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Should Twins Share An Elementary School Classroom?

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Should Twins Share an Elementary Classroom?

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Abstract

In any child’s educational experience, there are positive and negative aspects. However, when jealousy and competition, identity and dependence, separation anxiety, and a host of other emotionally charged aspects of school life, are added to the situation, the elementary classroom becomes a minefield for all involved, especially for twins. It is this minefield that parents, states, and educational professionals walk students through, all while seeking each child’s best interest. However, there are conflicting opinions, research, and practices that mark the historical landscape of whether to educate twins in a shared elementary school classroom. The historical trend within the greater United States of America has been that the Principal and other educational professionals shall decide whether twins are placed together or separate. The scarcity of quantitative research has left many professionals with an “old school” view of automatically assigning twin pairs to separate classrooms. Entering the school environment is usually the first time parents, teachers, and other educational professionals determine whether to separate twin children or place them together in the same classroom. This decision is based upon the twin relationship, parents’ views, state laws, and professional educators’ opinions. By researching and gathering data from the past and present, a conclusion may be put forth for discussion by parents, and professionals to allow for the most student support possible. Should twins share an elementary school classroom?
Keywords and Abbreviations

Zygosity - the characterization of twinning and multiple births in terms of the combination of alleles for particular hereditary traits.

Monozygotic (MZ) - developed from a single fertilized ovum, as identical same gender twins

Dizygotic (DZ) - developed from two fertilized ovum, as fraternal twins; could be male/female, female/female, or male/male twins

ACE’s Score - Adverse Childhood Experiences including, but not limited to abuse of a loved one, abuse of the individual, homelessness, hunger, divorce, and childhood sickness.

CDC - Center for Disease Control and Prevention

FERPA - The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Singleton – One child born; not a multiple birth

IEP - Individualized Education Plan used for children when they show issues with learning or special needs.

WISC - V – Weschler Intelligence Scale V is a form of academic testing that can only be performed by a doctor of educational psychology and focuses on IQ.
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*WIAT – III –* Weschler Individual Achievement Test – III is a form of academic testing that can only be performed by a doctor of educational psychology and focuses on achievement.
Literature Review

Introduction/Overview

In any child’s educational experience, there are positive and negative aspects. However, when jealousy and competition, identity and dependence, separation anxiety, and a host of other emotionally charged aspects of school life, are added to the situation, the elementary classroom becomes a minefield for all involved, especially for twins.

“The decision regarding separation of twins centres on the co-twin relationship rather than on individual problems. The key question is whether the presence or absence of the co-twin is problematic. Adverse effects of the inter-twin relationship on social and academic engagement particularly problems associated with competition, dominance, and identity development, have been presented as justification of decisions to separate (Beauchamp and Brooks, 2003; Hay and Preedy, 2006; Segal and Russell, 1992).”

(Staton, et al., 2012, p. 197)

It is this minefield that parents, states, and educational professionals walk students through, all while seeking each child’s best interest.

Parents of twins want the final say in any classroom placement of their children. The argument is that parents know their children best and therefore should be the ones to decide whether their twins should share an elementary classroom or not.

The mothers reported that the emotional bond that their twins shared was too strong and that placing them in separate classrooms would compromise that bond. Segal and Russell
(1992) noted that some mothers surveyed wanted their twins to share a classroom so the twins would have a sense of security. The mothers interviewed did not believe that their twins would have that sense of security without their co-twin sharing a classroom with them (Grime, 2008, p. 84).

However, there are conflicting opinions, research, and practices that mark the historical landscape of whether to educate twins in a shared elementary school classroom. The historical trend within the greater United States of America has been that the Principal and other educational professionals shall decide whether twins are placed together or separate. The scarcity of quantitative research has left many professionals with an “old school” view of automatically assigning twin pairs to separate classrooms. This historical trend regarding the advantages of separating twins is often based upon perception rather than data and has caused many parents to lobby their state’s government for a law stating that parents have the right to choose for their twins.

In 1994 the Center for Disease Control reported that twins made up 24 of every 1000 live births (https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00046173.htm). In the twenty-first century, the frequency of twin births has dramatically increased. The CDC now reports that twins make up 33.3 of every 1000 live births (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/multiple.htm). The average class size during the 2011–12 school year was 21.2 pupils for United States public elementary schools (https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=28). With that class size and 33.3 live births out of 1000, the chance of having just one twin from a twin pair in each class is around 14%.
With so many twins needing an education, principals, teachers and parents should be aware of the issues that these specially connected children face. Various considerations mark the decision as to the joint education of twins in a shared classroom. The twin relationship is a complicated one taking into consideration the competition between twins, independence and identity of each individual, separation anxiety, friends, and academics.

