



## **'School Readiness', Governance and Early Years 'Ability' Grouping**

Journal:	<i>Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood</i>
Manuscript ID	CIE-19-0003.R2
Manuscript Type:	Empirical Research
Keywords:	school readiness, neoliberal, phonics, ability grouping, governance
Abstract:	Compliance to Government prescribed national school readiness performance measures, particularly in early numeracy and literacy, 'readys' and governs early years children for primary school's test based culture. Performance measures, such as the Early Learning Goals (ELG's) and the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) govern and steer early years teachers towards inappropriate 'ability' grouping practices to obtain required outputs and results. This research draws upon the findings of an English nationwide survey of early years and primary key stage one teachers (n=1373), four focus groups and four case study schools with 12 in-depth interviews. Early years teachers attempts to meet nationally imposed 'school readiness' performance measures were analysed as Foucauldian governance. Finally, the article examined ability labelling and grouping impacts upon children's well being and aspirations.

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

## ***‘School Readiness’, Governance and Early Years ‘Ability’ Grouping***

### ***Abstract***

Compliance to Government prescribed national school readiness performance measures, particularly in early numeracy and literacy, readys and governs early years children for primary school’s test based culture. Performance measures, such as the Early Learning Goals (ELG’s) and the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) govern and steer early years teachers towards inappropriate ‘ability’ grouping practices to obtain required outputs and results. This research draws upon the findings of an English nationwide survey of early years and primary key stage one teachers (n=1373), four focus groups and four case study schools with 12 in-depth interviews. Early years teachers attempts to meet nationally imposed ‘school readiness’ performance measures were analysed as Foucauldian governance. Finally, the article examined ability labelling and grouping impacts upon children’s well being and aspirations.

### **‘School Readiness’ and The Phonics Screening Check (PSC)**

School readiness operates as a governing 'technology of normalisation' (Moss, 2019: 95) reducing and measuring early years children against ‘the norm’ to assess whether or not they are ‘school ready’. Compliance to Government prescribed national school readiness performance measures, particularly in early numeracy and literacy, prepare and govern children ‘for the rapid acquisition of literacy and numeracy’ (Moss, 2012: 9) and to be primary school ‘test ready’. The concept of readiness has a long history within ECEC (Kay, 2018a), but what is relatively novel is its use to govern early years education through performance management standards and measures, with the potential threat of punitive sanctions if nationally prescribed pass rates and thresholds are not met (Wood, 2019). Through this neoliberal governing process, school readiness reimagines and reconfigures the purpose of early years education as ‘readying’ children for primary schools’ test based culture (Kay, 2018b, Wood, 2019). Neoliberal governance and control of early years education is particularly strong in England but readers in other countries may well recognise some of the features of neoliberal governance apparent in this English case study. Within the English context, ‘school readiness’ performance measures include attainment of the Early Learning Goals (ELG’s) at age five and the pressures to ‘ready’ children to pass the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) at age six. The data presented in this article particularly focused upon the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) performance measure and its impact in encouraging early years teachers to make children ‘ready’ for the PSC.

Within the Australian and New Zealand contexts, Press et al (2018: 328) have noted how neoliberalism has ‘profoundly altered’ the infrastructure of ECEC through the marketization of childcare. Neoliberalism has had a similar effect in England where ECEC policy ‘reforms’ have tightened standardised prescribed literacy and maths curriculum goals; an increased control of required test data and a greater inspection of output control in the form of young children who are ‘school ready’ (Moss, 2019). Within this school readiness assemblage, the Anglophone countries of England, Australia, New Zealand and the US (Campbell, 2018) have seen an increase in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) and the Phonics Screening Check (PSC). This 'simple view of reading' (Rose Review, 2006) has led to 'the most prescriptive, rigid and limited view of what it means to teach early reading to have appeared in England' (Wyse & Styles, 2007: 41) and it has been ‘destructive of forms of professionalism’ (Ellis and Moss, 2014: 252) leading to calls to make the PSC voluntary (Clarke, 2018: 21). Nevertheless, the English DfE introduced the phonics test for 5 and 6 year

