

Separate or Together in School?

A letter from Professor Pat Preedy Ph.D, M.Ed., B.Ed.

To whom it may concern,

I am ashamed to say that during the early part of my career I was unaware of the needs of multiple birth children and their families. As a teacher and headteacher I presumed that separating multiples into different classes would enable them to develop as individuals.



Then in 1992 came revelation when nine sets of twins started at the school where I was headteacher – making ten sets of twins in a small rural Infant school!

Tamba happened to be holding a workshop for schools in the area and I attended out of interest. Several families spoke movingly about how schools made decisions with regard to separating their children without any consultation or consideration of the needs and prior experiences of the children. This experience prompted me to

begin researching the educational needs of multiples birth children. It also started a long and happy relationship with multiple birth organisations around the world.

I found 84% of the children in my sample had little or no separate experience before starting school; 72% showed signs of what is frequently referred to as "The Prima Dona Effect," where the children like the attention they received as young multiples and find it hard to adjust to living outside of the spotlight; 68% played mostly together with few other friends; and about half were greatly affected when their twin was upset or reprimanded.

My research led to the development of a model to help understand how multiples may relate very differently to each other and have very differing needs. Closely coupled multiples function as one unit rather than individuals; extreme individuals resent being a multiple and can be exceedingly competitive; mature dependents typically enjoy the multiple relationship and being individuals enjoying a mix of shared and separate activities and friends.

It is essential that educators liaise with parents in order need to understand the particular multiple relationship and then decide together whether it is best to separate the children or keep them together. I have developed a questionnaire (available at www.twinsandmultiples.org) to help teachers and parents consider all of the issues including the need for flexibility and review – like all children they grow, develop and change. For example, nursery age multiples may have different key persons but are able to be in the same learning area.

Working with parents to meet the needs of multiple birth children enriches the school and the experience of the children and the staff.

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