The quantitative research that is available is mainly from European or Australian sources and is over 10-20 years old. One might conclude that since the number of twin births has risen, that the option of completing a quantitative study on academics and shared classrooms should be easier; however, not only has the number of twin births risen steadily, but so have ACE’s (Adverse Childhood Experiences) score. These negative life experiences include abuse of a loved one, abuse of the child, homelessness, hunger, and even “simply,” divorce. When a child has even one of these adverse childhood experiences, their fight, flight, or freeze brain response takes over, leaving them unable to learn. With the breakdown in our societal “norms” of a two-parent home, a control group of twins would be extremely difficult to find, get permission for a quantitative study, and have that “norm” of enough families, who do not go through any ACE’s while gathering data over the course of years in order to complete an unbiased, accurate study.

Stereotypical perceptions about how twins interact with each other, peers and authority figures, affect their placement in separate classrooms during elementary school. School counselors, principals, and parents all have their own interest in classroom placements with various opinions and interest levels, leaving many states to create laws as to who makes the final decision whether twins can share a classroom.
“Are twins and parents of twins confronted with unique educational issues not faced by singletons? According to Segal and Russell (1992), parents of twins, teachers, and school psychologists need to contemplate many issues regarding the education of twins that do not impact singletons. For example, parents of twins are often forced to consider the equality of their children’s educational experience, separate/common classroom placements, dependence on each other, peer comparisons, and differential abilities. Given all of these issues, it is unfortunate that American parents of twins report lacking information and assistance regarding such important educational decisions (Segal & Russell, 1992).” (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003, p. 429-430)

With a paucity of research in this area as well as having a high probability of having at least one twin in every classroom, it seems important to investigate the wisdom of twins sharing public elementary school classrooms.

Another reason for not having more quantitative data may be because of the recent trend in privacy laws. Daniel J. Solove (2006) discusses the historical movement toward more and more privacy for US citizens. For example, HIPAA which was enacted for the first time in 1996 has recently been revised and strictly controls individual health information including educational assisting medication. With the US Family Educational Right and Privacy Act (FERPA) and given the fact that the children are obviously underage, a researcher would find it difficult to conduct such a quantitative study based upon academic achievements. The more current research that has been done regarding twins sharing an elementary classroom, has been
qualitative or from the perspective of principals, school counselors, or educational professionals and does not contain quantitative data, especially academic data, about the twin students.

When parents feel supported by the school system and the school system feels supported by the parents, the twin students benefit. New laws may determine that parents can make the final decision as to whether their twins may share an elementary classroom, but what does the research say? Twins are uniquely made by God to go through life with another half. That other half experiences life through another set of eyes, ears, hands, feet and brain. So, what about the school experience? By researching and gathering this data from the past and present, a conclusion may be put forth for discussion by parents, and professionals to allow for the most student support possible. Should twins share an elementary school classroom?

**Twin Relationships**

Entry to school is typically the first point at which the question about whether to separate twin children or place them together in the same class arises. The decision centres on the inter-twin relationship and the intended outcome is to optimize social-behavioural adjustment and scholastic attainment of each twin child. (Stanton, et al., 2012, p.205).

Sibling relationships can be fraught with competition, jealousy, negative behavior, identity struggles, issues with sharing and sibling rivalry. But for twins, this experience includes being the same age, grade level, academic competition, and finding friends who like you for you, and not how you look; all making a twin relationships even more challenging. Through researching these specifics of twin relationships as well as how educational professionals and
parents view twins in the classroom, this literature review will offer more clarity to whether
twins should share an elementary school learning environment.

**Competition/Jealousy/Negative Behavior.** Classroom separation is often practiced with
the intention of eliminating competition among twins, allowing each one the opportunity to focus
on his or her individual abilities. However, competition can be evaluated in two different ways.
When twins share a classroom, it can be a competition of who is liked more, or who got the
better grade on the math test. However, if twins do not share a classroom, there are other types
of competition and resentment that still exist, for instance the perception that their twin got the
nicer teacher or got to be in the same classroom as their joint friends.

The twin relationship is vital to consider when classroom separation and twin competition
are considerations. In a shared classroom some twins thrive off competition, especially when
they are evenly matched in some areas. For example, one twin might get better grades in math,
while the other leads in reading skills. However, if one twin is more academically challenged,
that twin may feel inadequate. In their study focused on 12 teachers from New South Wales,
Australia, Jones and De Gioia (2010) quoted one teacher, Mary as saying,

“…sometimes that competitiveness can be a positive. Because it can encourage
the other one to take risks and have a go. But that can then also have the flip, the
reversal, where…it’s not an inhibition that’s stopping them from having a go, it’s
actually that they can’t, that can then cause problems between the twins and that’s
where I think it’s a disadvantage. So, it’s kind of, a flip coin, that one.” (Jones &
De Gioia, 2010, p. 244)
Children are at a higher risk of behavior problems when they are jealous of what the other twin has in an adjacent classroom where he, himself is not included. “All of these correlations indicated that twins with less favourable perceptions of the classroom environments had more behavior problems.” (Oliver, et al., 2008, p. 649) Also mentioned at the end of Oliver, Pike, & Plomin’s, (2008) conclusion was that, “For interest, we reran our analyses for twins in the same classroom. As expected, MZ twin similarity for both teacher-rated behaviour and the twins’ perceptions of the classroom were higher than for those twins in different classrooms.” (Oliver, et al., 2008, p. 649)

