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Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through
Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Joy Brown Parton

August 2011

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Keywords: Fraternal Twins, Identical Twins, Triplets, Birth Multiples, Classroom Placement of
Multiples, Premature Birth, Low Birth Weight, School Readiness

ABSTRACT

Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions

by

Joy Brown Parton

The purpose of this study was to learn from kindergarten- through 8th-grade principals in East Tennessee (a) what policies guide their decisions regarding classroom placement for multiple-birth children; (b) what postsecondary training they have; (c) what sources guide their decisions; (d) what knowledge they have of the needs, relationships, and bonds of multiples; and (e) what their perceptions are regarding how to best meet the needs of multiples.

Data were collected through interviews with a purposeful sample of 10 principals of kindergarten- through 8th-grade schools. Five themes emerged forming constructs for organizational framework: (a) learning environment, (b) meeting individual needs, (c) communication, (d) culture, and (e) perceptions.

Based on the research, the following conclusions were presented: Prior to Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3102, effective July 1, 2010, none of the school systems had placement policies. Most principals had no postsecondary or graduate school training specific to and were not knowledgeable of the educational psychology of multiples or implications regarding their developmental, emotional, and academic issues. Most said on-the-job training was their only

instruction. Few principals were aware of the needs, relationships, and bonds of multiples.

Principals stated their conviction that separating multiples would promote individuality and foster independence.

Findings from this study might result in colleges modifying their teachers' education curriculum to include the educational psychology of multiples and implications regarding their developmental, emotional, and academic issues. Principals currently serving should enlighten themselves regarding the educational psychology of multiples to include the dynamics of the multiples' relationships and the bond that exists between them. School districts should provide education for staff regarding the development of multiples. Principals should recognize parents of multiples as their best source of guidance and look to school psychologists as resources. It is recommended that principals work with families, become more acquainted with multiples, and seek their opinions when making decisions that affect them. It is recommended that if principals want to help multiples become independent and develop as individuals, they should learn to tell them apart and call them by their individual names rather than "twin" or "triplet."

DEDICATION

Dedication #1:

This study is dedicated to my family, my source of strength:

To my husband Merle who has always expressed the highest degree of confidence in me.

To my daughter Jennifer and our granddaughters Lucy and Laney: “I am the matriarch of this family, and I am your role model. I desire that you learn the importance of setting goals, dedication, perseverance, and the result of hard work in all that you endeavor in life.”

Dedication #2:

I dedicate this study to two people who are as much a part of my life as I am:

I can't remember a time in my life when I was without them
and I can't imagine the time in my life when I will be without them.

They were my first playmates; they are my lifelong best friends.

They are not just my sisters--they are my womb-mates.

They are my triplet sisters,

Love and Hope

“The uniqueness of the multiples' bond is hard for a non-multiple to imagine. It is a bond that is longer lasting than marriage, friendships, or the relationship between a parent and a child. Togetherness with the co-multiples is all that the child has ever known”