1  
2  
3 old children in 2011 to promote the teaching of ‘systematic synthetic phonics’ (DfE, 2012:  
4 5). Similarly in 2018, the Phonics Screening Check was trialled in the Australian states of  
5 Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales with a view to a national rollout in 2019  
6 (Adoniou, 2017 in Clarke; Campbell, 2018). Clarke (2017) notes how this Australian policy  
7 decision was ‘likely to have been reinforced’ by Nick Gibb’s (English Schools Minister) visit  
8 to Sydney in April 2017 where Gibb advocated the use of Systematic Synthetic Phonics  
9 (SSP). The English and Australian PSC is a standardised arbitrary pass/fail high stakes test  
10 (HST) in which children decode ‘nonsense’ words. In England it is re-taken in Year 2 by  
11 those pupils who ‘fail’ to score an arbitrary mark of less than 32. The English DfE require  
12 schools percentage pass rates be increased annually and schools results to be posted on the  
13 web for accountability and comparison.  
14  
15

16  
17 In the Anglophone countries of England, New Zealand and Australia, the use of commercial  
18 phonics programmes is growing; including their use in preschools where teachers feel obliged  
19 to provide evidence that they are engaging with ‘school readiness’ (Campbell et al 2014,  
20 Campbell, 2018). Lewis and Ellis (2006:20) state that ‘phonics is big business with financial  
21 rewards waiting for anyone who invents ‘the best’ scheme or programme for teaching it’. So,  
22 for example, the Federal Australian Government has allocated AUD\$22,000,000 for the  
23 anticipated national rollout of the PSC (Adoniou, 2017). Within England the two largest  
24 English phonics programme providers are Letters and Sounds and The Ruth Miskin Read  
25 Write Inc. Phonics programme (RWI). The English DfE subsidises schools to purchase RWI  
26 and promotes its uptake by stating that the ‘Ruth Miskin Read Write Inc. programme helps  
27 schools improve literacy through the teaching of phonics and early reading’ (DfE, 2018).  
28 Both Letters and Sounds and RWI are organized around grouping children by phonics  
29 ‘ability’ and have distinct phases and stages with their own assessments that children must  
30 pass through in order to move onto the next phase or stage. For example, RWI stipulates that  
31 ‘pupils are grouped across the school in homogeneous groups’ (RWI, 2017: 6) justifying and  
32 legitimating the use of grouping practices for phonics and adding to the sense that grouping is  
33 beyond the teacher’s control.  
34  
35  
36

### 37 *The Study*

38  
39 The national research explored early years and Key Stage 1 teachers’ views of grouping  
40 practices for children aged between 3 and 7 years. A mixed methods approach (Tashakkori &  
41 Teddlie, 1998) was utilised to gain both quantitative and qualitative understandings of the  
42 following research questions (i) the extent and nature of grouping practices (ii) the first  
43 forms of grouping children experienced (iii) the teachers’ reasons for using grouping and (iv)  
44 to what extent there might be movement between groups. The data was collected over three  
45 distinct iterative phases, firstly qualitative focus group discussions, secondly a quantitative  
46 online survey and thirdly qualitative interviews based in four carefully sampled case study  
47 primary schools to represent socio-economic diversity.  
48  
49  
50

51 In phase one, the two researchers led four qualitative focus group discussions comprised of  
52 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) teachers (Nursery and Reception children aged 3-5)  
53 and Key Stage One teachers (Year One and Year Two children aged 6 -7) using a  
54 standardized interview schedule based on the research questions above. These four focus  
55 groups were made up of teacher delegates at the National Education Union (NEU)  
56 Conference, April 2017. Each focus group had between 8 and 12 teachers and lasted  
57 approximately 45 minutes and was recorded and professionally transcribed. Teacher quotes  
58  
59  
60

used from these focus groups have been noted as Focus Group (FG) Discussions 1-4 in the findings section.

