What makes two?
All sorts of things.
A bicycle’s wheels,
A bluebird’s wings.
—Wendy Cheyette Lewison,
Two Is for Twins

The children’s book Two Is for Twins celebrates twins and illustrates the many “twos” in a child’s world. The uniqueness of twos does not have to mean separate classrooms for twins in child development programs, preschool, or elementary school settings. With recent dramatic increases in the US twin population (Martin et al. 2006, 2010; Lacina 2010), how should educators address the separation of twins in different classrooms? This article will answer this question by providing a synthesis of research studies on twins and their separation in school and recommending best practices for teachers and school leaders when deciding to include or separate twins by classroom. Since 94 percent of multiple births are twins (Martin et al. 2006) and because the experiences of other multiples may vary from the experiences of twins, this article focuses specifically on the effects separation has on twins.

Limited information for educators

At the start of each school year, some parents are told that their twins must be placed in separate classrooms. Forced twin separation occurs throughout the country; however, state legislation and state laws are giving families a voice in twin placement in schools. Twelve states have laws giving parents the right to decide classroom placement for their twins; 10 states have taken action against forcible separation of twins in schools; and two states allow parental input on school placement decisions for twins (www.twinslaw.com, n.d.).

Several studies have investigated the effects of twin separation (Beauchamp & Brooks 2003; Tully et al. 2004; van Leeuwen et al. 2005). Despite strong research findings that separation is not always the best choice for twins, few research-based articles have been written for teachers and school officials. As a result, many educators are not aware of the research addressing how to best meet the educational needs of twins, and they often separate twins because they simply think that separation is best practice (Katz 1998; Banks 2004; Lacina 2010).

What the research says

Tully, Moffit, Caspi, Taylor, Kierman, and Andreou’s (2004) study on twin separation is widely cited. It documents the harmful effects that forced separation has on twins’ behavior, progress at school, and reading abilities. The two-year study followed three groups of twins from age 5 to 7: (1) those in the same class at ages 5 and 7, (2) those in separate classes at ages 5 and 7, and (3) those in the same class at age 5 but separated by age 7. Using a variety of measures, the researchers found that at age 5, separated twins had significantly more teacher-rated internalizing problems than twins not separated. Separated identical twins had more internalizing problems over time than separated fraternal twins, and their problems persisted over the study’s duration. The study found that the anxiety some separated twins experience is not necessarily temporary and separation may be related to the development of emotional problems. Thus, twin separation decisions require

State legislation and state laws are giving families a voice in twin placement in schools.
Myths about Twins

There is no research base for the following statements about twins’ placement; thus, they are considered myths.

• Twins need to be separated to develop their own individuality.
• Separating twins in different classrooms allows teachers to get to know each child as an individual.
• Twins should be separated in the early childhood years, prior to kindergarten.
• Separation is required for all kindergartners—at all schools.
• The older twin is the leader or more dominant, and the younger twin is a follower.
• All twins have the same characteristics in common.
• Twins who are placed in the same class will have behavior problems.

Educators’ careful consideration, and separations should be monitored.

Twins separated in the early years of school often endure a great deal of anxiety, such as night terrors and a fear that something will happen to their twin, and those feelings are not temporary, as noted in another study of twin separation and primary school (van Leeuwen et al. 2005). For that reason, researchers suggest that some twins benefit from being together in pre-K through first or second grade (van Leeuwen et al. 2005). Schoolwide practices that separate all twins can contribute to adjustment problems in school, emotional disturbances, and/or reading difficulties (Hays & Preedy 2006).

The notion that twins must be separated just because they are twins—that keeping them together will hinder their development and learning—is a myth (see “Myths about Twins”). With an increasing population of twins, it is profoundly important that schools use family-friendly practices when deciding on classroom placements.

Recommendations

Hays and Preedy (2006) stress, “Before deciding whether to separate multiple birth children, parents and teachers need to meet to discuss the development AND experiences of the children” (399). Discussions between families, teachers, and school leaders become especially important because there is no evidence that separation helps the intellectual or emotional development of twins, and even common sense tells us that no two children are alike. Therefore, each set of twins should be evaluated individually.

If there is a legitimate need to separate twins because of competition between the two or behavioral issues, the decision should be made well before the beginning of the school year. Twins need to gradually spend time apart so they will experience less of a shock when assigned to different classrooms and thus spend much of the day without their twin.

No single policy or mandate should be enforced when it comes to the inclusion or separation of twins. Each twin is an individual, and families and educators should decide together what is best for each child (Hays & Preedy 2006; Lacina 2010).

