



No 6

Twins Early Development Study, P083, Freepost Lon7567 London SE5 8YZ

Autumn 2002

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TEDS NEWS

REPORT ON 2002

This has been a busy and enjoyable year for all of us at TEDS. We are busy analysing the information you sent us about your twins at 2, 3 and 4 years, as well as the data we collected from home visits. Thanks to all of you, we now have an internationally important treasure trove of information about developing children. Results have been presented at more than a dozen conferences over the year and more than 30 papers published in scientific journals. This is only the beginning! To help us get to grips with all the information you have sent, this year we have welcomed five new post-graduate researchers to work on TEDS. We feature them and their work in this newsletter.

We are still collecting telephone interview data from 7-year-old TEDS twins and their families. We are very grateful to all the families who have taken part as we know that it can be quite an organisational feat to get two lively seven year olds to the telephone in turn! We are delighted that so many of the children liked being interviewed and our team enjoyed talking directly to so many parents. Lots of people thought that we were trying to do the impossible in talking to so many young children, but the TEDS twins proved otherwise! We also had a terrific response from the twins' teachers as over 87% kindly returned questionnaires. This has given us a very valuable picture of the twins' achievements in school. We intend to maintain this educational focus in the Nine Year Study we are now preparing. We hope that our research will throw light on the factors that contribute to successful early years' education.

TEDS is such a large study that it is hard to summarise its findings succinctly. In the future we intend to set up a website to make our papers and publications more readily available. At present we have a publications list that we are happy to send out. TEDS main focus is on the three major domains of child development: language, cognition and behaviour problems and on the genetic and environmental influences that underlie them. Our large sample, and all the help and information you give us, means that we have a unique opportunity to look at how problems relate to normal development.



The picture that is emerging, over a wide range of data, is that genetic influences are important in all these areas, especially where problems are more severe. For instance our preliminary analysis of the results of the reading test we use in the Seven Year Study, together with the teacher ratings of reading, suggests that there is substantial genetic influence on early reading skills. We are finding too that most common problems in children's development (such as speech and language difficulties, hyperactivity, and even medical problems such as overweight, or ear infections) are better thought of as extensions of normal behaviour, brought about by the same genetic and environmental influences that make all children different. That is, you could say that there are no clear-cut disorders, just normal variation. This finding has far-reaching implications for diagnosis and treatment, as well as the way that parents and teachers think about children.

Seven-Year Study

If your twins have a birthday between September 1st and December 31st 1995, we hope you will take part in next year's Seven Year Telephone Study. We have received some very favourable feedback from families, some of whom felt that their children couldn't stay on the phone for such a long period or just wouldn't co-operate, and were pleased to say that they were wrong! Here are some of the comments from families:

'Both twins enjoyed the interview. One even went through the booklet again with her sister.' *'Thank you to your interviewer for putting the children at ease and giving them an enjoyable experience'* *'Although the girls were very shy and reluctant to start with, once they got started they really enjoyed themselves.'* *'We are very impressed by the*

professional/simple/ friendly way the study is undertaken. Congratulations and thanks to all.' *'Watching their faces they were certainly engrossed in the conversation. The interviewer was so patient and didn't rush them at all.'* *And from one of the children: 'I loved the question and the missing parts. It was great fun.'*

We did have some queries from parents as well. Some parents asked about confidentiality and the status of our researchers. We would like to reassure you that all data is anonymised and none of our researchers know the identity of the children whose data they study. All our employees are rigorously selected and in addition have undergone police checks. Thanks too to all parents who contacted us with ideas about how we could improve the study. We do sometimes ask families to give us extra help when we are trialling new materials. If you would like to be involved in this way, please let us know.



Four of the TEDS post-graduate research team. Left to Right: Angelica Ronald, Nicole Harlaar, Bonny Oliver, Sheila Walker.

We asked the team to tell us about their interests and topics of research.

AR: Were you very naughty when you were younger? Did you find people's actions confusing and impossible to understand? Behaviour problems and difficulties with social understanding are common problems during childhood. As part of my research I hope to learn more about the variation of these problems between children and their developmental consequences. Our initial findings show that both genes and environment play a role in these patterns of behaviour.

NH: I came to TEDS with experience of baby-sitting identical twin girls, one of whom was struggling to learn to read. Now I'm trying to understand how genetic and environmental factors contribute to the development of differences in reading ability, and particularly to reading problems (dyslexia). In the future I hope to explore why some children at risk of reading underachievement do much better than expected.

BRO: Having co-ordinated TEDS for its first few years, I have now decided to study for a PhD. I am most interested in how children's language develops. Language difficulties in children are a common cause for parental concern, and it is important to learn


as much as we can about what influences language development.

SW: My focus is on education, particularly how genes and the environment interact in school. We know that genes play an essential role in academic achievement, but that the environment is also important. I plan to investigate how nature and nurture influence academic achievement, and how children's perceptions of the classroom environment relate to their achievement.

Kathryn Asbury: My area of research is how children's environments and experiences help shape their behaviour. In particular I am looking at identical twins, who share the same genes but often have different approaches to life, and trying to understand what it is about their lives which drives the differences between them.

Coming up! Nine Year Postal Study

We hope to hear from as many families as possible when the children are nine. We are planning and piloting postal questionnaires for parents and teachers now. What's new is that we will be sending the children their own book of questions and puzzles to do. We are working hard now on making it as enjoyable and interesting as possible for all concerned. If your child has a birthday between 1st January 1994 and 31st August 1994, we invite you to take part in 2003. The rest of you will be hearing from us in the next few years.



Younger Siblings?
Please let us know if you have younger children who you would like to join the study. We would especially like to hear from you if you have a younger child who will be 2, 3, 4 or 7 in 2003. Please call us on the freephone to enrol them in TEDS.

More about twins

Don't forget you can find out more about twin-related issues from TAMBA. Their office can be contacted on **0870 7703305** (day). Twinline offers a listening ear to parents on **01732 868000** (eves & wknds). Their website is www.tamba.org.uk. The focus is on education at www.twinsandmultiples.org.uk. Support and information are also offered by the MBF on **0208 383 3519**.

Please help us stay in touch with you by letting us know any change of address or phone number. You can also call us free on 0800 317 029 or e-mail us at TEDS@iop.kcl.ac.uk



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To: TEDS Research Centre, De Crespigny Park, P083, FREEPOST LON7567 London SE5 8YZ

Your name

Your twins' names.....&.....Their date of birth.....

Your new address.....

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Postcode.....Tel: (H)..... (W).....