~ Pamela Prindle Fierro

~~~

*In memory of my parents  
Roy D. and Viola Ford Brown  
who both passed away before the completion of this work*

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First, I thank God for providing me with His gifts of family, health, ability, opportunity, and support to complete this task.

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I wish to thank Dr. Virginia Foley, Dr. James Lampley, and Dr. Elizabeth Ralston for serving on my committee; I appreciate your time and guidance.

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I am indebted to the participants who volunteered their time for this research. You allowed me to delve into your personal inner space as you readily and enthusiastically shared your thoughts and feelings with me; I appreciate your candor. Thank you for your hard work and dedication for serving the educational needs of the children in East Tennessee.

Finally, I am forever grateful to Debby Bryan, my editor. Throughout this project our lives underwent momentous changes; we weathered some heavy storms, went through some dark days, and endured some bumpy rides but we kept to the task. Her unwavering faith in God, her ability to remain optimistic, and her confidence in me was a constant source of inspiration.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The incidence of multiple births has increased dramatically in the past 3 decades in the United States. With the dramatic increase in the births of twins and other birth multiples, many schools will be adding sets of twins, triplets, quadruplets, and quintuplets to their classroom rosters. Entering school for the first time, premature and multiple-birth children often appear to be developmentally behind their peers; however, when compared to children who are one grade level or 1 year lower, these children are considered developmentally appropriate (Hay & Preedy, 2006).

Multiple-birth children are frequently subjected to arbitrary placement practices enforced by some schools systems with no consideration for the psychosocial attributes for multiple-birth children. Increasingly, administrators are being challenged regarding placement of multiples (Mascazine, 2004).

According to Mascazine (2004) principals defend their policy to separate multiple-birth children because they contend it will promote the children's individuality; yet, they are unable to support this practice given the current studies that suggest otherwise. Although many school systems have no formal policy for the classroom placement of multiples, it is common for principals to incorporate an informal policy of separating multiples without considering parental wishes and desires (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003). As a result parents have begun to demand that their voices be heard and have taken an active role in the decision-making processes and educational policies that affect their children. The Tennessee State Board of Education Policy # 4.208, *Parent and Family Involvement*, revised on January 31, 2003, has recognized that the

family and the school share in the responsibility of a child during the time he or she attends public school (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2010). Further, Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3102 effective July 1, 2010, states that in determining the classroom assignment of multiple-birth siblings, no school or board of education shall place multiple-birth children into different classrooms solely due to the children being part of a multiple set (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2010).

Multiple-birth pregnancies often present serious problems before and after birth. It is common for multiples to be born as many as 4 weeks early; this can lead to greater risks of perinatal death, premature birth, cerebral palsy, and intrauterine growth retardation. Other residual effects of a premature or traumatic birth experience can include ADD (Attention Deficient Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficient Disorder with Hyperactivity), dyslexia, and other cognitive disabilities (March of Dimes, 2009).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010), there were 4,316,233 births registered in the United States for the year 2007. This was the largest number ever recorded. These births were separated into the following categories:

|                          |           |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Singleton (one infant) = | 4,170,845 |
| Twins =                  | 138,961   |
| Triplets =               | 5,967     |
| Quadruplets =            | 369       |
| *Quintuplets =           | 91        |

\* Including other higher order birth multiples

In 1980 about one of every 55 live births resulted in twins; however, by 2003, about one in every 33 live births resulted in the birth of twins (Martin et al., 2005). The rate of twin births rose by

70% between 1980 and 2004 but it has remained stable since. The birth rate for triplets and other birth multiples climbed more than 400% between 1980 and 1998 (at its peak) but has begun a downward trend since then. For the year 2007 the birth rate for twins was 32.2 per 1,000 births, and the birth rate for triplets and other higher order birth multiples was 148.9 per 100,000 (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2009). Preliminary birthing data for 2008 have not yet been made available.

Table 1 shows the most current birthing data for the United States since 1980 (Hamilton et al., 2009). Twins are the most common form of multiple births. Quadruplet and quintuplet births were not added as a category until 1995; until that time, triplets, quadruplets, and quintuplets were all grouped together and expressed by rate of growth (Hamilton et al., 2009).

#### *Purpose of the Study*

Parents often approach school administrators with a special request to consider the dynamics of their child's personality or learning style so that careful consideration can be given to ensure the child is paired with a teacher whose teaching style or personality is compatible with that of the child. Administrators often will not place certain students together in the same classroom because of personality conflicts or behavioral problems, or parents may ask to place their child or children in certain settings based on individual needs and parental wishes. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate kindergarten-through eighth-grade principals' perceptions regarding the classroom assignment of twins and other multiple-birth students.

Table 1

*Numbers of Twin, Triplet, Quadruplet, Quintuplet, and Other Higher Order Multiple Births:*

*United States, 1990, 1995-2007*

| Year | Twins   | Triplets | Quadruplets | Quintuplets and other higher multiple births <sup>a</sup> | Triplet birth rate <sup>b</sup> | Quadruplet and higher order multiple-birth rate <sup>c</sup> |
|------|---------|----------|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2007 | 138,961 | 5,967    | 369         | 91                                                        | 138.2                           | 10.7                                                         |
| 2006 | 137,085 | 6,118    | 355         | 67                                                        | 143.4                           | 9.9                                                          |
| 2005 | 133,122 | 6,208    | 418         | 68                                                        | 150.0                           | 11.7                                                         |
| 2004 | 132,219 | 6,750    | 439         | 86                                                        | 164.2                           | 12.8                                                         |
| 2003 | 128,665 | 7,110    | 468         | 85                                                        | 173.8                           | 13.5                                                         |
| 2002 | 125,134 | 6,898    | 434         | 69                                                        | 171.5                           | 12.5                                                         |
| 2001 | 121,246 | 6,885    | 501         | 85                                                        | 171.0                           | 14.6                                                         |
| 2000 | 118,916 | 6,742    | 506         | 77                                                        | 166.1                           | 14.4                                                         |
| 1999 | 114,307 | 6,742    | 512         | 67                                                        | 170.3                           | 14.6                                                         |
| 1998 | 110,670 | 6,919    | 627         | 79                                                        | 175.5                           | 17.9                                                         |
| 1997 | 104,137 | 6,148    | 510         | 79                                                        | 158.4                           | 15.2                                                         |
| 1996 | 100,750 | 5,298    | 560         | 81                                                        | 136.1                           | 16.5                                                         |
| 1995 | 96,736  | 4,551    | 365         | 57                                                        | 116.7                           | 10.8                                                         |
| 1990 | 93,865  | 2,830    | 185         | 13                                                        | 71.6                            | 5.0                                                          |

*Note.* From “Births: Final Data for 2007” by Martin et al., 2010, *National Vital Statistics*

*Reports*, 58, n. p.

<sup>a</sup>Quintuplets, sextuplets and higher order multiple births are not differentiated in the national data set. <sup>b</sup>Triplet births per 100,000 total births. <sup>c</sup>Quadruplet and higher order multiple births per 100,000 total births.

*Research Questions*

In order to determine kindergarten- through eighth-grade principals’ perceptions related to the classroom placement of multiple-birth children in East Tennessee, the following research questions were used in this study:



1. What local, district, and state policies guide principals in making placement decisions for multiple-birth students?
2. What training do principals have to prepare them for the placement of multiple-birth students?
3. What other sources of guidance assist principals in placing multiple-birth students?
4. What knowledge do principals have about the unique needs of multiple-birth students?
5. What are principals' perceptions regarding how to best meet the needs of multiple-birth students?

### *Significance of the Study*

Multiple-birth children face many unique challenges and their parents confront many unanswered questions regarding what schooling practices are best for their children. With the high numbers of multiple births in the past 3 decades, school boards, school administrators, teachers, and counselors are increasingly called upon to offer their professional opinions to parents of multiples as they arrive to register their children in school. Further, more parents are speaking out, challenging the status quo, and demanding that their voices be heard regarding educational decisions that affect their children; this has resulted in many states enacting legislation that ensures multiple-birth children's parents' voices are heard regarding educational decisions that affect their children.

An investigation of the perceptions of kindergarten- through eighth-grade principals regarding the classroom assignment of twins and other birth multiples could raise awareness of the issue, might give administrators a better understanding of multiple-birth children, and it

should add to the existing body of knowledge. It could also influence administrators of teacher-preparation programs to develop curriculum related to the unique aspects of multiple-birth children in order to promote understanding and to better meet their individual educational needs.

### *Definitions of Terms*

The following definitions were used for the purpose of this study:

1. Higher order birth multiple: This term refers to three or more eggs being fertilized, one egg splitting twice (or more), or a combination of both. A set of higher order multiples may contain all fraternal siblings or a combination of identical and fraternal siblings (March of Dimes, 2009).
2. Monozygotic (Identical): This occurs when one fertilized egg splits and develops into two (or occasionally more) fetuses. The fetuses usually share one placenta. Identical twins have the same genes so they generally look alike and are the same sex. A woman's chances of having identical twins are not related to age, race, or family history (March of Dimes, 2009).
3. Dizygotic (Fraternal): This develops when two separate eggs are fertilized by two different sperm. Each twin usually has its own placenta. Fraternal twins (like other siblings) share about 50% of their genes; therefore, they can be different sexes. They generally do not look any more alike than brothers or sisters born from different pregnancies. Fraternal twins are more common than identical twins (March of Dimes, 2009).
4. Singleton: This is the birth of one baby (March of Dimes, 2009).

5. Cryptophasia: This refers to a peculiar phenomenon of language developed by identical twins that only the two children can understand. The word has its roots from ‘crypto’ meaning secret and ‘phasia’ meaning speech disorder (Encyclopedia Online, 2010).
6. Idioglossia: This is a condition in which words are so poorly articulated that speech is either unintelligible or appears to be a made-up language (Medline Plus, 2010).
7. Premature birth: This refers to a birth occurring before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy (March of Dimes, 2009).

#### *Delimitations and Limitations*

This study was limited to 10 principals in kindergarten- through eighth-grade schools from five rural school systems located in East Tennessee who have had prior experiences with classroom placement of multiple-birth children. The findings might not be representative of nor generalized to the wider populations of kindergarten- through eighth-grade school principals in any other areas. The fact that I am a triplet is a bias that I brought to the research. As one third of a set of identical triplets, I have first-hand knowledge and understanding of the unique bond that unites multiples. I do not feel that my perceptions are flawed or tarnished because of negative experiences during my school years as our classroom placement was never an issue.

My life experiences as a multiple-birth child, a parent, a teacher, and as a school counselor have given me perspectives that few can feel or know. These life experiences have provided opportunities for me to work with many sets of twins and triplets and their parents. In all honesty, I do not believe that I have a biased view regarding the classroom placement of multiple-birth children, but I do believe their voices and the voices of their parents should be

heard in reference to their placement in school classrooms. I was extremely interested in what the research would reveal concerning the perceptions of principals as to classroom placements multiples in an educational setting.

I have a strong sense of fairness and strongly believe in the rights of the individual. My initial belief regarding the classroom placement of multiple-birth children in school was that they should be together--if that is what they want and if that is what is best for them. My other bias was my belief that parents know their children better than a school administrator does and are in a better position to know what is best for them regarding their placement in school.

### *Overview of the Study*

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of key terms used in the study, and the delimitations and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature including reviews of psychological, medical, and educational journals, periodicals, and books surrounding the dynamics of a multiple-birth relationship, the risks and residual effects of multiple-birth children, and the educational policies and practices regarding the education of multiples. The research design and methodology is described in Chapter 3. Data are analyzed and reported in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a detailed summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and further research.

CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Introduction*

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to review the literature related to the increase in the births of multiple-birth children, the development of multiple-birth children, and schooling practices regarding multiple-birth children.

*Birthing Trends*

Multiple birth refers to the birth of offspring produced in the same gestation period comprising twins, triplets, quadruplets, quintuplets, sextuplets, septuplets, octuplets, or tuplets, also known as obstetrics multigestation (Medical-Dictionary, 2010). Multiple births occur when multiple fetuses are carried during a pregnancy with the subsequent delivery of multiple infants (Oliver, 2006). The most common form of human multiple birth is twins (two babies) but cases of triplets (three), quadruplets (four), quintuplets (five), sextuplets (six), septuplets (seven), and octuplets (eight) have been recorded with all siblings being born alive. In 2006 there were approximately 125,000,000 living human twins in the world equating to 1.9% of the world's population (Oliver, 2006).

In 2006, 4,265,555 births were recorded in the United States--3% more than in 2005. As shown in the National Vital Statistics Report (Martin et al., 2009), the breakdown for all births for 2006 was:

|                  |   |                           |
|------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Singleton births | = | 4,121,930                 |
| Twin births      | = | 137,085 (133,122 in 2005) |

|                            |   |                       |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Triplet births             | = | 6,118 (6,208 in 2005) |
| Quadruplet births          | = | 355 (418 in 2005)     |
| Quintuplet & higher births | = | 67 (68 in 2005)       |

Data from Martin et al. (2009) revealed that the rate of multiple births has risen about 2% each year in the United States. From 1980 to 1998 the number of all other multiple births increased fourfold or 400% (March of Dimes, 2009).

Mathews and Hamilton (2002) found that over the past 30 years the mean age of all women becoming mothers in the United States increased by 2.6 years; the mean age of first-time mothers increased by 3.5 years. The widespread increases in mothers' ages in all states indicated that birthing trends have been changing in the United States (Mathews & Hamilton, 2002).

Two birthing trends in the United States have been noted: (a) women are choosing to have babies at an older age and (b) they are using Assisted Reproduction Therapies (ART) (Ventura, Martin, Curtin, & Mathews, 1998). A family history of multiple-birth pregnancies and ethnicity contributed to the high number of multiple births but was not the leading cause of multiple-birth pregnancies (Pregnancy-Period, 2010). According to the National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs (NOMOTC, 2010) multiple-birth rates tend to rise with the mother's increasing age. A woman who delays pregnancy past the age of 30 is at a greater risk for having multiples (Tinglof, 1998). As women age, they produce higher levels of gonadotrophins, the hormone responsible for stimulating the ovaries to release more eggs. Tinglof (1998) noted that women between the ages of 35 and 40 were more likely to have twins than were women between 20 and 24 years old.

Today, more than 3% of babies in the U.S. are born in sets of two, three, or more; about 95% of these multiple births are twins. Between 1980 and 2006 the rate of twin births increased

by 27% for mothers under the age of 20, 80% for women in their 30s, and 190% for mothers aged 40 years and older. Multiple-birth rates tend to rise with increasing maternal age. In 2006 20% of births to women between the ages of 45 to 54 years produced twins compared to about 2% of births to women in the age range of 20 to 24 years. The rate of higher-order multiple births has declined 21% since its peak in 1998 (Martin et al., 2009).

Today's women have been choosing to pursue higher education and establish careers before starting their families. Nagourney (2002) reported the findings from a 2-year study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the University of Kansas involving 147,000 twin pregnancies and 5,015 triplet pregnancies. The study provided a description of the older pregnant woman: She was likely more educated and married, which meant it was possible she was more financially secure and had access to better insurance making it likely she would have had continuous medical supervision during her pregnancy and after birth. Nagourney (2002) suggested that this high quality of health care might have enabled her to better carry out a multiple-birth delivery. Nagourney (2002) stated that all multiple births are risky, and that pregnancy is risky for older women; therefore, he speculated that if carrying multiples was risky and later-in-life pregnancy was risky, then older women carrying multiples should be very risky. However, this assumption was not proven. Although miscarriages were common in women carrying multiples at any age, twins and triplets born to older mothers seemed to be at no greater risk of complications in comparison to younger mothers (Nagourney, 2002).

Another factor for the increase of multiple births has been the availability and use of fertility enhancing treatments using fertility drugs such as Clomid and Pergonal and ART technologies such as In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) (Ventura et al., 1998). In IVF eggs are removed

from the mother, fertilized in a laboratory dish, and then transferred back to the mother's uterus. Multiple fertilized eggs are implanted for a better chance of success. In pregnancies made possible by ART 44% of the procedures might result in twins, and about 5% of the procedures might result in triplets or more (March of Dimes, 2009). Since the 1970s about one third of the increase in multiples births was attributed to maternal age (Ventura et al., 1998).

Although the overall use of ART methods such as fertility drugs and IVF have increased, assisted reproductive fertility surgeries involving the fallopian tubes and ovaries have decreased. However, in the case of tubal infertility assisted reproductive fertility surgery remains the main treatment (Ketefian, Bartolucci, & Azzis, 2009).

### *Health Risks for Multiple-Birth Babies*

The extraordinary rise in the occurrences of multiple-birth pregnancies has created a significant public health concern because of the heightened risk to both mother and children before and after birth (Blondel et al., 2002). The risks of physical disability increase greatly with the number of babies present. Preterm labor is a major concern for women expecting multiples; Tinglof (1998) defined preterm labor as labor occurring between week 20 and week 36 of the pregnancy. Tinglof (1998) noted that approximately 50% of all twins, 90% of all triplets, and practically all quadruplets are born prematurely and have a low birth weight; further, she added, of the infants born prematurely, nearly 1 in 10 will not survive. Multiples tend to be born prematurely because of limited space in the uterus (Pingili, Bamigboye, & Jegede, 2008) and the more babies who are involved, the more severe the complications might be (March of Dimes, 2009). Consequently, multiple-birth infants are at a higher risk to experience life-long medical



problems such as cerebral palsy, hearing loss, vision problems, developmental disabilities, and delays (Tinglof, 1998).

In the past the premature birth of multiple-birth infants compounded with low birth weight contributed significantly to higher infant mortality rates and lifelong physical, cognitive, and behavioral disabilities. Most multiple-birth pregnancies have a satisfactory outcome culminating in the birth and development of healthy children, but the consequences of some multiple pregnancies remain significant. In spite of this a small percentage of low birth-weight infants face perinatal death, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, sight and hearing disabilities, and intrauterine growth retardation (March of Dimes, 2009).

The occurrences of multiple pregnancies soared in the late 1990s as a consequence of assisted reproductive technology; however, the high rate of multiple-births has begun to decline and should continue to decline as improvements are made in assisted reproductive technology along with careful monitoring of ovulation inductions and reducing the numbers of embryos transferred after IVF. According to Tinglof (2010), “The days of double-digit increases in twinning may be coming to an end” (p. xiv). Tinglof (2010) explained that the medical community has called for changing the in-vitro procedure of transferring two, three, four, and sometimes more embryos at a time to the recommended standard practice of transferring only one embryo at a time.

### *Understanding Multiples*

Throughout time multiple-birth children have held a certain fascination for many people. Biblical stories, literature, and media and entertainment businesses have captivated audiences with fabulous stories and plots involving multiple-birth characters such as Biblical twins Jacob

and Esau, Roman mythology heroes Romulus and Remus, Canada's Dionne Quintuplets, the McCaughey Septuplets, the Gosselins Plus Eight, and "Octo-Mom," Nadya Suleman. (Citrin, 2006; Gen 25: 23, New King James Version; Good Morning America, 2009, Gosselin & Carson, 2008, McKelden, 2005; Newman, 2009; Quintland, 2010). Limitless access to worldwide entertainment and media allows society an up-close and personal view into the lives of multiple-birth families.

High-order multiple child pregnancies are risky and require more intensive prenatal care for the mother. An extremely premature delivery is a great concern. An infant is not considered full term until 37 weeks gestation. All higher order birth multiples have been born before 37 weeks of gestation. No case of sextuplets' births in the United States has gone past 31 weeks of gestation (McKelden, 2005).

Multiple-birth babies bring excessive physical and emotional demands on the parents as well as financial burdens. As cited in Lemonick, Cole, and Fedarko (1997), Luke, a perinatal epidemiologist at the University of Michigan, summed up the effects of being born a multiple, "It is an injustice to children to be born in litters" (n. p.).

Novotny (2001), discussing the lack of research designed to educate parents, teachers, and school administrators about the special social and psychological factors that affect multiple-birth children and their families said, "Twins have often served science, but science has rarely served twins" (p., 229). The majority of research regarding twins, triplets, and other birth multiples has focused on nature vs. nurture studies of multiples who were raised together or separately in order to explain the influence of genetics versus environmental factors in personality development. In order to better meet the needs of all students, school administrators

and other school personnel should be aware of the other issues that can affect many multiple-birth children (Eric Digest, 1998).

Pogrebin (2009), an identical twin, spent 2 years interviewing more than 40 sets of twins trying to understand what it takes for a multiple-birth child to create his or her own individuality. As noted by Pogrebin (2009), “[There is] confirmation that twins, despite their recent ubiquity, still fascinate and confound. [There is] evidence that twins will always play a key role in decoding what differentiates all of us--emotionally, temperamentally, and physically” (p. 11). Pogrebin’s (2009) work created more thought about how one forms a singular identity in a world where millions of people do the same job or come from similar backgrounds.

### *Types of Multiples*

In order to better understand the uniqueness of multiple-birth children, one should first understand the difference between identical and fraternal twins.

#### *Identical Twins*

Identical twins, also called monozygotic twins, occur when one fertilized egg splits and develops into two embryos. The embryos usually share one placenta. Identical twins share the same genes; therefore, they look alike and are of the same sex. The sooner the egg splits, the more the children will look alike; the later the egg splits, the less the multiples will look alike. Eggs that split extremely late could result in Siamese, or conjoined twins. A woman’s chance of having identical twins is not related to her age, race, or family history (March of Dimes, 2009).

### *Fraternal Twins*

Fraternal twins, also called dizygotic twins, develop when two different sperms fertilize two different eggs. Fraternal twins share about 50% of their genes, so they could be different sexes. Each twin usually has his or her own placenta. Like other singleton siblings (one child), they generally do not look any more alike than brothers or sisters born from different pregnancies. Fraternal twins are more common than are identical twins. Fraternal twins are also more common for mothers over the age of 35 (March of Dimes, 2009).

Twins, triplets, and other multiples can result from two or more eggs being fertilized, one egg splitting twice (or more), or a combination of both. A set of higher order multiples could contain all fraternal siblings or a combination of identical and fraternal siblings (March of Dimes, 2009).

### *Categories of Multiples Apart From Zgosity*

The works of Hay and Preedy (2001, 2006) regarding Australian multiples and multiples studies have offered insight to issues that affect the physical, intellectual, personal, social, and emotional development of multiple-birth children. Preedy, a Canadian educational research consultant for the Twins- and Multiple-Births Society and the Twins- and Multiple-Births Association (TAMBA), became interested in multiples during her work as a school principal when nine sets of multiples started school at the same time (Hay & Preedy, 2001). Hay, a professor of psychology and author, has worked with multiple-birth families for 25 years. In the late 1980s while working with the Australian Multiple-Birth Association, he developed the “Twins in School” program, a national survey of parents and teachers (Hay & Preedy, 2001).

Hay and Preedy (2001) identified three primary types of multiples: extreme individuals, mature dependents, and closely-coupled multiples. Hay and Preedy (2001) pointed out whereas there is no assessment scale available to assess into which group multiples would fit, parents, teachers, and the more mature multiples might be able to relate to the following groupings:

Extreme Individual:

- likes own friends, doesn't share friends;
- plays mostly alone;
- opts out of the interaction if his [or her] co-multiple is successful;
- polarizes his or her behavior, goes to extremes (angel or devil);
- is excessively competitive;
- dislikes co-multiple(s);
- refuses to dress alike; or
- tries to dominate. (p. 9)

Mature Dependent:

- [has]shared and separate friends,
- are happy either separated or together,
- [are] supportive of co-multiple(s),
- has developed as an individual with own identity, or
- may choose the same or different interests from co-multiple(s). (p. 9)

Closely Coupled:

- unhappy when separated, wants to be together most or all of the time;
- responds to each others' names or group name, e.g. 'Twinnie';
- cannot recognize his or her image in the mirror;
- [uses] twin 'language' (Cryptophasia);
- slows down or speeds up to keep together, especially in school;
- has few or no individual friends;
- combines to form a unit; or
- dress[es] and behaves identically. (p. 9)

### *Consequences of Being a Multiple*

It is not uncommon for multiples to be born preterm with low birth weight and intrauterine growth retardation that could affect their development. In the United States the overall rate of very low birth weight babies is increasing mainly because of the greater numbers