The two researchers inductively analysed the transcripts for emerging key themes and the data was reduced to meaningful codes and names (Creswell 2007). This was both an inductive bottom-up and deductive top-down interactive analytical process as the identified themes were influenced by Foucault's governance theoretical framework. Governance encompasses the processes and means of governing or managing ECEC by the neoliberal state (Moss, 2019). This is achieved through firstly, the setting of explicit school readiness standards and measurement of performance, such as the PSC. Second, by making that performance visible and public through the publication of inspection reports and other information. Third, by means of governmentality, that process of governing the self or self disciplining, a process in which early years education accept school readiness performance measures as normal and necessary.

In phase two, the themes from the focus group discussions were also used to inform an online national survey using Opinio software and was distributed via the NEU email databases and on social media. The survey used a Likert Scale and some open comment boxes to ask teachers for their views on grouping by ability and the different subjects it was used for in their schools. There were 1373 respondents in total, with Nursery teachers (9%); Reception teachers (22%); Year 1 teachers (20%); Year 2 teachers (18%); EYFS and KS1 Phase Leaders (14%); School Leaders (4%); Support and Other Staff (11%). Teacher's quotes generated from these written online comments were labelled as 'W' in this article.

In phase three, four case study primary schools were sampled for geographic and socio-economic diversity and varied in terms of Ofsted rating. The schools were located in inner and outer London; a large Northern city and a city in the Midlands. The schools were recompensed with funding for either a half day or a full days teaching supply cover (depending on the number of interviews) in order to reduce the impact of the research on the children. In total nine early years and key stage one teachers and three school leaders were interviewed by two researchers over four days. University ethical approval was obtained and pseudonyms used to maintain participant anonymity.

## *The Findings*

### *Grouping for Phonics begins in the Nursery*

Phonics grouping was begun in the Nursery classes, almost three years before the PSC and were reportedly at their highest in Reception and Year 1 as children were made 'ready' for the PSC at the end of Year One.

**Table One:** Responses to the question 'In your year group, do you regularly group children by ability for the following?' by percentage of teacher year group:

%	Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
<b>Phonics</b>	58	81	78	72
<b>Literacy</b>	21	46	68	60
<b>Maths</b>	35	61	72	66
<b>Reading</b>	9	52	72	71

The survey data in Table One suggested that grouping was most common in Phonics (76%), Maths (62%), Reading (57%) and Literacy (54%), as one might expect given the dominance of these subjects in the early years 'school readiness' curriculum and assessments. In the survey 52% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'Grouping raises attainment overall' suggesting that the main reason for this early grouping was an attempt to raise attainment.

*As a professional I do like the idea of using mixed ability groups but feel pressures of targets/attainment at the end of the year means I do use grouping more than I should (W)*  
*Grouping in a data driven world seems to be becoming the norm. This sadly takes away from child led play time as we are forced into writing and reading constantly (W)*  
*The constant fixation on data results, means that grouping becomes necessary (W)*  
*In a climate of results I also think it is a necessary means to an end in many circumstances. (W)*  
*'There's an incredible amount of pressure to get children to a certain level' (School 4).*

In written comments some teachers also noted that phonics grouping was part of the commercialized phonics schemes such as Read Write Inc.

*They are streamed by ability for phonics because of the phonics test. (W)*  
*'In Read Write Inc. we have to follow the scheme strictly despite believing that it goes against good practice in the early years.' (W).*  
*Ability grouping shouldn't be done. Read write Inc phonics doesn't work if you don't though. (W).*  
*Basically our reading results weren't as high as they could be so they decided we'd get a phonics scheme in... stream them and then every half term they're all assessed. (Focus Group 1).*

For other teachers however, the issues around grouping were complex and nuanced. Teachers identified many reasons for grouping students, including those based on children's confidence.

*I think one of the positive things about grouping is that children often feel safe and secure within their own ability group to actually be able to share. They feel that much more confident I think if they're in ability groups. There are definitely positive and negatives about groupings, whichever way you look at it. (FG4)*

*Whilst it can make preparation for the teacher easier, I don't think it's particularly good for the children, especially those at the far ends of the spectrum. (W)*

For some teachers the regular assessment and movement of pupils between groups alleviated the negative effects of grouping and worked to resolve some of the tensions discussed above.

