

Literacy level divide

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A Cardiff University academic has uncovered evidence that children at age seven in Wales do not do as well as their contemporaries in England when it comes to literacy.

Leading academic Professor Chris Taylor, from the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD), found that whilst [children](#) in England and Wales score equally in assessments on their numeracy and non-verbal reasoning, the gap in literacy levels between the two countries increases as the children grow up.

"On the one hand the analysis finds considerable variation in different aspects of child cognitive development by country of the UK, with no single story of 'success'," says Professor Taylor. "However, in terms of literacy development, distinct and worrying contrasts can be found between children in Wales and children in the rest of the UK.

Interestingly, some of that distinction appears to largely be the result of greater improvements in literacy of children living in London, which on average is greater than the improvement in [literacy](#) skills for children in any other region or country of the UK."

The research, published online in *Comparative Education*, uses rich data on child background and development taken from the Millennium Cohort Study. This longitudinal survey, conducted by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS), follows the lives of a sample of 19,000 babies born in the UK in the year 2000–2001, with 2,000 of those coming from Wales.

The data provides a unique opportunity for comparative research within the UK, something that Professor Taylor feels is needed given the diverged education systems to come out of political devolution in the late 1990s (and the establishment of the governments for Wales and Scotland).

"Too often the media and politicians make comparisons between the educational outcomes of children from different countries within the UK and internationally without consideration of the underlying differences in their social and economic make-up or relying on measures of educational outcomes that are perhaps not directly comparable. The Millennium Cohort Study provides a unique opportunity to make such comparisons in a fair and reliable way."

Professor Taylor will begin further analysis in 2014 when data is released for the children in the study as they approach the end of their

primary school years. "Not only will this allow us to consider whether any gaps in educational development at age seven continue to grow, but it will also allow for more detailed analysis of the impact of other factors central to the education system in Wales, such as the role of bilingual education on educational development," concludes Professor Taylor.

"Interrupting educational inequality in the UK: evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study" is being presented to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) by Professor Chris Taylor and Professor Sally Power at BERA's annual conference.

Provided by Cardiff University

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