of multiple births (Schneider Children's Hospital, 2010). A major consequence of preterm birth is that the baby has less time in the mother's uterus to grow and to gain weight. According to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (2011) a birthweight less than 2,500 grams (5 pounds, 8 ounces) is diagnosed as low birthweight and infants weighing less than 1,500 grams (3 pounds, 5 ounces) at birth are considered very low birthweight. Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (2011) recorded the latest statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics for very low birthweight babies (Table 2).

Likewise, single-birth children born to women who are exposed to drugs, alcohol, and cigarette smoking during their pregnancies face similar developmental risks. These children are more likely to be born with low birth weight or very low birth weight. In addition mothers of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to have had proper nutrition and adequate prenatal care; this can also contribute to very low birth weight. Advances in the medical care of premature babies have resulted in very low birth weight babies and low birth weight babies who are surviving in spite of being born early or being born very small (Schneider Children's Hospital, 2010).

Table 2

*Statistics for Very Low Birthweight Babies*

| Birthweight                             | % of Total Births |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|
| less than 2,500 grams (5.5 lbs)         | 7.9 %             |
| 2,000 to 2,499 grams (4.4 to 5.5 lbs)   | 4.9 %             |
| 1,500 to 1,999 grams (3.3 to 4.4 lbs)   | 1.4 %             |
| 1,000 to 1,499 grams (2.2 to 3.3 lbs)   | 0.7 %             |
| 500 to 999 grams (1.1 to 2.2 lbs)       | 0.6 %             |
| less than 500 grams (less than 1.1 lbs) | 0.2 %             |

Generally, the more babies there are in the uterus, the greater the risks are for complications. According to information gleaned from the March of Dimes (2009) low birth weight babies are more likely to have health problems during the newborn period; many may require the specialized care of a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). The March of Dimes (2009) listed the following medical problems as being the most common for low birth weight babies:

- Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RSD): Babies born before the 34<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy lack the protein surfactant that keeps the small air sacs in the lung from collapsing.
- Bleeding in the Brain (IVH): Intraventricular hemorrhage occurs in some very low birth weight premature babies in the first 3 days of life. In extreme cases, severe brain bleeds can cause pressure on the brain, which can lead to brain damage.
- Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA): Before birth, a large artery, the ductus arteriosus, allows blood to bypass the baby's nonworking lungs. After birth, the ductus closes so that blood can travel to the lungs and pick up oxygen. If the ductus does not close properly, it can lead to heart failure.

- Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC): A potentially dangerous intestinal problem that develops 2-3 weeks after birth and can lead to feeding difficulties.
- Retinopathy of Prematurity (RPO): An abnormal growth of blood vessels in the eye that can lead to vision loss. (n. p.)

Many very low birth weight babies are also premature birth babies, so it can be difficult to distinguish between problems that are related to the premature birth and problems associated with a very low birth weight. Almost all very low birth weight babies require specialized care in the NICU until they are able to gain weight and are strong enough to go home. According to the March of Dimes (2009) the risks of long-term complicated residual effects for low birth weight babies are great; generally 10% to 20% will have some type of disability affecting intellectual and neurological problems that could include cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness, or mental retardation.

Very low birth weight babies might have a harder time "catching up" in their physical growth (March of Dimes, 2009). Researchers at Johns Hopkins Children's Center (1997) reported that around 10% of premature or very low birth weight children showed significant learning problems. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) with or without hyperactivity (ADHD) is common in many premature or very low birth weight children. Around the ages of 11 to 13 years very low birth weight children or premature children are more likely than are their peers to show signs of behavioral or psychiatric problems, and they more often describe themselves as depressed, anxious, and not as social as their peers (Johns Hopkins Children's Center, 1997).



### *Development of the Person*

Justice and Utesch (1994) noted that self-esteem, separation-individualism, and object relations are often issues associated with individuals who are born multiples. Risks of multiple-birth pregnancies include premature birth and low birth weight often requiring the use of a neonatal incubator for survival. The time spent in the neonatal incubator prevents early parental contact with the infant; therefore, early parental bonding sometimes does not occur. Justice and Utesch (1994) wrote about twins only and stated that twins were more inclined to be self-centered, aggressive, irritable, prone to temper tantrums, and to experience sleeping problems. Parental abuse toward twins has increased and parental stress related to raising multiples has increased as well.

When twins reach the age of 6 months, they have already bonded emotionally and can communicate and play together. They are able to amuse and entertain themselves; therefore, parents often leave them alone. Reduced contact time with a caregiver slows development in the children's' identity, language, and intellect. Interestingly, Justice and Utesch (1994) wrote that when mothers talked to their twins, they tended to talk to the twins as one instead of individually, and this could lead to the twins having lower I.Q. scores.

During the first 2 years twins seek separate social and interpersonal identities. They will often use each other for security instead of the usual security blanket. This constant togetherness might cause over bonding; however, Justice and Utesch (1994) wrote that over bonding might be an advantage because it could lessen difficulties of the eventual separation from the mother. Twins learn very early in life how to share, cooperate, and even fight well (Justice & Utesch, 1994).

### *Personal Development*

Human infants are born with no culture; therefore, they are trained by their parents and family how to act in order to fit into their society (O'Neil, 2006). O'Neil (2006) called this process socialization, a lifelong process that begins shortly after birth. Early childhood is the most crucial time for socialization, for this is when much of one's personality is formed. Children learn and adapt to their culture's norms--the behaviors that are expected and considered appropriate. In addition to learning their culture's language, children start playing the role of whatever society says is appropriate for them (O'Neil, 2006). O'Neil's (2006) example showed that girls learned how to fill female roles such as daughter or sister as well as occupational expectations for their gender. Socialization contributes to the development of one's personality through one's beliefs, attitudes, and life experiences.

The human personality is largely a result of genetics (O'Neil, 2006). One's personality is a complexity of mental characteristics that makes him or her unique. Some hereditary factors such as genetically inherited physical attributes and mental capabilities contribute to personality development; they have an impact on how one is seen and, subsequently, how one sees himself or herself. A person's health and physical attributes can affect personality development if these qualities cause the person to feel inferior, superior, or different. One's skin color, gender, and sexual orientation could have a major impact on one's perception. Being accepted by others as normal or not accepted for being abnormal can cause one to think and act in a socially unacceptable, deviant way (O'Neil, 2006).

### *Attachment and Bonding*

According to Tinglof (1998),

Twins, especially, have a hard time in their quest to become individuals. As infants, all children see themselves as part of their caretakers, or mothers, but as they get older, they slowly understand their sense of self and ultimately form their own identities. Twins, on the other hand, must separate not only from their mother, but also from each other. Compounding the situation is the twin bond itself--an intense relationship that exceeds the closeness of two different-aged siblings. Although twins want to individualize, they sometimes feel guilt at the prospect of separating from their twin, someone they truly love. For some twins, especially identical twins, the process of breaking away is difficult. (p. 175).

The infant's earliest experiences after birth have a significant impact on the child's development and behavior later in life. Two of these experiences are bonding and attachment, terms that are sometimes used interchangeably but have quite different meanings. Bonding is the relationship between parent(s) and infant that typically occurs in the first hours after birth. On the other hand, attachment refers to the relationship that gradually develops between an infant and significant others such as a babysitter or siblings (Sroufe, England, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

The period immediately following birth, known as bonding, is essential in forming a mutual emotional connection between parents and infant. Some parents feel intense affection within minutes after their baby's birth; however, the bonding process might take longer if the infant had been in neonatal care or was adopted. Most infants are ready to bond immediately after birth. Bonding is critical in developing a sense of security and is essential for emotional well being. Establishing emotional intimacy and a sense of closeness between parent and child is the foundation for the child's healthy self-worth and self-esteem (Sroufe et al., 2005).

The attachment between infant and caregiver does not develop until the second 6 months of life. As with other types of relationships, an attachment does not happen instantly but is built over time--one experience at a time building on previous experiences. Newborn infants are not capable of forming attachments because they lack human experiences. Gutek (2001) said attachment was similar to John Locke's belief, "Ideas originate in the individual's sensory

experience of external objects and are formed into concepts by the mind's power of cognition" (p. 127). Gutek (2001) said Locke maintained that at birth, the human mind is a blank slate, or tabula rasa, empty of ideas. He argued that we gain knowledge from the information that our senses bring to us. We learn by forming simple ideas and then combine them into ones that are more complex (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2009).

All early childhood experiences are important for relationship perspectives. Relationships or attachments are formed when people share experiences over time. Early infant relationships play a critical role in later development of the child. Children who are moved from placement to placement are at a higher risk for developmental problems because it takes time to build relationships or attachments with others. Lack of stability and unresponsive care over an extended period might lead children to feel helpless or become hostile toward society (Sroufe et al., 2005).

### *Birth Order*

#### *Adler's Individual Psychology*

Psychiatrist Adler (1879-1937) was most likely the first one to apply mental health concepts to the school environment (Alfred Adler Institute, 2009). Adler said he was convinced that early intervention and school involvement were critical for children to develop into psychologically healthy individuals. He gained fame and recognition on an international scale as a bestselling author and lecturer after he developed his theory of "Individual Psychology." Adler's groundbreaking work in his children's guidance clinics in Vienna drew professionals from all over the world who came to study clinicians' and teachers' work with children (Alfred Adler Institute, 2009).

Adler was influenced by the holism approach to psychology practiced by Jan Smuts, a South African philosopher (Alfred Adler Institute, 2009). According to Engler (2009) Smuts stated that in order to understand people we must see them as entities rather than parts within the context of their physical and social environments. Adler's Individual Psychology is self-descriptive and is most appropriate as the word individual is defined by Webster: "that which is inseparable or existing as a distinct entity" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2010, n. p.). Adler sought to understand the beliefs and strategies an individual develops in childhood that are responsible for positioning his or her attitudes and behavior and how he or she privately views himself or herself, others, and the world (Engler, 2009).

Adler used the term "style of life" to describe how the dynamics of one's personality are formed. A person's style of life is a reflection of his or her unique, unconscious way of responding to friendship, love, and work. As noted by the Alfred Adler Institute (2009), Adler's belief was that one's style of life remains consistent throughout and can be seen in the way he or she thinks, feels, and acts in a situation.

Adler pioneered an interest in the concept of birth order as one of the major social influences that shapes personality development. Birth order is the order in which children are born into a family. It is important to note that no two children born in the same family will grow up in the same environment because of his or her birth order (Alfred Adler Institute, 2009). It is not the child's birth order number that influences his or her character but the situation that the child is born into and how he or she interprets that situation according to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964). Each birth order position has some favorable outcomes as well as some unfavorable ones. Birth order-personality differences are not meant to stereotype people into

rigid categories, but rather the information could be used to better understand an individual (Eckstein, 2000).

### *Adler's Birth Order Position*

Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) explained Adler's perspective on children's birth order:

Oldest child--#1: The oldest child in the family is in a temporary position of being an only child and is then "dethroned" with the birth of baby #2 (p. 98). As an only child he or she has had quite a bit of attention and has been the center of attention. When baby #2 arrives baby #1 loses power and now has to compete for the parents' attention; thus, sibling rivalry has begun. Baby #1 sees his or her sudden loss of power as "accidental" (p. 98) thus first-born children tend to believe whoever is in power should remain in power. First-born children tend to admire powerful people. Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) noted of first-born children, "We often find in problem children, [such as] neurotics, criminals, drunkards, and perverts that their difficulties began in such circumstances" (p. 377).

Middle child--#2: According to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) the second child is in a very different situation. From the time of this child's birth, he or she has cooperated while sharing the parents with the older sibling. Middle or second children's positions in life are not at the center of attention; Adler described the second child as always trying to catch up. He or she does not "realize the sanctity of authority, but thinks it should change hands" (p. 98). Second-born children tend to want to change scientific and natural laws and they tend to be avant-garde in their attitudes toward fellow persons. Second-born children are often more talented and successful than are first-born children. Adler used Jacob and Esau as an example of the relationship between first- and second-born children.

Youngest child: According to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964), Adler maintained that the youngest child was of great interest to psychologists. The youngest will always be the youngest because there can be no successors and he or she can never be “dethroned” (p. 98). The youngest child’s status is secure and if all other circumstances in the family are equal, the youngest child has been shown to be the best developed.

