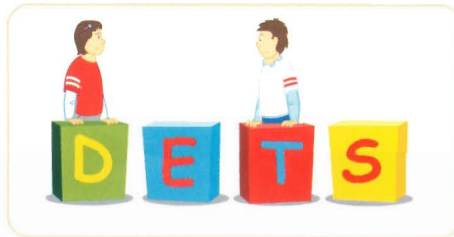




# T E D S N E W S

NO. 7 – AUTUMN 2003

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## TEDS GOES ON-LINE!

We are delighted to announce our new TEDS website which will be launched later this year.

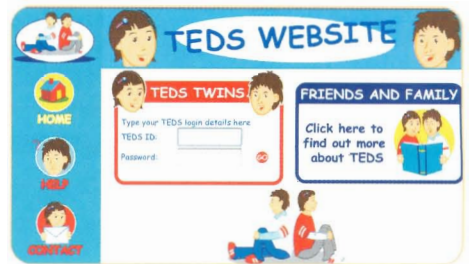
Many of our future puzzles and questionnaires will be on the web. Going on-line will also help us stay in closer contact with you, and offer up-to-date and exciting activities for TEDS twins.

When the website is up and running, we will use it to tell you more about our major findings as well as offering information about twins, child health and education. As the children get older we hope that TEDS research will be more rewarding than ever before!

There are now lots of ways for us to be in touch with you, and for you to be in touch with us. If you would like to be added to our e-mail mailing list, please let us know at [teds@iop.kcl.ac.uk](mailto:teds@iop.kcl.ac.uk).

The TEDS website is still being built, but we hope that you will be regular visitors to the site and come to think of it as your own. Any suggestions about what you would like to see on the site will make it even better – we'd love to hear them!

Do call, email or write to us to let us know your ideas. We will be in touch soon to let you know when our website goes live.



## Our new home

This has been our home since February 2003. TEDS is part of the Centre for Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Research. Our new building was funded by a grant of £14.5 million from the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council, in recognition of the importance of our interdisciplinary research.



The new building was opened by HRH Princess Anne, who came to visit the TEDS office to hear about our work.

## The mother of all twin studies

**The TEDS team were invited to present their work to the symposium 'Genetics and cognitive abilities and disabilities in the early school years' at the Annual Conference of the British Psychological Society.**

Simon Bignell reports:

More than 15,000 pairs of twins and their families are currently involved in the largest twin study ever carried out in the UK. Owing to their differing amount of shared genetic material, identical and fraternal twin pairs can be compared to assess the effects of non-genetic influences such as education or parenting. TEDS uses this method in a large-scale examination of early development of the three most common psychological problems in childhood: communication disorders, mild mental impairment and behavioural problems.

Between 85% and 90% of students with learning difficulties who receive support from special educational services have

reading problems, explained Nicole Harlaar, one of the TEDS graduate students. Existing research studies show a substantial genetic element to reading disability. Along with her colleagues at TEDS, Harlaar is using the TEDS sample to assess the extent that genes contribute to children's reading abilities. She looked at the causes of early reading difficulty in the context of normal reading ability. Harlaar explained there is no single gene responsible for reading difficulties; the same influences responsible for the normal understanding of written text may be those that are involved in reading disability.

It is possible to predict low language ability from as early as two years, according to Bonamy Oliver, another graduate student. She

is using the TEDS twins to predict school-age language problems from infancy and childhood, using the term 'retrodiction' to explain her method of looking at the twin pairs at seven years old, and then going back to look at records from when they were two years old. This approach targets children with later language problems, some of whom may not have had earlier difficulties. Oliver found that early behaviour problems were good indicators of later language problems and, surprisingly, non-verbal skills at three and four years are nearly as predictive as language measures. By examining early language and non-verbal ability with behaviour difficulties, Oliver explained, we could add fuel to early prediction of language outcomes.

Concluding the symposium was Robert Plomin, looking at how children differ in academic achievement. He explained that many studies have looked at the influence of home life (emphasising parental education, income and expectations), or their school life (assessing teacher skills, class size and peer relations). However, relatively few studies have investigated genetic influence. Plomin's findings show greater influence of genetics on academic achieve-

ment than the shared 'environmental' effects that most studies have looked at. Predictably, a high proportion of the genetic influence on academic achievement overlaps with intelligence scores, but interestingly, half is specific to achievement.

The TEDS project is providing a major contribution to our understanding of the childhood development of cognitive and language disorders, as well as providing a data set on which several other major projects have been established. Concluding, Plomin said that 'genetics plays a major role in academic achievement, and genetic research has far-reaching implications for educational theory and practice'.

(Reprinted from *The Psychologist* June 2003, by kind permission of the Editor)

Over 60 scientific papers have now been written based on the information you have given us. Topics are wide ranging, incorporating language and cognitive development, health issues and behaviour problems. Please email or phone if you would like a fuller list of our publications to date. This will soon be available on-line.

## New people on the TEDS research team



Left to right: Yulia Kovas, Jane Mackay, Dr Emma Hayiou-Thomas

**Yulia** comes from St Petersburg, Russia. After graduating from the University of St Petersburg, she taught Russian and English to children of all ages.

Yulia studied Psychology in London and became particularly interested in developmental psychology. Her main research interest is language development, causes of language disabilities and the

way these disabilities affect other aspects of children's development.

**Jane** came to TEDS having been a teacher, principally working with Year 5. Based on her experiences of the range of challenges that children face daily, she was keen to become involved with the TEDS research.

**Emma** came to TEDS from Athens in Greece, where she grew up, via Oxford, where she spent far too long at university. Her research interests are in children's language development, and why some children have difficulties with spoken language (Specific Language Impairment, or SLI) or with reading and writing.

## TEDS twins ask the questions

This year we have been busy with the Nine Year postal study. Lots of parents and children have helped us by filling in our booklets.

We have heard from a lot of you who have written to let us know what you like (or don't like!) about our booklets. We appreciate all your comments, and they will help us to make our booklets even better. You've also sent in some interesting questions and kept Jane Mackay, our secretary, busy finding the answers!

Here are some we thought might be of general interest

### How big are the world's tallest living twins?

The Lanier brothers – 7 feet 6 inches each

The Burge sisters – 6 feet 5 inches each

### How old were the longest living twins?

These were female twins called Kin Narita and Gin Kanie born August 1st 1892 in Japan. They lived to be 107 and saw 3 centuries! Kin means gold and Gin means silver.

### Who invented the word twin?

The word twin probably comes from an old German word *gtwine*, which means 'two together.'

### How many twins are born in the UK every year?

Approximately 9,000 pairs

### Which school holds the record for the largest numbers of twins?

The Louis Marshall School in New York had 29 sets of twins for the 1999–2000 school year.

### Which company employs the most twins?

The Cirque du Soleil, a French Canadian circus, has had nine sets of twins working for them.

### Do you have any questions about twins or TEDS?

Please write to Jane at the TEDS address or call her on the freephone number – your questions and answers could appear here in the next Newsletter! You might also enjoy doing your own research on <http://www.twinstuff.com>

## MOVING? DON'T FORGET TO STAY IN TOUCH!

To: TEDS Research Centre, Freepost LON7567, London SE5 8YZ

Your name: .....

Twins' names ..... & ..... DOB:.....

Your new address .....

Postcode ..... E-mail address .....

Phone: Home ..... Work ..... Mobile .....

Any other changes .....