*Every six weeks, every half term we reassess where they are up to: "Great, you've done well, you can go into the next group". We have celebration assemblies where we get them all standing, "You've gone into...", that sort of thing. So the whole idea is everybody succeeds. (FG3)*

*[In Reception] They're fluid so they can move. They're dependent on what is being taught that week. If a child needs a bit more input then they're moved about. It's just purely so that they can address the children's needs and continuous provision. [FG4]*

Despite the rhetoric of fluidity and movement between groups, other data from the interviews suggested that grouping was not fluid:

*Our phonics streaming with the Read Write Inc programme, it's not very fluid. They don't move very often because if they move quite often, I mean it's a big undertaking to the very structured assessments but also, where it's a very structured programme, if they move often, you'll find that they'll miss out and there'll be gaps. So generally, when they're in a set they stay in it for quite a while unless they've made real accelerated progress and can move but often they don't move very much. (FG4)*

This teacher's view was supported by literature that suggests once labelled and placed into a particular group, there are limited opportunities for children to move to other groups. Being placed into a relatively fixed group has implications for children's self perception of their learner identity and their aspirations (Boaler, 2005; Campbell, 2013, Hargreaves, 2019).

### ***Young Children's Awareness of Grouping***

65% of early years and Key Stage 1 teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'Children are aware which group they are in' and in both interviews and the survey stated that the children were aware of how and why their classrooms were hierarchically grouped.

*Children are aware of groups and it damages self-esteem and sets expectations that the more able can only do the more challenging work where the rest of the class can feel they have nothing to offer (W)*

*Children are very aware even at this age of the group that they are in, which can affect confidence (W)*

*I have been a full-time supply teacher in all primary year groups for 15 years. Children do know what group they are in however young they are (W).*

*Even if groups are moved around based on in lesson work or assessments, children are still aware of basically a ranking system in the class and I don't see how this is of benefit to the children (W)*

*My own son has been aware of what group he is in at his school since year 2 and it knocked his confidence (W)*

Hargreaves (2019, 57) has noted that such 'segregation is blatantly obvious to pupils' and research with older primary school pupils has also demonstrated that children are aware of which groups they are placed in and the reasons for this (Hallam et al., 2004).

### ***Grouping Reduces Young Children's Self Esteem and Confidence***

Among both survey and interview respondents there were clear concerns that ability grouping reduced children's self-esteem and self-confidence. In the national survey 45% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement grouping damages some children's self-esteem', whilst 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Although not asked to specifically comment on this issue on the survey, many respondents made comments in a general section on grouping, often using very emotive language such as 'disgusting', 'distracted' and 'segregation' to describe the potential impact:

1  
2  
3 *It is disgusting to label someone as 'low ability' at the age of 4. Maybe they can't spell but*  
4 *who cares? It just damages their confidence and lets them down... Utter nonsense. We are*  
5 *ruining our own children (W)*

6 *Fixed ability groups are highly damaging to self-esteem and put a lid on the learning of all*  
7 *abilities (W)*

8 *It limits children and sometimes stops teachers having high expectations of pupils. It*  
9 *damages self-esteem and doesn't provide models for other children (W)*

10 *It was deemed an efficient way to plan differentiated lessons but it made children very*  
11 *competitive and destroyed self-esteem in some pupils (W)*

12 *I do think it can really damage self-esteem - the children who spend their whole education in*  
13 *the bottom group (W)*

14  
15  
16  
17 This was explored in more detail in the focus groups and interviews, where teachers who saw  
18 being moved to a lower ability group as negatively affecting self-esteem and the child's  
19 perception of themselves as a learner.

20  
21  
22 *.... that just would cause a drop in their self-esteem. If they go, "I'm not as good at Maths or*  
23 *English as I thought I was because now look at where I am". (FG2)*

24 *There's so much pressure on children... We're really worried that our children write*  
25 *themselves off before they've started, they see themselves as failing (FG3)*

26  
27 These findings suggest that early years grouping can create and produce negative learner  
28 identities. [Hargreaves \(2019, 57\)](#) has noted that children understand themselves as having  
29 been 'judged' and 'declared as 'less' or 'more' according to which group they are placed in  
30 with potentially long-lasting and damaging effects. [Boaler \(2013:147\)](#) has noted that children  
31 'take a very clear message' from ability grouping practices - 'some children are clever and  
32 some are not'. This suggests that early years ability grouping governs and controls young  
33 children's conduct of themselves by creating 'possibilities for who we are and might be'  
34 (Ball, 2013: 98).