Like the middle child, the youngest child is energetic in his or her attempts to overcome the others; however, he or she typically takes a different direction compared to the rest of the family. The youngest child likes to be different. As an example, in a family of doctors, the youngest child might choose to become a poet; he or she often will pursue a completely different career path because it is easier to work in another area than to have to compete in the same field with his or her siblings. Youngest children want to excel in everything, to have no limits, and to be different (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964).

However, Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) pointed out that Adler believed this behavior could also be a sign that the youngest child lacked courage, fearing the competition of working in the same field as the rest of the family. Sometimes youngest children have feelings of inferiority because they are the youngest in an environment where everyone else is stronger and more experienced. The second largest group of problem children comes from the youngest children’s group. As the youngest, the baby might have had a great deal of attention from the rest of the family that could have spoiled him or her, and a spoiled child can never be independent (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964).

Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) stated that individual psychology methods assume that a child makes certain inferences based on his or her position or place in the family. The child’s place in the family is closely connected to his or her educational development. Being born first,

last, or in the middle does not matter. What matters is how the parents and siblings interact with each child and how that child feels about it. Other factors could also influence the child's socialization and the parents' expectations.

A child's chronological order within the family can be very important. In the past, and in some cultures today, the firstborn child earns the birthright. Birthright means that the firstborn will be heir to the throne, inherit the kingdom, or have the family farm handed down to him or her (Fierro, 2006).

### *Birth Order and Multiples*

Twins and other birth multiples distort what the theorists say about birth order and personality development. Each set of twins or other multiple-birth children has his or her own birth ranking within the unit or group. Usually the firstborn twin assumes the leadership role for the pair and the second born tends to be more of a follower. The birth order of single birth children who are born after twins or other multiples is also skewed because the twins or multiples have become their own birth order unit (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2010).

A child's gender, physical attributes, or being one of a multiple can influence parents' treatment and affect how he or she is perceived by the other siblings. If a child of any birth order has a serious medical problem or has a physical or mental disability, this child moves to the position of firstborn or lastborn because of the attention he or she receives (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2010). Studies dedicated to birth order and multiples are practically nonexistent. Most research on birth order has focused on the birth positions of first, second, middle, last, and only children.



### *Forming Identities*

According to Klein (2002) identity is a theoretical or psychological construct. Twins have distinguishing issues forming their identities; “because of their natural closeness, they share a womb, they share parents, and they share memories” (Klein, 2002, p. 35). Klein (2002) noted that parental attachment and the twins’ interactions with their parents creates the twin bond, which once established lasts a lifetime and is nearly impossible to change. Young twins who are extremely close and interdependent “remain psychologically close to each other into adulthood” (Klein, 2002, p. 35). According to Klein (2002):

Respecting the twin bond without idealizing it or minimizing it has been a complicated process. Twins need to be treated as individuals if they are going to be able to function at their optimal state of development. Otherwise, the over-identification between a pair of twins will limit their capacity to form non-twin-like relationships and to separate from each other. A twin’s sense of individuality makes the process of separating from his [or her] co-twin possible in adolescence and young adulthood. (p. 104)

Separating twins from each other can be especially difficult because of the deep and intense bond that has been built on the multiples’ countless shared and similar experiences from infancy.

### *When Multiple-Birth Babies Enter School*

Being a multiple is not a disability, but multiple-birth children might need special consideration when they enter school (Hay & Preedy, 2006). The gestational age and catch-up rates for multiples deserve special consideration before decisions are made regarding school placements. The actual birth date of multiples is extremely important. If a school has strict rules regarding children’s birthdays and enrollment in school, preterm children will be forced to begin school a year before their “correct” year (Hay & Preedy, 2006). Hay and Preedy (2006) recommended when evaluating multiples they should be compared to children a year below them. They also suggested that parents might want to hold their multiples back another year

while the children catch up. Hay and Preedy (2006) wrote that problems were more common for multiples, and they wanted people who work in special education to be aware of these concerns. In their work Hay and Preedy (2006) focused mainly on reading problems, ADHD, and the major difficulties involving cerebral palsy, sensory problems, and intellectual disabilities.

With the high numbers of multiple-birth children presently attending schools and the potential for more multiple-birth children yet to be born, schools are adding several sets of birth multiples to their rosters. Multiples are different from singleton brothers and sisters who are close in age or who might be in the same class. There are particular issues that could affect the physical, intellectual, personal, social, and emotional development of multiple-birth children. Hay and Preedy (2006) recommended that teachers become aware of the problems that multiples face, read current research, and adopt beneficial school policies and practices.

### *Beginning School*

According to Tully et al. (2004) Koch did the first study addressing the effects of classroom placement for twins in the 1960s. Koch found that twins who were separated performed better than did twins who were not separated; they demonstrated more advanced speech and “had greater IQ differences” (as cited in Tully et al., 2004, p. 115). However, Tully et al. (2004) reported that because of serious methodological problems of the Koch study, the findings were questionable. More recently research has been conducted with teachers and parents regarding classroom separation of twins. As recorded by Gleeson, Hay, Johnston, and Theobald (1990) the findings showed:

. . . 10% of teachers reported that it was official school policy to separate all twins without exception. This survey also found that 30% of parents reported that they were not consulted by teachers about whether or not to place twins in separate classes and an additional 40% of parents felt they were inadequately consulted. The American survey

by Segal and Russell in 1992 found that almost half of the parents in the survey who were aware of a mandatory policy on separating twins at school did not endorse this practice. The UK survey produced similar findings. While [sic] most parents reported that they expected their children to be in separate classes by the time they reached secondary school, many felt they had been inadequately consulted about whether or not the twins should be separated at an earlier stage. (p. 232)

Of the schools surveyed, only one in four reported that they regularly consulted parents about the decision to separate twins and half reported that they made decisions without consulting parents at all. This survey also found that only 1% of schools had official written policies about the education and management of multiple-birth children, but despite this, 7% of schools reported that they always separated twins and 23% reported that they always kept them together. These contradictory findings suggest that while almost all schools reported that they did not have formal policies about classroom separation, one-third of the implemented practices applied to all twins. (p. 233).

The survey results suggested that there is a strong tendency for schools in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States not to involve parents in the decision-making process regarding the placement of multiple-birth students (Gleeson et al., 1990). The decision regarding classroom placement can be challenging for parents and school personnel alike. Most schools uphold strict policies regarding the separation of twins and multiples upon school entry and it is not uncommon that schools make the decision without involving parents in the process (Gleeson et al., 1990).

Koch (as cited by Tully et al, 2004) advocated, “Separating multiples will promote their individuality and independence” (p. 116). Presently, research does not support theories about the probable positive effects and harmful effects regarding classroom separation of twins (Tully et al., 2004). School policies to separate multiples without considering parental input and the lack of research currently available about classroom separation for twins has been a concern (Tully et al., 2004).

In a study conducted by Gleeson et al. (1990) teachers were asked to rank the attributes of multiple-birth children as justification for classroom separation; the teachers listed dependency or reliance, restrictions on each other’s language, hindering social maturity, and

ability as the most commonly reasons for separation. Parents were asked the same question with similar results: concerns for dependency or reliance, opinions of the twins' language and social maturity, and restriction of each other. One difference between the teachers' and parents' ratings was the parents' desire to acknowledge the wishes of their children regarding staying together or not (Gleeson et al., 1990). Preedy (Hay & Preedy, 2006) developed a parent-teacher questionnaire (see Appendix A) to help parents and teachers assess the personal, social, and emotional development of multiple-birth children.

### *School Policy Related to Classroom Placement of Multiples*

Accepted school policy, whether stated or not, often separates twins and other multiples into different classrooms. This separation could place a burden on both the parents and the multiples. Many parents of multiples and psychologists have stated that such mandatory splitting might be unnecessary and in fact counterproductive (Twins Law, 2010a).

According to Miller (2009) Assistant Principal Michael Lamp of Kyrene de Las Lomas Elementary School (population 800 students) in Ahwatukee, Arizona, had 15 pairs of twins and 1 set of triplets to register for the 2009-2010 school year. Lamp, a twin himself, reflected that he was not offered any classes involving multiples as students in his undergraduate education to become a teacher or in his graduate school curriculum to become a school administrator. He explained, "That makes the decision to split, or not to split, a gut call. The pros can be more independent children, but the cons are obvious as well: separate teacher meetings, separate homework help, sometimes separate schedules" (n. p.).

### *To Separate or Not to Separate*

At the beginning of every new school year most school administrators have to make decisions regarding the classroom placement of multiples; yet, there is practically no evidence-based best practice guide for school administrators. Many school systems and school administrators have rigid policies in place regarding the issue. Different practices are seen throughout the world. For example, in the Netherlands the Dutch Society for Parents of Multiples (NVOM) generally contends that separation will promote individual development of twins. It is common practice in the Netherlands to separate multiples in school whereas Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland typically keep multiples together. The Education Department in Australia has mandated a no-blanket ruling in the placement of multiples in school adding that each family's needs should be considered individually (Hay & Preedy, 2006).

School officials have a tendency to separate multiple-birth children simply because they are part of a multiple-birth set of children (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003). The school's goal is to help students develop individually rather than as part of a set of multiples so the idea of separating multiple-birth children should help them develop a positive self-concept. Levine (as cited in Nussbaum, 2005) stated that from an educator's point-of-view it is usually better to separate twins and triplets if possible so that they develop as individuals. Levine, principal of an elementary school in New Jersey, maintained that separating multiples would keep them from becoming too dependent on each other. When multiples are split, teachers and students will know each multiple as an individual instead of a part of a unit (Nussbaum, 2005). This practice assumes that all multiples are the same and does not take into consideration the type of multiples: fraternal or identical, same-gendered twins, or opposite gender twins; or in higher multiple

births, there could be a combination of identical and fraternal multiple-birth children (Twins List, 1996).

When first starting school multiples typically benefit from the social support they give each other if they are in the same classroom. Ganon and Pearlman (2000) gave the following advice to parents of multiples:

Supporting your twins as they try to balance their dependence on each other and their independence from each other is a great challenge. Preschool is kind of a dress rehearsal for the beginning of your twins' lives as students. Now they've made it to the big time--kindergarten! This is a great time to remember one of the most useful of all parenting tips: Observe, observe, observe. Try not to be wed to a particular strategy regarding your twins' placement. There is not necessarily a "right way" for twins to make their way through school. As with all children, a move to a school is a very vulnerable time. Your twins will again be dealing with separating from you and might benefit by starting off in the same class. Kindergarten is a wonderful opportunity to begin to assess the learning styles of each of your twins; observations made now will be very useful in making decisions about class placement a little further down the road. There is plenty of time to make the shift into separate classes a little later on. It is important to note, there are some twins who do well in separate classes right from the start. (p. 36).

Ganon and Pearlman (2000) found that when multiples were allowed to be together in the same classroom, they seemed more willing to participate in activities than if they were placed in separate classrooms. Forced classroom separations could create emotional stress, multiples might worry about their absent co-multiple, they might have a hard time concentrating and doing their school work, they could have behavior problems, or they might get the message that there is something wrong about being a twin or multiple (Tully et al., 2004).

The founder and president of Twin Services, Malmstrom (2006), wrote that there is often confusion about the physical separation of multiples and the development of their individual identities and independence. This misunderstanding has resulted in some administrators adopting the policy to separate multiples as a way to promote development of individual personalities. Malmstrom (2006) noted that not all multiples benefit from being separated any more than all multiples benefit from being placed in the same classroom. Multiples' classroom