Yet, if one twin is more dominant, separation may be ideal. That way twin B can thrive without worrying about how twin A will perceive his or her actions in the classroom. However, when twins are competitive and not satisfied with their separate classrooms, there may be poor behavior choices made. In one study conducted by Oliver, Pike, & Plomin, (2008) the focus was on teacher reported behavior issues based upon separated twins. The study concluded that “All significant correlations were in the expected direction, indicating that twins who reported less satisfaction with their classroom environment than did their co-twin displayed more problematic behaviour that did their co-twin.” (Oliver, et al., 2008, p. 649)

From another perspective, Webbink, et al. (2007, p. 1) explains that “assigned to different classes may stimulate the independent development of both twins and could prevent them being too competitive. It is not clear which alternative is better for the development of twins.” With varying opinions as to whether twins should or should not be separated based upon competition, it reasons to ask whether competition is the main factor to consider when looking at classroom placement in elementary school.
When making classroom assignments based upon a twin pair’s competition levels, there may be no way to eliminate competition. Competition is just one factor that can affect the decision as to a twin pair’s class placements. Is it the main factor, it could be? However, with so many considerations competition should be added to a list of pros and cons based upon each twin pair’s relationship to determine whether or not it should affect classroom placement.

**Independence/Dependence/Identity.** There are many reasons and facets to the placement of twins in any classroom. The most common argument against a shared classroom for twin sets is their individuality; while among other peers and authority figures, kids must be away from all family in order to develop who they are and who they are going to be. One principal from Tennessee stated, that he understood why principals deliberately separated twins as early as first grade. Other principals would separate simply because, “it would help them develop their own personalities. They didn’t get that part; twins already have their own personalities! (Parton, 2011, p. 96).”

Many twins who dress alike or finish each other’s sentences are then separated for the good of the individual twin’s social development and interactions. Beauchamp & Brooks state that

Many school personnel rely on a ubiquitous assumption that separating twins is very beneficial (Gleeson et al., 1990; Koch, 1996). For example, the popularized perception regarding twins is that separating twins in school will foster individuation, separate identity development, and less pathological dependency for twins. (2003, p. 432)
Another common qualitative argument when thinking about the development of personal identity is how the twin set is treated when sharing a classroom and whether the teacher is deliberate about recognizing the unique identity of each student. For example, many twins are called by their sibling’s name. Classmates may compare one twin to the other, leaving one feeling inadequate by their shared peers. By placing twins in separate classrooms, other children can get to know each twin as an individual, and not as a set. Even teachers are reminded to always treat pupils as individuals, but not to forget that they are part of a unit.

Larche (2007) goes as far as to suggest that, contrary to promoting individuality in twin pairs, the separation of twin children may in fact lead to the undermining of the individual identities. She proposes that when teachers and peers are not encouraged to get to know and understand the individual differences between the two children they have the potential to assume only arbitrary differences between the child in their own class the ‘other’ twin. (Staton, et al., 2012, p. 206)

In that same study of Staton, et al, (2012), showed through their results that parents preferred to make their decision about separation or classroom sharing keeping identity in mind. Some parents relied on the pedagogy of the school to develop two individuals all while being side-by-side while other parents felt their twins needed to develop as individuals in different classroom environments. The authors also note that “to date there are no empirical data examining specific pedagogical practices and opportunities that promote individualities for twin children.” (Staton, et al., 2012, p. 206)

Interestingly enough, Beauchamp & Brooks (2003) mention another researcher. Robin (1999) researched the relationship of twin siblings age 3 in both their home and school
environments. In these findings Robin presupposed that the twin relationship would be dependent upon the mother’s perception of twin dependency and therefore decreased social development. However, even twins who were separated in preschool for brief periods of time were not closer nor more dependent upon each other when brought back together as those twins who were not separated. “Robin suggests that these findings refute stereotypical beliefs that lack of twin separation causes twins to become depended upon one another.” (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003, p. 432)

When developing an identity, anyone who knows even two children well, can attest to the fact that even if they are siblings, look very much alike, and are raised in the same home with many of the same experiences, those siblings have different personalities. If personality equates identity, then it stands to reason that a child’s identity is well established before entering kindergarten, while still in the presence of that sibling. The decision of classroom sharing, or separation has everything to do with personality and identity. It simply depends on whether those two personalities will mix well in a classroom setting given all the other factors like the teaching style and twin relationship.

**Separation Anxiety and Focus.** Separation anxiety and focus are another set of factors that most decision-makers take into consideration when determining whether twins should share an elementary classroom. Most children begin experiencing separation anxiety before age 1 when away from their parents and have 5 years before kindergarten to gradually adjust to being separated from their care providers. Twins are often together 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, even when Mom or Dad is not present. Then upon entering the school environment when twins may be separated, it can be a sudden shock to their relationship. According to Grimme (2008),
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there can be deep emotional effects when twins are told they cannot see each other at all 5 days a week during school hours. Critics may argue that twins have opportunities like recess and lunch to see one another throughout the day; however, those events are not guaranteed and are dependent on the individual teacher and his or her understanding of the twin relationship.