35  
36  
37 A teacher noted that once such a negative learner identity is produced, it is 'extremely hard to  
38 shift'.

39  
40  
41 *So often it comes back to very, very early and it comes back to when they realised that they*  
42 *were 'daft', they were 'dim'. Their self-image has been built up and it's so much part of that.*  
43 *It's from very early and it's and it's extremely hard to shift, extremely hard to shift (FG2).*

44  
45  
46 In one focus group, a teacher recalled how a girl's aspiration to be a doctor like her mother  
47 disappeared when she was moved down a set.

48  
49 *She said, "I used to want to be a doctor like my mum but since I moved to the middle set I've*  
50 *realised that that's not something I can do, because I'm not good enough so I'm thinking*  
51 *about what else I might do in the future." (FG2)*

52  
53  
54 This demonstrates how ability grouping can act as a 'psychological prison' that 'breaks  
55 ambition' and 'almost formally label kids as stupid' [Boaler \(2005, 141\)](#). Ability grouping  
56 may exacerbate the underachievement of disadvantaged children, SEN children, and summer-  
57 born children, particularly boys because ability grouping systematically disadvantages  
58 children from poorer backgrounds ([Francis et al. 2017](#)). This suggests that performance  
59  
60

management techniques such as ability grouping that attempt to close the gap between different socio-economic groups may not work with in their own terms.

Ball argues that the governing power of performance measures such as the Phonics Screening Check, has 'ethically retooled' (2016: 1054) some teachers. For example, the following Reception teacher reminisces about how as a child she was ability grouped herself and placed on the 'struggling table' which she says was '*horrendous*' for her self-esteem. Nevertheless, as a teacher she is governed by the need to obtain the required performance measurements and so ability groups her class.

*I remember when I was in Year 1, I was put on the table where the children were struggling and I still remember that, that I was put on the struggling table. It was horrendous for my self-esteem. I still remember it now. (School Leader, School 4)*

This teacher has been governed and 'burdened with the responsibility to perform' and submit to the 'new' moral system' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013: 88) of performance measurement. Her professional autonomy and ethics become subsumed by an 'economy of student worth' (Pratt, 2016) consigning some children to low ability groups and phases. Within a performative accountability culture, 'efficiency' and calculation trumps and undermines early years teachers' professional judgements, values and principles. The above teacher disregarded her early years professionalism and used ability grouping as a 'solution' to obtain required performance measures. This pedagogical internal conflict leads to 'values schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003) as the teacher was required to satisfy national targets despite reflecting upon the emotional damage it caused her as a girl. This early years teacher was 'no longer encouraged to have a rationale for practice, account of themselves in terms of a relationship to the meaningfulness of *what they do*, but are required to produce measurable and 'improving' outputs and performances, what is important is *what works*.' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, 91). 'What works' for this early years teacher is ability grouping as she attempted to raise her class phonics performance measurement despite being painfully aware of the potential damaging emotional impact upon children.

### ***Mental Health, Ability Grouping and a Politics of Refusal***

Teachers in two of the four focus group discussions referred to the impacts of ability grouping upon young children's mental health. The national survey did not ask about mental health and nor were there any references made to mental health in the survey's open ended responses. Nevertheless, the comments are discussed here as they stood out as provocative and contested the dominant narrative of ability grouping.