placement has an important effect on their relationship and their lives. Each school year classroom placement should be evaluated and adjusted as necessary to meet the changing needs of the multiples (Malmstrom, 2006).

Although they are multiples, each set of multiples have their own unique group dynamics and function on their own developmental time tables (Dreyer, 1991). The classroom placement of multiple-birth children has an important effect on the multiples' relationships and lives and should be monitored and evaluated each school year so that it can be adjusted as needed to meet the changing needs of these students (Dreyer, 1991).

Some researchers have emphasized the need for a flexible policy regarding school placement for multiples in addition to allowing their parents to be involved in all of the decision-making processes (Ganon & Pearlman, 2000). Dreyer (1991) noted that the Parents of Multiple-Births Association, a Canadian organization, provided a list of possible circumstances for careful thought before making the classroom placement decision.

Multiples' constant togetherness could hinder the social development of one or all of the multiples. If the multiples are able to initiate and maintain acceptable relationships with their nonsibling peers, they may not need to be separated. If, on the other hand, the multiples are not able to initiate and maintain acceptable relationships, then it might be best for them to be together for only a portion of the day (Dreyer, 1991).

Formerly, few scientific studies have addressed the effects of twins' classroom separation. However, recent studies have focused on the effects of twin separation (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2003; Hay & Preedy, 2006; Tully et al., 2004). Tully et al. (2004) studied 15,906 twins who were born in 1994 and 1995 in Wales. Their study revealed that twins separated by force experienced significantly more teacher-rated problems than did twins who were agreeable to the

separation. Tully et al. (2004) found that monozygotic (MZ) or identical twins experienced more problems, which continued throughout the study, than did their dizygotic (DZ) or fraternal twin peers. Beauchamp and Brooks (2003) stressed the importance for educators to read the research carefully in order to make informed decisions when deciding on twins' placement in schools.

### *Reasons to Separate*

Dreyer (1991) gave several reasons to separate multiples in the classroom:

1. **Constant Comparisons**--If classmates are constantly comparing the multiples the comparisons could cause one or all of the multiples to have negative feelings. Constant comparisons is one of the greatest sources for distress for twins and one of the most difficult things for people to resist doing to multiple-birth children.
2. **Class Disruptions**--The multiples are causing major behavioral problems that cannot be solved through other means.
3. **Mothering**--In the case of fraternal opposite gender multiples, females tend to be more dominate and critical toward the brother. This dominance may cause the co-multiple to feel threatened by the other's 'superiority.'
4. **Helping Each Other**--Multiples often develop a pattern of helping each other through academic and social situations. Educators should consider how separation will affect multiples that are used to helping each other. Observation of the children is needed to ensure that one is not doing all the work and the other one becomes dependent on the co-multiple.
5. **Families undergoing stresses and health issues** for one or all multiples could place added stress on the multiples. (p. 11)

Multiples should be separated at times within the classroom to ensure that they can function as individuals. Separation within the classroom can be done by having the multiples work on different projects or in different groups and during this time the teacher can look for signs of dependence or independence (Hay & Preedy, 2001). Teachers should understand that multiples' likes and dislikes are most likely caused by their common home environment not because they are multiples. A good way for teachers to assess multiples fairly for signs of



dependence and independence is to compare the multiples as if they were observing siblings separated by a year in school (Hay & Preedy. 2001).

### *Reasons to Keep Multiples Together*

Fierro (2010) offered 10 reasons to keep multiples together in the same classroom:

1. To ensure a consistent educational experience: Multiples are together since conception, and then after birth they spend the next few years of their lives together. To be separated when entering school for the first time may cause jealousy, discouragement, competition, and rivalry between the multiples. If placed in the same school environment, they continue to share learning the same things at the same time.
2. Only one class option: In very small schools, there may be only one class per grade level or only one morning class and one afternoon class.
3. Convenience: Sometimes what is the best for the family is what will have to be best for the multiples. One set of assignments, tests, and teachers to keep up with can simplify life. This is not the lazy way out; it is what is logistically manageable.
4. One twin needs the other: Multiples' relationships are complicated, but like any other individual, multiples can be alike yet different. Their traits may complement each other; where one is weak, the other may be strong. This causes them to rely on each other and at times to resist each other. When multiples are younger, they may need each other more; if one is missing, the other will flounder. As the multiples mature as individuals, they will need each other less. If a separate classroom placement is a negative experience for one multiple, it calls for immediately placing the multiples together.
5. Competitive: If the multiples are very competitive, they may need to be separated. However, if the twins are not very competitive, sharing a classroom can be beneficial for the multiples.
6. Distractions: If the twins are able to work independently with other children around, being in the same classroom can be an ideal situation. All sets of multiples are different; for some, being together is a distraction and interferes with learning, for others, being separated can have the same effect because they can't concentrate wondering what the co-multiple is doing.
7. Their bond makes them more comfortable: The uniqueness of the multiples' bond is hard for a non-multiple to imagine. It is a bond that is longer lasting than marriage, friendships, or the relationship between a parent and child. Togetherness with the co-multiples is all that the child has ever known. If the multiples want to be together

they should be allowed to do so. Separation can be traumatic for them. There will be times when they can be separated, but for now, they're better off together. As individuals within the same classroom, the multiples are more confident and more productive.

8. Parental Involvement: The National PTA says that when parents are involved, the students learn more. If multiples are in separate rooms, the parent(s) are torn between which class they spend time with, field trips, room mothering, helping the teacher, providing cupcakes, and such.
9. Similar learning styles: Often twins have similar learning styles. An effective classroom setting is one where the teacher's style is consistent with the learning style of the students. It may be more beneficial to put the multiples in the same room so that they are well matched with a teacher than to be placed with a teacher whose style is not consistent with their learning style.
10. External circumstances: This is what is going on outside of school, such as divorce, death of a loved one, a new home, or a new school. If "real life" is presenting challenges, it is not recommended that multiples be separated because it will add extra stress. Being together provides stability and will help them adjust to the new situation at home and at school. (para. 2-10)

Decisions regarding classroom placement should also include the parents' perspectives.

Some parents have very strong opinions about the classroom placement of their multiple-birth children. Segal (1999) suggested that parents and teachers take a team approach as they closely observe and evaluate the multiples together in the classroom environment during a short-term experiment to separate or keep the multiples together. The team approach can focus on the best long-term interests for the children (Segal & Russell, 1992).

The National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs reported that when multiples begin school, school administrators often want to place them into separate classrooms (Dreyer, 1991). Commonly, parental wishes regarding the classroom placement of their multiple-birth children are not honored, as they were not included in the decision-making process from the beginning. According to Dreyer (1991) research and expert opinions revealed that mandatory separation of multiple-birth children could be ineffective and detrimental to their education and emotional growth.

*Meeting the Educational Needs of Twins, Triplets, and Other Birth Multiples*

According to Blevins (2001) researchers at *Twins Magazine* conducted extensive research into academic foundations and were not able to find any empirical research supporting a policy to separate multiples in school. Further, they were not able to find any empirical research related to the experiences of multiples in school whether they were separated or together in the classroom, nor could they find research regarding the experiences of teachers dealing with multiples together in a classroom. The article concluded that the separation policies that exist now most likely came about in the 1960s when educators were influenced by early-childhood development experts who stressed the importance of the individual. It was not clear if early childhood experts of this time promoted the development of the individual in multiples. “Over zealous” teachers, they hypothesized, likely interpreted the importance of the individual to include twins, triplets, and other birth multiple children without giving consideration to the situation or the needs of the individual (Blevins, 2001, p.18).

Mascazine (2004) stated that many educators felt they were adequately prepared to teach multiples based on their years of teaching experiences “without consulting current research on the subject of educating multiples” (p .1). In 1989 the National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs (NOMOTC, 2000) conducted a survey of 1,423 teachers and administrators in the United States. Over half of the survey respondents indicated there should be a policy to separate multiples in school because separation would help the children develop a positive self-concept and promote intellectual growth. The same study indicated that only 15% of the survey respondents said that educating multiples had been addressed in their college coursework (NOMOTC, 2000). Ten years later the NOMOTC conducted another survey similar to the earlier study. The 1999 study (NOMOTC, 2010) revealed that most parents stated that schools

should not have a formal policy regarding classroom assignment or placement for multiples. Of the teacher survey respondents, 80% stated that their college coursework rarely addressed multiples in the classroom. All of the respondents, both parents and teachers, said that the home and school should work together in deciding on the placement of multiples in school. However, 43% of the teachers surveyed stated that if there were two classrooms, then twins should be separated (NOMOTC, 2010).

The debate to separate multiples in schools is ongoing. According to Mascazine (2004) the majority of teachers appeared misinformed on this issue. Many school administrators and classroom teachers maintained that separating multiples in school would help the multiples to develop their own individuality. Separating multiples could decrease the constant comparisons made by teachers, other students, and even by the multiples themselves. At home, parents have learned that competition between their multiple-birth children can have a negative impact on their children's personal development and self-esteem, but (Mascazine (2004) pointed out that when multiples were in school the closeness of that relationship provided a social support system. Conversely, when multiples are separated the effects could be detrimental because the co-multiples' perception of being separated implies that there is something wrong with being a twin (Mascazine, 2004).

The NOMOTC (2000) offered the following guiding principles in their booklet,

*Placement of Multiple-Birth Children in School: A Guide for Educators:*

1. Schools should provide an atmosphere that respects the close nature of the multiple bonds while at the same time encouraging individual abilities.
2. Schools should maintain a flexible placement policy throughout the early elementary school years.
3. When multiple-birth children are enrolled in different classrooms at the same grade level, there is a need for a consistent approach to instruction classroom management.

4. Educators should move with extreme caution when considering retention, acceleration, or designation in any of the areas of exceptionality of one or more children in a set of multiples.
5. Teachers at the primary, middle, and high school levels should value parental input regarding the nature of the multiples' relationships.
6. School districts should provide staff at all grade levels with multiple-related research and reading materials.
7. At the university level, schools of education should introduce teachers in training to the research findings on the psychology of twins and higher order multiples in their curricula. (pp. 29-31)

Considerations for multiple-birth children can generally be applied to other children within a school setting. Many times a classroom contains children who may be best friends or those who have personality conflicts; if placed in the same classroom, they can become disruptive and negatively impact the learning environment. According to NOMOTC (2000) administrators should consider several factors before making classroom placement decisions:

1. How many classes do they have together?
2. Are there students in the group who have discipline problems?
3. What is the academic level of the students? (n. p.)

Conversely, for multiples the fact that they are multiples has been the primary focus in classroom assignment regardless of educational needs. Multiple-birth children may be well-developed individuals who do not need any special considerations yet they are forced into separate classes simply because they are multiples (NOMOTC, 2000).

### *Effects of Classroom Placement for Multiples*

The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP, 2010) fervently asserted that decisions regarding school placement for multiples were best made on an individual basis.

The NYASP (2010) strongly advised against a blanket policy that automatically separates or

places multiples together but rather encouraged school administrators to adapt a flexible yet informed policy regarding the classroom placement of multiple-birth children. Parents of multiples often look to school administrators and teachers for professional advice. Parents are sometimes intimidated by school personnel when they register their multiples in school for the first time. A mother of twins, Blevins (2001), wrote in an article in *Twins* magazine saying the whole process left her in an “emotional turmoil” (p. 20).

Blevins (2001) had put forth considerable effort in preparing her twin boys for the day they would begin school; the boys had attended a preschool 2 days a week for 2 years, and the summer before school was to begin, she took them to visit the school and let them get on a school bus; she even attended all the school’s open houses. At the time of registration, she was told, “I know it’s easier for you to have your boys in the same class, but it really is better for them to be separated” (p. 20). However, as the actual time for school to start approached, she felt more uneasy with her twins being separated.