In fighting for classroom sharing, parents of twins and multiples say that their children have a special bond that should not be broken so early. These children have spent just about every waking and sleeping moment together. To separate them when they are seeking to learn so many new things creates a distraction. Some twins will gaze off thinking about what his/her twin is doing in the next classroom. Is he ok? I miss her! This distraction takes away from the constructive academic learning that could take place. When twins share a classroom a twin can look across the room to calm those thoughts and then refocus on the academic tasks at hand; however, evidence suggests that twins fare better when they are not placed together in academic groups or sit in close proximity to one another. While arguing for same classroom placement, many parents will tell researchers that their children like the special attention of being a twin in a shared classroom. It is who they are. Many twins will go out of their way to make strangers take note that they are identical or have the same birthday. It is natural to them, and not something to be ashamed of. By placing them in separate classrooms, many twins have felt disconnected, shamed, and ordinary.

Parents mention focusing issues as a joint concern when considering separation anxiety. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder has been proven to affect twins with a higher frequency than singletons (Levy, et al., 1996), making it more difficult for a separated twin pair to focus, especially when worrying about where their co-twin is. Grime’s 2008 study suggested that this
is not necessarily ideal and that students often struggle when unsure of the whereabouts of their co-twin. When referencing twin separation, Grime (2008) states, 

All of the twins reported that focusing was an issue for them while they were separated from their co-twin. Each of them reported a need to know where their co-twin was; a need to know that their co-twin was safe. One twin reported that he had to take medicine on a daily basis to help him focus in class. Another twin reported that he perceived his teacher as being angry with him because he had difficulty paying attention in class. Tully et al. (2004) and van Leeuwen et al. (2005) both concluded that twins separated at age seven exhibited more internalizing behaviors than non-separated twins. All of the twins interviewed showed signs of internalizing behaviors as a result of their separation. Such internalizing behaviors described by the twins in this study were loneliness, sadness, anger, and fright. (Grime, 2008, p. 81)

Psychologically and “emotionally,” twins have had a companion since conception to experience new things with. When a singleton is dropped off in the nursery at church, often there is evidence of separation anxiety from the parental figure. When twins are dropped off, there may be separation from the parent, but there is no separation anxiety from their sibling. In fact, it is often one twin that comforts the other in those moments. Separation anxiety then may surface during the early years of school, thus hindering academic learning (Faulker, 2009). Alexander (2012, p. 134) reminds us that ‘twins and multiples help each other through both academic and social dilemmas by providing a support system in a new classroom setting.’
When Laura Bruno interviewed Nancy Segal, director of the Twins Study Center at California State University-Fullerton, for USA Today’s Life Section (2008) she stated that “her research found that some young twins may need to be within eyesight of each other to relax.” But are there focus issues when sharing a classroom? Do children worry about how their co-twin is treated by their tablemates, while looking on from another table? Although there is no research to formally suggest this, it would reason that depending upon the personality type of each twin, there could be some control issues that cause focus difficulties among each twin when sharing a classroom. If twin A has a more dominant personality, then he may become distracted when twin B is answering a question incorrectly, playing with someone else, or leaving the room without him for any reason. Twin B may become distracted by twin A’s behavior and worry, not being allowed to have some independence outside of the twin pair.

It is this dichotomy of questions that shapes the landscape for each twin pair. One pair may have less anxiety than another. One twin in a pair may have more anxiety and not be able to focus as well with their co-twin in another room or even across the classroom. It is this dichotomy that leads to more and more research as to the best course of action as to whether twins should or should not share an elementary classroom.

**Friends.** The independence and identity outside of a twin pair is directly related to the social aspect of the twin relationship. Katherine Goymour (2017, p. 46) references a study from 1966 saying that young twins who felt close to each other were more likely to be outgoing in making other friends. Further into her research, Goymour suggests that the social competence of any child is based upon attachment theory specifically attachment with the parental figure. However, she also referenced that “mothers of MZ twins reported significantly higher levels of
inter-twin closeness and dependence than the mothers of DZ twins.” (Goymour, 2017, p. 46) It is this closeness and dependence that gives twin pairs a security to reach out into their world and make other friends.

DiLall and Mullineaux (2007) found that Peer Problems were the only real negative effect of being in different classrooms despite the misconception that there would be significant negative consequences. “Children who were separated from their co-twins in the classroom had significantly more peer problems as rated by their teachers.” (p. 14) Furthermore, the “Children who were rated by their parents as having conduct problems at age 4 were rated by their teachers as having more conduct problems if they were separated at school from their co-twin, whereas children without early problems were more likely to be rated as having conduct problems if they were kept in the same classroom as their co-twin” (DiLall & Milleneaux, 2007, p.14). In other words, peer relationships outside of the twin relationship depend upon the connection that the twin pair has before entering the classroom. Based upon what DiLall and Milleneaux (2007) studied, regardless of conduct issues at the age of 4, it is always beneficial to place twins in the same classroom when considering peer relationships.