*It's pressure on teachers that becomes pressure on young children. I really worry about the mental health issues... There's children's lives at stake. FG3*

*What are we doing with grouping? I mean what we're going to have is loads of mental health issues with children. FG3*

Hargreaves (2019, 57) has noted how ability grouping operates as symbols for children's perceptions of their own worth, so that they perceive themselves 'only as valuable as their test scores' and if placed in a low ability group as 'less than other people' thus negatively effecting their well-being. Similarly, the teacher above was critically aware of the potential well being and mental health problems associated with ability grouping particularly for those



1  
2  
3 children assigned to lower groups. This critical thinking led to a staff meeting and the  
4 questioning of ability grouping throughout the primary school.  
5

6  
7 *'It's probably because mental health is quite big on the agenda now, isn't it? Mental health of*  
8 *children even down to the age of four is a big thing at the moment. I think because that's part*  
9 *of what we're talking about at the moment, that's what made us think, "Mental health, we're*  
10 *affecting their mental health, let's not do that." FG1.*  
11

12 Within the narrow constraints of performativity data and 'hitting objectives' ability grouping  
13 'worked'. However, the detrimental impacts that some children experienced when distributed  
14 to lower ability groups, led the teacher above to question the dominant narrative of ability  
15 grouping and engage with 'a politics of refusal' (Ball, 2016: 1130). Foucault noted that 'as  
16 soon as one no longer thinks things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes  
17 very urgent, very difficult and quite possible' (Foucault, 1988 in Moss, 2019: 100). This was  
18 clearly the case with the teacher above and provides optimism for contestation and alternative  
19 narratives.  
20  
21

## 22 **Discussion**

23  
24  
25 Early years education is being reimagined, reconfigured and repurposed as the first stage in a  
26 'delivery chain' (Ball 2012 et al) to prepare and 'ready' children who can successfully  
27 perform in primary schools test based culture. For example the English Revised Early Years  
28 Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP, 2019: 7), with its increasingly narrowed focus upon maths  
29 and literacy, aims to 'promote teaching and learning to ensure children's school readiness'.  
30 Similarly, Ofsted's 'Bold Beginnings' curriculum document states that 'the core purpose of  
31 the Reception Year' (DfE, 2017: 7) is to teach systematic synthetic phonics in preparation for  
32 the year one Phonics Screening Check (PSC). 'Bold Beginnings' praises early years settings  
33 that have based their literacy and maths upon Year 1 primary school National Curriculum  
34 expectations. Kay (2018b, 331) argues that there has been an 'increasing formalisation of the  
35 early years and a narrowing of the curriculum...to be prepared for the rigour of Year 1  
36 curriculum and achieving improved outcomes in mathematics and literacy'. A further example  
37 of governance is the English Government's proposed national standardised Reception  
38 Baseline Assessment (DfE, 2018) that directly aligns the early years with the end of primary  
39 school by measuring progress across a child's seven years of primary schooling. All these  
40 techniques place early childhood firmly within the 'school readiness' performativity  
41 discourse, exerting governing pressure upon teachers to use inappropriate ability grouping  
42 practices as they attempt to meet school readiness performance measures.  
43  
44  
45

46  
47 The data presented suggests that early years pedagogy is increasingly colonised into  
48 preparing children for primary school so that 'ability' grouping, more normally associated  
49 with much older primary school children, is used to maximize the production of required  
50 attainment data. Through performativity data schools, teachers and children are held to  
51 account against these 'school readiness' measures which 'steer' early years pedagogy  
52 (Lingard, Martino, and Rezai-Rashti, 2013: 541) in the direction of more formal primary  
53 schooling. Ability grouping as a primary school pedagogy has cascaded down into the  
54 earliest phase of education so that young children are increasingly labelled, classified and  
55 distributed according to their so-called different 'abilities' as the school attempts to achieve  
56 the arbitrary 'readiness' performativity data. Early years grouping practices are understood as  
57 'calculated technologies of performance' (Ball et al. 2012: 518).  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Some of the teachers in the study suggested that one of the unintended consequences of  
4 ability grouping was poor wellbeing and mental health. Similarly, Brown and Carr (2018: 20)  
5 argue that ‘the neoliberal educational model itself creates the perfect platform for a mental  
6 health crisis in young people’. It is concluded that more international critical research on the  
7 consequences of the neoliberalisation of ECEC is needed so that we can explore its impacts  
8 and its contestation and hence ‘move beyond the atomisation and individualisation of benefit,  
9 success and achievement’ (Press et al, 2018: 337).