Blevins’s (2001) main concern was what would be best for the boys in the end. If the boys were separated and unhappy, she did not want the experience to set the tone for the rest of their school careers. She declared it was best for the twins to be allowed to stay together because she said she felt they would find comfort in each other, so she made her request to the school to keep the twins together. The reaction from the school made her doubt herself and to question herself about how well she knew her own children. She wrote that the school’s reaction to her request made her feel wrong and selfish and it made her wonder if she wanted to keep the twins together because she believed it would make them feel more comfortable or was it because it would really make her more comfortable.

Blevins (2001) had read what she could find on the topic from psychologists, educators, and pediatricians. She talked to her sons, and then she was determined that she would be the one to make the decision regarding the classroom placement for her twin boys. She described her twins as sensitive, caring, and smart. They were able to enjoy the company of others as well as each other's company, and when asked, they said they wanted to be together in the same room.

Blevins (2001) finally decided that to separate her boys would be socially and emotionally detrimental to them. The school agreed to allow the boys to be in the same classroom. After the first grading period, the teacher reported that they were doing very well and that she did not see any reason why they could not be kept together. The teacher made sure that she provided opportunities in the classroom for the boys to work together and to work separately with other children. Blevins (2001) added:

So is this the best choice for every set of twins? No, I don't believe so. If there is one thing that I learned in my search it is that, as every child is different, every situation is different. For your twins or multiples, separation may be the best choice. It may be an opportunity for them to shine as individuals, to develop a positive sense of self and to experience a world outside of each other. Or, your twins, like mine, may find needed comfort and stability in being together. They may flourish as a team and be able to strike a balance between being together and being with others. Like nearly all aspects of parenting multiples, this is an issue that you need to figure out on your own – with the help of your children. Don't be afraid to ask others, but ultimately, you know your children best. (p. 23)

The National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs emphasized that research has shown that mandatorily separating multiple-birth children in classrooms is often ineffective and that it can actually be detrimental to the multiples' educational and emotional growth (Dreyer, 1991). According to Dreyer (1991):

1. Educators should move with extreme caution when considering retention, acceleration, or designation in any of the areas of exceptionality of one or more children in a set of multiples.
2. Teachers at the primary, middle, and high school levels should value parental input regarding the nature of the multiples' relationship.

3. School districts should provide staff at all grade levels with multiple-related research and reading materials.
4. At the university level, schools of education should introduce teachers in training to the research findings on the psychology of twins and higher order multiples in their curricula. (n. p.)

### *Legislation Regarding the Classroom Placement of Birth Multiples*

Minnesota Governor Pawlenty signed the first twin law, the *Minnesota Twins Law*, in 2005. According to the Minnesota House of Representatives (2005) the *Minnesota Twins Law* gives parents the right to request that their twins or multiple-birth children be placed in the same classroom and it requires schools to honor the request. The bill was sponsored by Representative Marty Seifert and Senator Dennis Fredrickson who said they felt compelled to act on behalf of the state's many citizens who were struggling with schools over the placement of their multiple-birth children (Twinstuff Community, 2009). The Senate bill was passed by the Minnesota Senate Education Committee on February 22, 2005, and then was unanimously passed by the Minnesota State Senate 64-0 on March 17, 2005. There were only two conditions to the bill: The multiples must be in the same grade and the parents must make the request within the first 14 days of the school year. If the multiples enter a school mid-year, then the request must be made within the first 14 days after the 1st day of attendance (Twinstuff Community, 2009).

At the time the *Minnesota Twins Law* was passed, the only other similar legislation regarding the placement of multiples in schools was a resolution passed by the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 1994. This resolution was a suggestion to the Oklahoma school boards to allow parents of multiple-birth children to request that their children be kept in the same classroom. However, nothing was written into state law (Twinstuff Community, 2009).



The co-author of the Minnesota bill, Senator Dennis Frederickson, a father of twins, had a full understanding of parents' desires to be involved in the decision-making process regarding the classroom placement of their twins or multiple-birth children (Twinstuff Community, 2009). Martin (2006) quoted Frederickson as saying, "I want the final decision to be made by the parents. I don't want the school to make the decision against the wishes of the parents. Parents are in the best position to know what's best for their children" (p. 27). Frederickson acknowledged that most people are not aware of the unique bond that exists between multiples. He further added that school administrators traumatize twins when they forcibly separate them against their will and against the wishes of their parents. In addition, the trauma may affect their learning and their happiness at home (Twinstuff Community, 2009).

A report issued by the NOMOTC (2010) concluded that an educator's best resource in making placement decisions is generally the parents. They suggested that schools maintain a flexible policy throughout the early elementary school years. Despite these recommendations, it was estimated that 43% of surveyed educators acknowledged that all multiples should be separated in school with many of those educators pinpointing kindergarten as the room in which to begin separation (NOMOTC, 2010).

Effective July 1, 2010, Tennessee enacted legislation that forbids a school or board of education to place multiple-birth children into different classrooms simply because of the children being part of a multiple set (Bird, 2009).

### *Multiples in Schools*

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control, a school's population should

mirror society's percentage of multiples (3% of all births in the US) (Twinstuff Community, 2009). To illustrate the importance of 3%, Twinstuff Community (2009) provided the following explanation:

Let's look at a community with 500 children in their local school. By the law of averages, about 3% of those students should be twins or perhaps 15 sets of twins in a school of 500. Of course, you need to multiply those sets by two to find out how many twins are actually at the school--30 in this example. (n. p.)

Currently, 34 states have enacted legislation or are in the process of enacting legislation dealing with the classroom placement for multiples. This legislation gives parents of multiples the right to make the classroom placement for their multiple-birth children. Presently, 12 states have enacted twin laws: Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Currently, nine states have twin bills sponsored: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New York, and South Carolina. Currently, 11 states are awaiting sponsorship: California, Connecticut, Colorado, Idaho, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. At this time, Oklahoma and Illinois have initiated resolutions dealing with the placement of multiples (Twins Law, 2010b).

Bird (2009), a writer for the *Chattanooga Family and Parenting Examiner*, asked in her article "Multiples in the Classroom: Should Tennessee Parents Have a Say?" exactly who should decide what is best for multiple-birth children, the parents or the school system? At the time of Bird's (2009) article on February 16, 2010, the state of Tennessee did not have a law regarding the placement of multiple-birth children in the classroom. However, according to Bird, Senator Dolores Gresham and Representative Beth Hartwell had proposed a bill seeking to allow parents the right to make decisions for what they contend is best for their children. Senate Bill 2480 and House Bill 3105, Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3129, "requires local boards of

education to give preference to parents' request in classroom placement of multiple-birth siblings" (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2010, n. p.).

On April 5, 2010, the General Assembly of the state of Tennessee amended Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3129 to add language relative to classroom assignment of multiple-birth children. The new Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3102 went into effect on July 1, 2010:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the state of Tennessee:

Section 1: Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3129, is amended by adding the following language as a new, appropriately designated subsection:

In determining the classroom assignments of multiple-birth children, no school or board of education shall separate such multiple-birth siblings into different classrooms solely due to such children being multiple-birth children.

Section 2: This act shall take effect July 1, 2010, the public welfare requiring it. (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2010, Section 1)

Bird (2009) credited Kathy Dolan, founder of Twins Law, with providing research and documentation to Tennessee lawmakers. Dolan has been a central figure in many other states passing legislation regarding flexible classroom placements for multiples (Bird, 2009).

### *Learning Theories*

Educational researchers have gathered data that support the theory that all students learn differently, and their needs must be met from several different aspects in order for them to become successful learners. Bloom (as cited in Eisner, 2000) and Maslow (1970) were concerned with meeting children's needs in order for children to learn.

According to Eisner (2000), Bloom had "an abiding faith in the power of the environment to influence the performance of individuals" (p. 3). Bloom was interested in determining how cognitive functions influenced learning. He recognized that what a student thinks about the

concept being taught provides his or her learning experience; thus, Bloom was concerned with promoting higher-level thinking (Eisner, 2000).

Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs is often represented in the form of a pyramid with five levels. The four lower levels represent lower-order or physiological needs; these are also called deficiency or deprivation needs (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010). The top level, self-actualization or self-fulfillment (a growth need), can never be met until all of the lower needs have been satisfied. Behaviors at this level are motivated by one's desire for personal growth in becoming all that one is capable of becoming.

As noted by Gutek (2001) John Dewey (1859-1952), one of America's most influential philosophers and educators and a founder of the pragmatist philosophy, believed that educators should understand the nature of human experience. According to Dewey education should have a societal purpose and an individual purpose for each student; he pointed out that the long-term quality of an educational experience was as important as the short-term quality. Educators are responsible for providing students with experiences that are immediately valuable and that enable them to later contribute better to society; hence, they should participate in decisions that affect their learning. Dewey supported democratic ideas in that schools should help students learn to live and to work cooperatively with others (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010).

### *School Readiness*

As reported in *Pediatrics* (High, 2008) school readiness includes (a) the readiness of each child, (b) the school's readiness for children, and (c) the ability of the family and community to support optimal early child development. High (2008) added that it is the responsibility of

schools to be ready for all children at all levels of readiness. She summarized the findings of Shonkoff and Phillips:

Our new knowledge of early brain and child development has demonstrated that modifiable factors in a child's early experience can greatly affect that child's learning trajectory. Three qualities that are necessary for children to be ready for school are intellectual skills, motivation to learn, and strong social-emotional capacity and support. These qualities are influenced by the health and well being of the families and neighborhoods in which children are raised. (p. e1013)

Maslow (1970), an American psychologist, has been noted for his belief in a hierarchy of human needs. Maslow (1970) asserted that human needs are arranged in a hierarchical order and when basic needs are met, students are more capable of learning. Maslow, a humanistic psychologist, maintained that each person has an innate desire to reach his or her full potential, the top level of self-actualization (as cited in Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010).

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs is most often illustrated in the shape of a pyramid. The four lower levels represent lower-order needs and are referred to as physiological needs. The lowest level of the pyramid is concerned with the most basic of needs in order to sustain life; these include air, food, water, sleep, and warmth. According to Learning Theories Knowledgebase (2010) Maslow's theory holds that as people satisfy the components of one level of needs, they are able to progress upward to the next level.

The second level of the pyramid is the safety level that includes security. The third level of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs pyramid list includes belongingness and encompasses love, friendships, and family. The fourth level is the esteem level; it includes confidence, self-esteem, achievement, and respect. According to Learning Theories Knowledgebase (2010) the first four levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid are driven by or are motivated by a deficiency, deprivation, or need.

The top level of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, self-actualization or self-fulfillment, is motivated by an individual's desire for personal growth and the need to realize his or her full potential. According to Learning Theories Knowledgebase (2010) the pyramid addresses why students behave as they do and how they could be affected depending on where they might be on the pyramid at any given time.

### *Beginning of Early Childhood Education*

Froebel, known as the "father of kindergarten," developed the first kindergarten in Germany in 1837 (Gutek, 2001). The theories and practices Froebel developed are still being used in kindergarten programs today. As recorded in Gutek (2001) Froebel was born on April 21, 1782, in the principality of Schwarzburg-Rudolfstadt, a part of Germany. Froebel's mother died when he was 9 months old. His father, a Lutheran pastor, took a new wife when Froebel was 4 years old. His new stepmother rejected and neglected him, favoring her own children over Froebel and his four older brothers. His father offered no solace; Froebel was alienated from his father and considered him to be "stupid, mischievous, and untrustworthy" (Gutek, 2001, p. 234). The loneliness, rejection, and isolation Froebel experienced as a child led to his lifelong condition of low self-esteem.

According to Gutek (2001) Froebel, was "shy, introspective, and socially inept" (p. 236) because he had few opportunities to interact socially with children other than his own brothers. During his youth Froebel spent a majority of his time alone in the woodlands where he was enthralled with the plant and animal life. His father sent him to a primary school for girls thinking he was "slow" (p. 235).