1. Look at each twin as an individual child and confer with the family to make sure that a decision will benefit each child. Include the following topics in the discussion:
   • their age;
   • each child’s social skills and independence;
   • how the twins interact with each other and with others;
   • the feelings of the family and the teachers about whether each child will benefit from separation;
   • whether one or both twins compare themselves to the other in a negative way; and
   • the type of classroom support available if the twins are separated.
2. Schedule follow-up conferences to share observations on how each child is adjusting to separation. Keep in mind that separating twins can be traumatic for the parents as well as the children.

3. Closely monitor separated twins and document their adjustment by determining whether each child has made new friends, assessing their behavior at home and at school, and observing each child’s independent actions in their separate classrooms.

4. Offer individualized support, just as you individualize for all the children in the classroom. Provide books with twins as main characters (see “Selected Children’s Books about Twins”). Read the books yourself before making them available to the children to ensure they do not stereotype twins (Lacina 2010).

**Conclusion**

With many women in our society waiting later in life to have children and an increase in fertility-enhancing technologies, there is a greater incidence of multiple births (Hagestad & Call 2007). During the past 20 years, schools have worked diligently to meet the needs of all children, including dual language learners and those with special needs. Now, with a growing population of twins, it is increasingly important for schools to also be responsive to and meet the unique needs of twins and their families.

---

**Online Resources about Twins**


---

**References**


Selected Children’s Books about Twins

About Twins, by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly (1999), features beautiful photographs and simple language to emphasize twins’ individualities as well as the closeness they share. Ages 4–6.


By My Brother’s Side, by Tiki Barber and Ronde Barber (2004), is a nonfiction story about twin NFL players (the authors) as children who loved to do everything together, especially sports. When Tiki has an accident, the boys learn about doing the best you can, sportsmanship, and being a twin. Ages 6–10.

Game Day, by Tiki Barber and Ronde Barber (2005), illustrates teamwork and perseverance in the lives of the authors, real NFL superstar twins and best friends. It is the sequel to By My Brother’s Side. Ages 6–10.

The Girl with the Broken Wing, by Heather Dyer (2005), follows James and Amanda after they discover Hilary, a girl with white wings, in their attic. Amanda believes Hilary is an angel, but her twin remains unconvinced, especially when the girl shows a lack of manners and begins to ruin family outings. Ages 6–10.

Hello Twins, by Charlotte Voake (2006), is an excellent compare-and-contrast book focusing on how energetic twins Charlotte and Simon are different and alike at the same time. Ages 2–5.

Jigsaw Pony, by Jessie Haas (2005), emphasizes cooperation and sharing as very different twins Kiera and Fran must learn to work together after their father surprises them with a pony. Ages 6–10.

Just Like Me, by Barbara J. Neasi (2003), explains, from Jennifer’s perspective, how she and Julie, her twin, are alike in some ways and different in others. Ages 3–5.

Max and Jax in Second Grade, by Jerdone Nolen (2002), follows brothers through the ups and downs of summer break as they discover that being a twin means always having a special friend. Ages 4–8.

My Twin, My Friend, by Lynne Crump (2001), is written by the mother of two sets of twins, with rhymes and pictures exploring the unique gift of being a twin. The book shows several combinations of twins—fraternal, identical, boys, girls, and different ethnicities. Ages 3–5.

Sweet Jasmine, Nice Jackson: What It’s Like to Be 2—and Be Twins!, by Robie H. Harris (2004), is a remarkable story about how 2-year-olds grow, learn, and interact, as told through the lives of twins Jasmine and Jackson. Ages 4–8.

T is for Twins: An ABC Book, by Mary Bond (2002), with photographs by Ralph Homan and Margaret Viles, pairs each letter of the alphabet with rhymes and colorful photographs of twins of different races, ethnicities, and abilities. It includes a pocket for families to display a photo of their own twins. Ages 3–5.


Twin Tales: The Magic and Mystery of Multiple Birth, by Donna M. Jackson (2001), explores a variety of aspects related to multiple births, including why and how twins are born, twin telepathy, separation, and more, through pictures, text, and anecdotal sidebars. Ages 5–10.

Twin to Twin, by Margaret O’Hair (2003), encourages readers to join in rhyming text (Double born/Twice the blessing/Doule kids/Twice the messing) celebrating similar and different characteristics of fraternal twins. Ages 3–5.

Twins!, by Charlotte Doyle (2003), uses simple rhymes and nice illustrations to highlight a day in the life of adorable twins and their busy mother and father. Ages 3–5.

Two Is for Twins, by Wendy Cheyette Lewison (2006), illustrates twins and other things that come in twos, such as hands, feet, and wings. The book shows that while twins might do some of the same things (like dress alike) and be close, they also have differences and like to be independent. Ages 3–5.