## 12 Acknowledgements

## 16 References

- 18 Adoniou M (2017) Misplaced faith in synthetic phonics and the Phonics Screening Check. In:  
19 Clarke M (ed.) *Reading the evidence: Synthetic Phonics and Literacy Learning*. Birmingham,  
20 Glendale Education, pp. 36-46.
- 21 Ball S J (2003) The teacher's soul and the Terrors of Performativity. *Journal of Education*  
22 *Policy* 18 (2): 215-228.
- 23 Ball S, Maguire, M. Braun A, Perryman, J & Hoskins, K. 2012 Assessment  
24 technologies in schools: ‘deliverology’ and the ‘play of dominations’. *Research Papers*  
25 *in Education* 27 (5): 513-533.
- 26 Ball S J (2013) *Foucault, power and education*. London: Routledge.
- 27 Ball S J and Olmedo A (2016) Care of the self, resistance and subjectivity under neoliberal  
28 governmentalities. *Critical Studies in Education* 54 (1): 85-96.
- 29 Ball S J (2016) Neoliberal Education? Confronting the Slouching Beast. *Policy Futures in*  
30 *Education* 14 (8): 1046-1059.
- 31 Boaler J (2005) The ‘Psychological Prisons’ from which They Never Escaped: the role of  
32 ability grouping in reproducing social class inequalities. *Forum*. 47 (2): 125-134.
- 33 Brown C & Carr S (2018) Education policy and mental weakness: a response to a mental  
34 health crisis. *Journal of Education Policy* 34 (2): 242-266.
- 35 Campbell-Barr V and Nygård M (2014) Losing Sight of the Child? Human Capital Theory  
36 and Its Role for Early Childhood Education and Care Policies in Finland and England since  
37 the Mid-1990s. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 15 (4): 346–59.
- 38 Campbell S, Torr J and Cologon K (2014) Pre-packaging preschool literacy: What drives  
39 early childhood teachers to use commercially produced phonics programs in prior to school  
40 settings. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 15(1): 41–53.
- 41 Campbell S (2018) Teaching phonics without teaching phonics: Early childhood teachers’  
42 reported beliefs and practices. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* Epub ahead of print 1st  
43 March 2019. DOI: 10.1177/1468798418791001
- 44 Campbell T (2013) *In-school ability grouping and the month of birth effect. Preliminary*  
45 *evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study*. London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies.
- 46 Clarke M (2017) Australia Plans to Follow England: Why? In: Clarke M (ed.) *Reading the*  
47 *evidence: Synthetic Phonics and Literacy Learning*. Birmingham, Glendale Education, pp.  
48 36-46.
- 49 Clarke M (2018) The views of teachers, parents and children on the Phonics Screening  
50 Check: the continuing domination of politics over evidence. *Education Journal* 347: 20-23
- 51 Department for Education (2012) *Year 1 phonics screening check 2012 scoring guidance*  
52 (London, STA).
- 53 Creswell J (2007) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*  
54 *approaches*. London: Sage Publications.