In another perspective, Megan Alexander (2012) wrote a guest editorial for the Early Childhood Education Journal, stating that the research leans toward twin classroom separation. “Overall, experts in support of separation indicate that there is no harm in separating twins and other multiples. If multiples are capable of forming friendships with non-sibling peers, then separation will not be an issue for them.” (p. 134) It is this type of conflicting research that makes it difficult to base classroom togetherness or separation on just peer relationships.
When considering how children make friends, since no two children are alike, every child is drawn to a different personality than their own. Sometimes there is a shared hobby or activity. Other times it is just time spent playing on the playground. With the understanding that siblings of all ages make different friends, it is not a stretch to conclude that even twins can make friends outside of the twin pair. It reasons that how open they are to friendships depends on the sibling relationship, but this is no different than siblings who may only be one year apart in age and school. However, with conflicting research on this topic of friendships and peer relationships outside of the twin pair, it leaves one wondering if this is a deciding factor in twin classroom placement.

**Academics.** Regardless of what the twin relationship looks like from competition to independence or separation anxiety to friends, academics is why children attend school. Academics are hard to document with the paucity of quantitative research and given the privacy laws that are now in place, and children’s ACE’s scores that directly affect their learning. The quantitative research that has been published, shows that twins achieve more academically during the first few years of school, when they are placed in a shared classroom environment. Staton et al (2012) cite sources that claim that twin children who are separated are more likely to use special education resources. Reading acquisition and math skills were among the highest in twin pairs who shared a classroom and common learning environment (Webbink et al, 2007). Regardless of zygosity, children learned better when they could continue to interact with their “other half” during their daily activities away from home.

Webbink et al, (2007) in their results mentioned that parents in Holland preferred to keep their twin sets together in the classroom. The researchers also noted that the average test scores
of twins versus singletons all sharing the same classroom were higher. This was also true for the language and arithmetic tests they preformed on grade 2 twins who were sharing a classroom. This proved to be a trend especially with same-sex twin pairs.

Joy Parton (2011), in her study about classroom placement of multiples from kindergarten through eighth grade and those East Tennessee school principals, found that principals were willing to openly share their experiences of teaching multiples, including twins, despite never having any formal training on multiples in the classroom. She also found that most principals were not aware of the needs of multiples and the implications regarding academic issues that are common to them. One principal interviewed by Joy Parton (2011, p. 99)

…reminisced on her career in education as a beginning teacher. As a 1st-year teacher, she had a set of twins in her fifth-grade class. They were well behaved, quiet, and shy little fifth-grade girls who were much smaller than the other students were; they both wore glasses and they struggled with learning. The twins gained confidence from each other and needed to be together. Principal B recalled that the girls relied on each other to study and learn; they helped each other and were able to get through to each other when she could not reach either one individually. Academically, the girls were similar and they served as each other’s support system. This arrangement, she said, was meeting their individual needs: they needed each other. (Parton, 2011, p. 99)

For those fifth-grade girls, their friendship, bond and academics were well served by sharing a classroom. For many others there is no difference in academic achievements. Polderman, et al., (2009), based upon their findings determined that there was no difference in educational achievement between twins who were together or separated. Webbink et al, (2007,
p. 8) concluded that “the presence of a co-twin seems to matter at the early stages of primary education for same-sex pairs. At the later stages of primary education, we hardly find any differences.”

Two articles that are often quoted and referenced by many in the education world studying twins are by Tully et al. (2003) and Van Leeuwen et al. (2005). Van Leeuwen et al., seeking to verify Tully et al’s study, repeated the study coming to many of the same conclusions. In both studies their final conclusions regarding long term effects stated, “there was no difference in academic performance between the separated and nonseparated twins, but the partly separated twins scored higher on academic performance. (Van Leeuwen, et al., 2005, p. 389).

This declaration of “partly separated” twins, what do they mean? It stands to reason it is the idea of sharing some classes while other classes may be separated. This could take place from one year to the next, or it could take place with the same home room, only to switch to a different class for math or science. Maybe one twin is pulled from the classroom for reading leaving the other in the familiar environment of their joint class. Often this does not take place in younger classrooms but can be a great way to develop a twin pair’s individual relationships, competition, independence, and separation anxiety tolerance.

In any experience for a child, there are positive and negative aspects. However, when adding in jealousy, identity, separation anxiety, competition, academics, independence/dependence and a host of other emotionally charged aspects of school life, the elementary classroom becomes a minefield for all involved. It is this minefield that parents, states and educational professionals walk students through, all while seeking each child’s best
interest. The real debate comes when that best interest is not based on academic issues, but on emotional and developmental ones.

School Policy and Educational Professionals’ Views

So, if academic performance is not helped or hurt by sharing a classroom, and twins are known to have higher uses of special education resources when not sharing a common learning environment, should the tradition of elementary classroom separation for twins be altered? This is a question that many parents have been asking, but what about school policies and perceptions of educational professionals?

