

Dear Educator,

The mission of the multi-national membership of the International Council of Multiple Birth Organisations (ICOMBO) is to promote awareness of the unique needs of multiple-birth infants, children, and adults.

To address specific issues, ICOMBO utilizes Multiple Birth Awareness Week to draw attention to benchmarks from the **Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher Order Multiples** to stimulate international discussion and action on a specific theme. For 2012 ICOMBO has chosen the following topic: “School placement of multiples, and issues regarding whether separation or not is best.”

As documented in the ICOMBO Declaration of Rights:

- WHEREAS the bond between co-multiples is a vital aspect of their normal development: Co-multiples have the right to be placed together in foster care, adoptive families, custody agreements, and educational settings.
- WHEREAS multiple-birth individuals are sometimes treated as a unit by parents, professionals, and the general public: Multiples, as any other human being, have the right to be respected and treated as individuals with their own needs, preferences and dislikes.

As documented in the ICOMBO Declaration of Needs:

Twins and higher order multiples need:

Health care, education, counseling, and flexible public policies which address their unique developmental norms, individualization processes, and relationship. For example by permitting and/or fostering:

- the annual review of the classroom placement of co-multiples, and facilitation of their co-placement or separate placement according to the particular needs of multiple-birth children and their families;
- to pursue their own and unique interests including simultaneously participating on sports teams and in other group activities and/or to pursue individual sports, group or hobby interests.

The arrival of twins, triplets or more brings many challenges for both the parents and the children themselves. One of the challenges faced by parents of multiples is to foster the unique bond between the children that began in utero, while at the same time encouraging each child’s unique development.

ICOMBO believes strongly that decisions about classroom placement of multiples should be made annually, on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the parents and if age appropriate, the children concerned. Just as each child is unique, each set of multiples is unique. Some multiples thrive in separate classes; others thrive in the same class. Similarly, what works for a given set of multiples one year might not work the next year. Therefore, we believe that blanket policies on this issue – either for separate or same-class placement – are inappropriate.

Educators play an important role in encouraging and facilitating individuality and togetherness among multiples. To assist you, we have provided some background information on this topic, and some additional resources you may wish to consult.

Reasons for Separation:

While there is no substantial evidence to support the policy of separation in order for each child to grow and develop as individuals, sometimes circumstances exist which would indicate that separation is advisable. It is helpful to recognise that some behaviours may be an issue one year and not the next.

- Constant 'togetherness' is hindering the development of social skills in one, both or more of the multiples;
- A 'division of labour' exists;
- Insensitive comparisons by teachers, peers or even each other have led to feelings of inadequacy in one or more of the multiples;
- The multiples form a 'power unit' which is causing disruptive behaviour;
- The children use their multipleship to exploit, cheat or play tricks;
- One or more of the multiples appears to resent the lack of privacy resulting from sharing a classroom;
- One multiple proves to be a constant distraction to the other/s;
- In opposite-sex multiples, the female is overprotective or 'mothering' the male co-multiple;
- In skill-grouped classrooms where the abilities of one of the multiples are far above those of the co-multiple/s; and
- The multiples WANT to separate.

Reasons to Keep Together:

Sometimes there are valid reasons for keeping multiples together:

- Major emotional upheavals may have occurred with the family, e.g. divorce, moving house, death, etc;
- Only one classroom is available;
- Unequal education will be experienced due to two different teachers employing different methods of teaching;
- Multiples are at or near the same skill level in a skill-based classroom;
- The multiples do NOT want to be separated. Forced separation, with all of the other 'firsts' children face, especially in their first year of school, can add undue stress, cause regression and affect self-esteem.

Tips for Teachers of Multiples:

- Separation in the first year of school should not be an automatic decision. The added stress may actually reinforce their need to be together;
- Allow multiples as much independence as they are ready to handle. They flourish when allowed to separate on their own timetable;
- Encourage them to choose separate classes as they gain confidence in the school situation;
- Encourage multiples to sit apart for different class activities. This assists you in identifying who's who and discourages them from completing each other's work;
- Look for differences in the multiples, not sameness, e.g. voice differences, left/right handed, birthmarks, hair growth. Being able to address each multiple by his or her individual name assists them in recognising that they are individuals;
- Some parents dress their children alike. If this is a difficulty in your classroom, ask that the children be dressed differently for easier identification both for yourself and their peers;
- Refer to each child by his or her own name. This helps you identify each child and sets a good example for their peers to address them individually as well;
- Expect differences in test scores, neatness and behaviour but don't be surprised if they are very similar;
- For parent/teacher interviews, compare each child to their peer group and not to each other;

- Make different interview times for each child rather than having one interview time to talk about all the multiples at once. One mother of quadruplets noted it was assumed by the teacher that they would be discussing all four children at one interview;
- If one multiple (especially monozygotic [identical] multiples) is markedly behind the co-multiple, investigate the cause;
 - Check to make sure that each multiple is doing their own work;
 - Plan a meeting with the parents to explore the situation;
 - Don't rule out the possibility of a learning disability in one of the multiples.

Recommendations Regarding Classroom Placement:

ICOMBO recommends that classroom placement for each set of multiples be evaluated each school year in order to ascertain which is the best situation for them, i.e. together or separated. The final decision of having the children together or separated should be made jointly by the parents, the teacher(s), the principal, and at some stages, the children themselves.

Sincerely,

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The information in this letter was originally produced by Lynda P. Haddon for Multiple Births Canada (MBC). It has been reviewed by Pat Preedy Ph.D., M.Ed., B.Ed. (UK), John Mascazine Ph.D. (US) and Donna Launslager, MBC Health & Education Committee Member.

For more information, contact Monica Rankin, ICOMBO Chair, at chair@icombo.org or consult the websites and reading material below.

WEBSITES

www.twinsandmultiples.org

<http://www.drnancysegaltwins.org/>

BOOKS

Emotionally Healthy Twins: A New Philosophy for Parenting Two Unique Children, Joan Friedman

Multiples in School, Australian Multiple Birth Association, 2010. Available through www.amba.org.au

Parenting School-age Twins and Multiples, Christine Baglivi Tinglof, 2007

Twin and Triplet Psychology: A Professional Guide to Working with Multiples, Audrey Sandbank, 1999

Understanding Multiple Birth Children and How They Learn, John Mascazine