- 1  
2  
3 Department for Education (DfE) (2018) *Reception Baseline Assessment*. Available at:  
4 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reception-baseline-assessment#measuring-progress>  
5  
6 Department for Education (2014) *Getting them reading early*. Available at:  
7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/getting-them-reading-early>  
8  
9 Department for Education (2017) *Reception curriculum in good and outstanding primary*  
10 *schools: Bold Beginnings*. Available at:  
11 [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reception-curriculum-in-good-and-outstanding-](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reception-curriculum-in-good-and-outstanding-primary-schools-bold-beginnings)  
12 [primary-schools-bold-beginnings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reception-curriculum-in-good-and-outstanding-primary-schools-bold-beginnings)  
13  
14 Department for Education (2018) *Get support with teaching phonics and early reading*.  
15 Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-support-with-teaching-phonics-and-early-](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-support-with-teaching-phonics-and-early-reading)  
16 [reading](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-support-with-teaching-phonics-and-early-reading)  
17  
18 Department for Education (2019) *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile*. Available at:  
19 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762499/EYFS_profile_handbook_2019.pdf)  
20 [/file/762499/EYFS\\_profile\\_handbook\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762499/EYFS_profile_handbook_2019.pdf).  
21  
22 Ellis S and Moss G (2014) Ethics, education policy and research: the phonics question  
23 reconsidered. *British Educational Research Journal* 40 (2): 241–260.  
24  
25 Foucault M (2010) *The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*.  
26 Basingstoke: Picador/Palgrave Macmillan.  
27  
28 Francis B, Archer, L. Hodgen, J. Pepper, D. Taylor, B. and Travers, M. (2017). Exploring  
29 the relative lack of impact of research on ‘ability grouping’ in England: a discourse analytic  
30 account. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 47(1): 1-17.  
31  
32 Foucault M (2010) *The government of self and others : lectures at the Collège de France,*  
33 *1982–1983*. Basingstoke: Picador/Palgrave Macmillan.  
34  
35 Hargreaves, E. (2019) Feeling Less Than Other People: attainment scores as symbols of  
36 children's worth. *Forum* 61 (1): 53-65  
37  
38 Kay L (2018a) School Readiness: a culture of compliance? *University of Sheffield*.  
39  
40 Kay L (2018b) Bold Beginnings and the Rhetoric of School Readiness. *Forum* 60 (3): 327-  
41 336  
42  
43 Lewis M and Ellis S (2006) *Phonics Practice, Research and Policy*. London, Sage.  
44  
45 Lingard B Martino Rezai-Rashti (2013) Testing regimes, accountabilities and education  
46 policy: commensurate global and national developments *Journal of Education Policy* 28 (6):  
47 539-556.  
48  
49 Moss P (2012) *Early Childhood and Compulsory Education: Reconceptualising the*  
50 *Relationship*. London ; New York, NY: Routledge.  
51  
52 Moss P (2014) *Transformative Change and Real Utopias in Early Childhood Education: A*  
53 *story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality* (1 edition). London ; New York, NY:  
54 Routledge.  
55  
56 Moss P (2019) *Alternative Narratives in Early Childhood*. London ; New York, NY:  
57 Routledge.  
58  
59 Parsons S and S Hallam (2014) The impact of streaming on attainment at age seven: evidence  
60 from the Millennium Cohort Study. *Oxford Review of Education* 40 (5): 567-589.  
61  
62 Pratt, N (2016) Neoliberalism and the (internal) marketisation of primary school assessment  
63 in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(5), 890–905.  
64  
65 Press F Woodrow C Logan H Mitchell L (2018) Can we belong in a neo-liberal world? Neo-  
66 liberalism in early childhood education and care policy in Australia and New Zealand.  
67 *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 19(4): 328–339  
68  
69 Rose N (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
70 University Press.  
71  
72 Rose J (2006) *Independent review of the teaching of early reading*. Nottingham: DfES  
73 Publications.  
74

- 1  
2  
3 RWI. Ruth Miskin Training (2017) *School policy on the teaching of phonics, reading and*  
4 *writing* Available at:  
5 [http://www.ruthmiskin.com/media/resource\\_files/policy\\_on\\_phonics\\_reading\\_and\\_writing\\_7](http://www.ruthmiskin.com/media/resource_files/policy_on_phonics_reading_and_writing_7xq7xPG.pdf)  
6 [xq7xPG.pdf](http://www.ruthmiskin.com/media/resource_files/policy_on_phonics_reading_and_writing_7xq7xPG.pdf)  
7  
8 Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and*  
9 *quantitative approaches* London: SAGE.  
10 Taylor B B Francis L Archer J Hodgen D Pepper A Tereshchenko and M Travers (2017)  
11 Factors deterring schools from mixed attainment teaching practice. *Pedagogy, Culture &*  
12 *Society* 25 (3): 327-345.  
13 Wood E (2019) Unbalanced and unbalancing acts in the Early Years Foundation Stage: a  
14 critical discourse analysis of policy-led evidence on teaching and play from the office for  
15 standards in education in England (Ofsted). *Education 3-13*.  
16 Wyse D and Goswami U (2008) Synthetic phonics and the teaching of reading. *British*  
17 *Educational Research Journal* 34 (6): 691–710.  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60