Jones and De Gioia (2010) found in New South Wales, Australia that there is no set system wide policy on the separation of twins. However, the 12 teachers that they interviewed led them to a few conclusions and recommendations. The first major recommendation was that twin classroom placement should be determined carefully by considering each twin pair’s abilities, individuality, personalities, strengths and weaknesses. This approach would allow educators to consider each child as if they were a singleton. Also suggested and brought up in the conclusion, was the need for new and/or inexperienced teachers to receive training about twins, giving them the ability to objectively make an informed decision regarding the classroom placement of twins.

As mentioned before, there is a paucity of research regarding the classroom placement of twins and with no academic support for the separation of twins, the scarcity of quantitative research has left many professionals with an “old school” view of automatically assigning twin pairs to separate classrooms. Segal and Russell (1992) found that almost 84% of American twins
aged 6.9 to 11.5 were in separate classrooms (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003, p. 435). This is a trend that continues today. When Lynn Melby Gordon (2014) received completed and returned one-page surveys from 131 elementary principals employed in a large urban school district located in the United States, she concluded that “most principals favor kindergarten separation and the ideals of individualism (Gordon, 2014, p. 592).” Based upon the reasons shared by Gordon on page 254, Table 1, principals based their viewpoint by 51% twins do better academically when separated. Independence within twin pairs and the value of independence were the only other statements that had a higher percentage regarding the separation of twins in an educational setting. Overall, 71% of those principals surveyed believed that school separation was important for twins.

When surveying the teachers from the same district, Gordon (2014) stated that 51% thought that twins should be kept together in the same classroom and 90% indicated that they would have no problem teaching a twin pair. 62% of the parents that filled out the exact same survey as the principals and teachers wanted their twin pairs to share a classroom during kindergarten. The highest percentage of favor of joint classroom placement in kindergarten came from the twins themselves at 81%.

After surveying principals, kindergarten teachers, parents of twins and twins themselves, Gordon (2014) makes note of the divergent view of principals from the others surveyed. The further removed from the classroom environment the higher the discord with twins sharing the same educational learning environment. Principals will often rely on a school counselor to help make decisions about twin pair classroom placement. However, in a brief survey of 65 school
counselors, only 17 responded to a written question related to positive and negative consequences of a shared classroom.

Mostly negative consequences were reported such as: bickering, competition, dependence, shyness, loss of identity, loss of social skills because they have a constant play mate, and possibility of teachers treating the twins or multiples as one unit. A few positive consequences were also listed, these were: built-in-buddy, comfort, and the ability to focus. (Nilsson et al, 2010, p. 12)

70% of those school counselors surveyed stated that they believe that twins should be separated by the age of 6. However, 77% of those same school counselors admitted they had never received training regarding the issues of twins and multiples in the school system.

Beauchamp and Brooks (2003) make some very good points in their review examining United States’ perceptions, policy, and practice of educating twins. Their main finding of school policy stated that “the prevailing rationale preempting strict policies of twin placements in school is currently based upon unsubstantiated stereotypical views of twins that may not accurately depict twin relationships.” (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003, p. 435) Those same school policies are changing because parents have begun petitioning at the state level for final say as to whether their twins share a classroom.

Parents’ Views

Due to the general trend within the greater United States of America that principals and other educational professionals make decisions regarding twin pair’s classroom placement, parents have begun politicizing the issue. Parents of twins want the final say in the classroom placement
of their children. The argument is that parents know their children best and therefore should be the ones to decide whether their twins should share an elementary classroom or not. This trend has caused many parents, in direct response to school policy, to lobby their state’s government for a law stating that parents have the right to choose for their twins.

Back in 2005, Minnesota became the first state to enact a law allowing parents to make the final decision regarding their twins’ classroom placements. According to Pamela Prindle Fierro (2018), there are currently 14 states with twin laws and 11 more states have legislation pending. Ultimately parents had to petition states to make it law so that they would be the ones to make the final decision on classroom placement for their children (Faulker, 2009). These laws have come from desperate parents seeking what is best for their twins. Even once these laws are in place, many educational professionals continue the tradition of separation being the norm, has left many parents to struggle with school districts.

Much of the qualitative research and ad hoc articles for parents of multiples share the strong opinion of keeping twins together through at least second grade (Gordon, 2014). The more recent qualitative studies including Gordon’s, lean toward keeping twins together until the children themselves wish to be in separate learning environments. If the conclusion of all of these studies is that parents should have the final say in twin classroom placement and that generally it is best to keep twins together, then when is it best to separate them? 54 kindergarten teachers were asked if twins should be separated by kindergarten. 49% said, “yes.” (Gordon, 2015) Many professional educators believe that after second grade twins should be separated. However, “the available data regarding scholastic attainment or social-behavioural adjustment for twin children indicate that there is greater risk of adverse outcome among children who are
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separated early than among those separated later or never (Tully et al., 2004; van Leeuwen et al., 2005).” (Staton et al., 2012, p. 205) Staton also states that,

The decision regarding separation of twins centres on the co-twin relationship rather than on individual problems. The key question is whether the presence or absence of the co-twin is problematic. Adverse effects of the inter-twin relationship on social and academic engagement particularly problems associated with competition, dominance, and identity development, have been presented as justification of decisions to separate.” (Staton, et al., 2012, p. 197)

With newer research and new laws at the state level, parents are more and more making these key decisions for their children. This stands to reason then that parents of young twins are researching more than ever about how to raise and educate their twin children. This leads them to studies where adult twins are now expressing what they couldn’t share when they were young. Many felt resentment, abandonment, and desperation because of the classroom separation that they were not ready for. Grime (2008) shared pictures that children drew about their desperation due to being separated from their co-twin.

Staton, et al, (2012) focused their study on Australian parents and whey they chose to place their twins in joint or separated classroom settings. Their results showed that the parents who placed their twins together were more focused on the children’s emotional security, twin children’s own request, and the children’s opportunity to enjoy being twins, while referencing books that they had read about the importance of their decisions on classroom placement. For those parents who chose to place their children in separate classes the focus was on each child’s individual identity, competition, and dominance of one twin over the other.
All these options for parents are only achieved when they make the final decision as to classroom placement for their twin children. Since opinions, including parents’ regarding the advantages of separating twins are often based upon perception rather than data, it was interesting to read J.B. Parton’s study. In 2011, J.B. Parton investigated the perceptions of principals of kindergarten through eighth-grade schools regarding the classroom assignment of twins and other multiple birth students. However, one administrator, “Administrator G” is the father of twins and “he believes it is in the best interest of the children to be allowed to be together in prekindergarten up to the middle grades if that is what they want.” (Parton, 2011)

Finding out what a child or twin pair wants in classroom placement is usually something that parents are attune to. This leaves parents to struggle with the school administration, regardless of laws at the state level. So, what can be done to continue to educate professional educators, parents, and the general public about what twins need while growing up?

**Recommendations**

Given the paucity of quantitative research that is based on academics, it is hard to make a hard and fast rule as to whether twins should always share a classroom or should always be separated. Regardless of the research that is or is not available, educational professionals should be taught at the college or master’s level about the special needs that twins have while being educated in elementary school classrooms. Jones and De Gioia (2010) focused their study on understanding “teachers’ perceptions of the classroom assignment of twins, and whether teachers believed twins should be assigned to the same or separate classes.” (Jones & De Gioia, 2010, p. 241) However, without being asked to look at and investigate the research, educational professionals will keep the same views and traditions of times past.
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should be required to investigate various “special needs.” Multiple births may not be considered a special need, but it should be given special consideration based upon each family’s case. In the conclusion of their study Jones and De Gioia (2010) stated, “It can be seen that teachers are actively involved in the decision-making process and must therefore be equipped to make an informed decision regarding the classroom assignment of twins to either the same or separate classes.” (Jones & De Gioia, 2010, p. 252)

With the “grass roots” movement of parents demanding state laws to be sure that they have the final say in classroom placement, it is still important to educate parents on how to approach the educational professionals. Having a positive interaction for both parties allows parents and educational professionals to make joint decisions regarding a twin pair’s education. Cooperation can prove valuable for everyone involved, but especially for the twin pair, regardless of whether they end up sharing a classroom. In order to educate both professionals and parents, there is a need for studies that investigate the impact of classroom placement with regards to the social and emotional development of twins. “This is a particularly salient area that warrants further exploration, given the fact that the unique relationship twins share is provided as both a justification and an argument against separating twins at school.” (Goymour, 2017, p. 84)

Finally, there is a need to run more studies based upon zygosity and how that relationship affects the twin bond. One study looked at the relationship between aspects of the classroom environment and monozygotic differences in behavior problems. The conclusion was in part that twins reported less satisfaction with their separated classroom and therefore their behavior was more problematic (Oliver, et. al., 2008). “Monozygotic twins suffered more from separation than dizygotic twins (Webbink et. al., 2007).” For dizygotic twins, “this study revealed only one
instance in which separated twins showed more favorable outcomes than nonseparated twins: DZ twins who were separated after the first year of school were rated as working harder when compared to DZ twins not separated (Tully, et. al., 2003).”

“To understand the process underlying the class placement of twin children requires data on the rationale for these decisions, the context in which these decisions are made (choice or enforced) and their timing (at school entry or later).” (Staton et al., 2012) Therefore, in order to make an educated decision as to whether twins should or should not share an elementary classroom, there needs to be more research. Research that focuses on numbers, facts, and zygotic relationships of the twins directly affected by any decisions related to their education at the elementary level. By running these studies and then requiring further education for all parties involved, twins will be better served during the foundation of learning.

Conclusions

Geluk and Hol referenced by Van Leeuwen, et al. (2005), concludes that “It seems that it makes no difference whether twins are separated or not. The recommendation that the decision about classroom separation of twins should be based upon what parents think is best for their twins and for themselves, still seems sensible (Geluk & Hol, 2001).”

With no proof that academics are linked to classroom separation, higher rates of problem behavior, higher rates of special education use and the trauma that separation can cause, the conclusion is that parents and educational professionals should work together on a case by case basis. However, with the current research, it seems best to keep twins, especially monozygotic twins together for at least the first few years of their elementary education. Is this the only
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conclusion? No. Based upon qualitative data, there is always room for movement, especially when humans are involved. However, when we marry, the pastor will also say, “What God has joined together, let no man, put us under.” God “joined” twins together and put them in the same home for reasons beyond our comprehension. It seems reasonable, then, that parents of twins themselves should decide whether their children should share an elementary classroom and for how long into elementary school?

As a parent of twins, this topic has been an ongoing experience for our family all while researching this literature review. After dissecting each of these many studies as well as having read various articles from other parents, I have concluded that twins should have the option to share a classroom up through 5th grade of elementary school. Although Pennsylvania is one of the states that has a state law making parents the final decision makers on classroom placement of their twins, I have experienced some strong reactions and input from our local school educational professionals. Our twins just completed third grade. After moving into the district and completing half a year in the same classroom, it was strongly recommended that we separated our monozygotic female twins for first grade in a new school within the district. (Of note, the full year of first-grade was actually a repeated year, as the girls had not received what they needed academically while we were living overseas as well as many ACE’s scores and trauma they had experienced before we adopted them at 22 months of age.) That second year of first grade, we experienced many difficulties. Each child, at various times would come home crying that they didn’t get to see their “other half” at all that day. For first graders, the lunch tables were divided by classrooms facing each other’s backs, and when winter came, recess was held in their own classrooms with a strict policy of not crossing the hall to see a friend/sister.
During both first-grade together for that half a year, and the second first-grade in the new school, both girls were assisted by Title 1 services, which assisted them in reading.

Against the recommendations of both their first-grade teachers and the guidance counselor, for second grade they shared the same classroom. The twins did not share table groups, sitting across the room from one another. They were rarely in the same academic groups. The year went well, and the teacher reported no issues with having them in the same classroom. However, due to the teacher’s observations we had Twin B tested using the WISC-V and WIAT-III, determining that she has Dyslexia. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was then sought out and put into place at the beginning of third grade.

Again, against the recommendation of the guidance counselor and the reading specialist, I demanded that the girls share a third-grade classroom. This past year has been a good year for them overall, but as they enter fourth-grade, my husband and I have decided that they should be in separate classrooms next year.

This past year, although good overall has revealed some of the twin relationship considerations of elementary classroom placement that this literature review covers. Twin A tends to be more controlling of Twin B and her friendships, especially when she does not benefit from those friendships. Twin B “needs a place to shine on her own,” stated her teacher during a parent-teacher conference. Twin B has done great academically but has made steady progress whether her sister she was in the presence of her twin all day, every day or not. Twin A’s grades on the other hand, have dropped. She needs to be challenged by other peers rather than her twin who gets assistance due to an IEP. The teacher and classmates have also treated them as one unit rather than as singletons. When the twins were in separate classrooms in first-grade, they
received a lot of individual play-date requests. This year they have received no invites, either together or separate. The teacher has tried to treat them as separate individuals, but it is hard to plan classroom seating around keeping certain children apart, while allowing them to have some contact.

Overall, based upon the findings from this literature review, I would have fought harder to place our identical twin girls in the same classroom for first grade. Then maybe some of these current issues might not be a factor. As for a case by case basis of twins in general, the findings of Polderman, et al (2010) leave me with the satisfaction that if academic achievement is not affected negatively, then what about the emotional development of a twin pair? Yes, twins have different personalities. Yes, twins can be more dependent on each other than upon others. However, genetics, home life, and ACE scores have strong effects on each child and how they filter their everyday environment.

Jones and De Gioia (2010) interviewed one teacher named Frank. Frank said it best when he said, “It’s a big responsibility to separate them, because we’re putting an artificial control on a natural situation.” (Jones & De Gioia, 2010, p. 244) Ultimately, the conclusion of all these studies is for all professionals, parents and twins to be involved in the decision of whether to educate twins together, but to err on the side of together, unless there are definite academic or emotional reasons for that particular twin pair not to share a classroom.
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Resources


Should Twins Share an Elementary Classroom?

link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A142459171/OVIC?u=ceda80570&xid=e56e65bd.

Accessed 4 Feb. 2017


US Family Educational Right and Privacy Act (FERPA)


Goymour, K.L., (2017). The Impact of Same and Separate Classroom Placements on the Social Adjustment of Identical and Non-Identical Same-Sex Twins at School Entry. Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology. University of Southampton


Malan, C., (2014). Determining Factors of Schooling Twins Together or Separately in the Foundation Phase. Degree Requirement for Master of Education with Specialization in Guidance and Counseling at the University of South Africa.


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