Because of financial hardships Froebel's education ended after 2 years at a university. He tried to find suitable work but was not successful. At the age of 23 he received an inheritance from an uncle that made it possible for him to continue his education. Recognized by the headmaster as having the potential to be a good teacher, Froebel was hired as a teacher and then sent away for 2 weeks to study at an educational institution under the tutelage of Pestalozzi (1747-1827) whose philosophy and teaching methods shaped education in Europe and the United States (Gutek, 2001).

Going against the educational trend of the time that endorsed corporal punishment and psychological coercion, Pestalozzi impressed upon Froebel the importance of respecting a child's dignity in an environment of love and emotional security. Following his philosophical idealism, Froebel returned to Frankfort to pursue a career that gave his life meaning and fulfillment (Gutek, 2001).

In 1816 after obtaining more education, serving as an assistant director of a university, and enlisting with the German infantry, Froebel was ready to implement his ideas and open his own school for students of ages 7 and older. The school struggled for 13 years and during this time, Froebel developed new insights into the nature of children and the learning process that he wrote about in *Principles, Aims, and Inner Life on the Universal German Educational Institute in Keilhau* (Gutek, 2001).

The circumstances of Froebel's childhood served as the building blocks for his kindergarten design. Among the principles of Froebel's work was that children's individual differences should be recognized and respected and that they should be educated based on individual needs. He designed his kindergartens to "encourage children to play and interact with each other under the guidance of a loving teacher (Gutek, 2001, p. 242). His work resulted in

community opposition, and because his educational philosophy was built upon religion, he was accused of deviating from orthodox Lutheran doctrine. Froebel established a school, an orphanage, a nursery, and an institute to educate kindergarten teachers. The institute flourished and Froebel became an important figure in early childhood education. At the end of the 19th century Froebel's kindergartens were modeled in Europe, North America, and Japan (Guttek, 2001).

Kindergarten has been the most successful of the 19th and 20th century educational innovations (Guttek, 2001). As European immigrants migrated to the United States they brought the idea of kindergarten with them. The idea of kindergarten gained favor with the first United States commissioner of education, Barnard. Deeming early childhood to be a critically formative time in children's growth, the superintendent of Des Peres School in St. Louis, Missouri, established the first kindergarten in a public school system in 1873 (Guttek, 2001).

Today kindergarten programs exist in virtually all public and private schools in the United States. Froebel's ideas for kindergarten were that children need a place to grow and learn from their social interaction with other children. Froebel's contributions to early childhood education is seen today as teachers emphasize the importance of allowing children to develop according to their own needs and to develop socially as a prerequisite for the learning readiness needed for intellectual learning. Most kindergarten programs' objectives are to teach social skills and self-esteem and to help children develop academic abilities (Guttek, 2001).

For most children, including multiple-birth children, entering kindergarten is a major step in developing the social skills needed to participate in a group setting outside of the home (Guttek, 2001). According to Arce (2010), "Preschool attendance is an important milestone for young children. Attendance is especially valuable for twins and supertwins because they have



unique needs related to their identity as multiples” (p. 133). However, Arce (2010) pointed out treating multiples as special and unique has been difficult for some educators who argue that all children are unique and special. Arce (2010) acknowledged:

Individuality is one of the most apparent characteristics of any child. A twin has a characteristic individuality. As supertwin has a characteristic individuality. Each of these children has another trait that is unique to his or status: each is a multiple. The characteristics of each child and the characteristics of his or her multiple group share the outcome of social and emotional development during the early childhood years. (p. 79)

Tinglof (2006) stated, “By far, one of the most complex issues facing school-age multiples and their parents centers on education” (p 89). Tinglof (2006) elaborated:

Making sure your children are ready for kindergarten is especially important for parents of multiples since research shows that on average, twins experience more learning disabilities than single-born children of the same age (twin boys are especially vulnerable). Reading difficulties tops the list. And, since [sic] reading is tied to nearly every other school subject, trouble in this area can be far-reaching for a multiple who is struggling. It’s important to note that twins aren’t any less intelligent than singletons; they just struggle with more learning problems. (n. p.)

Parents must decide if their multiples are ready to enter school. Tinglof (2010) suggested that parents might want to consider waiting until the next school year to enroll if their school-age multiples were born prematurely or if they had a fall birthday. This should give the children time to catch up to their peers.

### *Child Development and Learning*

Three child development and learning theories: constructionist, environmentalist, and maturationist have affected significantly the concept of school readiness and, thus, have impacted kindergarten readiness practices (Learning Point Associates, 2010).

### *Constructionist Theory*

Mooney (2000) explained Piaget's constructionist theory saying that unlike adults children are not able to think in the abstract until about the age of 11. Piaget stated that a child's reasoning was not derived from an idea or logic but rather was the result of the child's perception of his or her environment and life experiences (Mooney, 2000). This does not mean children cannot reason correctly at this developmental stage; instead, it means that children's reasoning abilities are the result of their sensorial experiences (Hunt, 1969).

Similarly, Montessori (1967) stated that a child's cognitive growth and progress developed from the sensorial to the intellectual. Montessori (1967) maintained there was a correlation between mental health and learning. Montessori's (1967) method advocated instructional methods that were suitable to the child's maturity level and emphasized choices and personal responsibility.

According to Mooney (2000) both Piaget and Montessori considered young children as being active participants in the learning process by interacting with the environment and the people around them; thus, they supported a curriculum that incorporated the children's experiences (Mooney, 2000). For a child who might be experiencing difficulty in learning, the constructivist would modify and adjust the curriculum and provide individual attention to help him or her learn the material. Piaget and Montessori, like American educator Dewey, have influenced our thinking about education in the 20th century. Douglas and Jackson (2005) suggested that learning builds upon a student's unique experiences and his or her ability to connect newly acquired knowledge to the larger world. Early childhood educational programs provide the social setting outside the home needed for young children to grow and learn socially. Ganon and Pearlman (2000) noted that multiple-birth children often benefit from the social

support they provide to each other. If all children are allowed to develop according to their individual needs and if all learning builds upon a student's unique life experiences, the constructivist would modify and adjust the curriculum for multiple-birth children by providing individual attention based on their individual needs.

### *Environmental Theory*

According to Learning Point Associates (2010) environmentalist theorists such as Bandura, Skinner, and Watson assumed that children's behavior, development, and learning were results of their reactions to the environment. According to the environmentalists a child is ready to begin kindergarten when he or she can respond in a positive way to the school's environment by following the rules and appropriately participating in group activities. School success is dependent on the child's ability to follow the teacher's directions. A teacher who subscribes to the environmentalists' viewpoint would expect the students to listen attentively while sitting in their seats arranged in straight rows quietly engaged in rote activities with little interaction with the teacher. If a child is unable to behave appropriately within the school setting, then he or she might be labeled as having a learning disability and recommended to a classroom to control behavior (Learning Point Associates, 2010).

According to the environmentalist theory, multiple-birth children should be assessed differently from singleton-birth children. Depending on the relationship of the multiples and their maturity level, multiples need special considerations if they are to be assessed as fairly and equally as their peers. For example, a forced separation may create anxiety for one or more of the multiples resulting in behaviors seen as negative or the child being labeled as having a learning disability (Learning Point Associates, 2010). Klein (2002) wrote that respecting the

twin bond is essential if multiples are to function at optimal stages of development and plays an important part in multiples gaining a sense of individuality.

### *Maturationist Theory*

As stated by Learning Point Associates (2010), Gessell's maturationist theory was built upon the premise that child development is a biological process that occurs automatically in predictable, sequential stages over time. This view assumes that if young children are healthy, they will be able to learn when they are older and more physically mature. According to the maturationist's theory a child is considered ready for school if he or she can recite the alphabet and count. The maturationists would suggest that if a child is developmentally lacking and not ready for school, he or she should be retained or be made to wait another year to begin in order to develop skills equal to his or her peers (Learning Point Associates, 2010). Douglas and Jackson (2005) stated:

People who genuinely understand teaching realize that it entails considerably more than having knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy and being gifted (whether from nature, experience, study, or all three). It also includes a set of understandings, activities, interactions, relationships, ways of thinking, and grounded habits of intuiting based on a broad knowledge of many things such as society, families, children, psychology, democracy, learning, ethics, community, pedagogy, and forms of inquiry and creativity. This is why the contributions of different kinds of researchers are needed to illuminate the work of teachers. Because the bodies of reflection and knowledge that inform teachers are growing, we must also. A narrowly focused personal or district professional development plan or program only reinforces the myth that a little training and giftedness makes teaching simple and easy and that problems are simple and isolated. (p. 5)

Piaget and Inhelder (2000) summarized a child's mental development as "a succession of three great periods each extending the preceding period as it reconstructs on a new level and then finally surpasses it to an even greater degree" (p. 152). A series of successive sequential structures divide growth into stages that are characterized as being constant with some individual

variations according to the child's intelligence or social situation. Piaget and Inhelder (2000) described four general factors assigned to mental development:

1. Organic growth (especially the maturation of the nervous system and the endocrine systems): Visual perception is not fully recognized until adolescence although retinal functioning occurs quite early (at about 4 months of age).
2. The role of exercise and acquired experiences in the actions of objects as opposed to social experiences: It is highly complex and consists of two types of experiences: (a) physical experiences--A child acts upon objects in order to understand their properties. Example: comparing two weights independently of volume and (b) logico-mathematical experiences--Acting upon objects in view to understand the result of the actions. Example: A child of about 5 or 6 realizes that the sum of a group of objects is independent of their spatial disposition or the order in which they are counted.
3. Social interaction and transmission: Necessary and essential, it is insufficient by itself. Socialization is an action by which the individual contributes as much as he or she receives operation and cooperation. In passive situations, such as school-teaching, social actions without active assimilation by the student is ineffective.
4. Oriented development: The role of the child and the general coordination of actions, which lead to a sense of apriority of internal finality. Self-regulation based on cause and effect. (pp. 152-159)

These four factors may appear to explain only the intellectual and cognitive growth of the child, but growth is also concerned with the development of affectivity and motivation of the child.

Child psychology allows us to follow generations of subjects confronting similar situations and recurring problems yet arriving at similar solutions (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000).

Piaget and Inhelder (2000) stated that maturation plays a role throughout a child's mental growth, but there is little detailed knowledge about maturation and the conditions that promote the formation of general operatory structures. However, maturation is only one of the factors involved in the influence of physical and social settings that increases in importance as the child grows. Maturation helps to explain a child's behavior during a stage of development.

Educational policy makers who adhere to the maturationist theory should be cognizant of the importance of issues related to multiple-birth children and how those issues could affect

being ready for school. Babies of premature birth or low-birth weight (both common in multiples) often have some type of disability that could lead to learning difficulties (March of Dimes, 2009). The gestational age of multiples puts them at a disadvantage when being assessed compared to children with birth dates of close proximity. Hay and Preedy (2006) suggested that multiple-birth children be held back a year to start school to allow them time to catch up or mature. Hay and Preedy (2006) also suggested that they be compared to children who are a year younger than are the multiples.

### *School Administrators, Educational Policies, and Best Practices for Multiples*

#### *When Multiples Enter School*

The New York Association of School Psychologists, NYASP, representing 4,500 school psychologists in New York fervently discouraged a blanket policy that automatically separates multiple-birth children in school (NYASP, 2010). A position paper written by the NYASP (2010) specifically directed to school boards and principals strongly encouraged a flexible and informed policy regarding school placement for multiples.

Extant educational research data dedicated solely to schooling practices regarding multiples are limited. In my quest for current research regarding school placement for multiples, I found it interesting that very little of the available research came from the United States. Most of the research I found originated in Australia, Canada, or the United Kingdom and was linked to multiple-birth support groups' web sites.

The NYASP (2010) proposed that administrators, teachers, and parents look upon school psychologists as a resource. They further suggested that school psychologists should be members of a multidisciplinary team trained to incorporate their knowledge of psychology with

specific training in education, child development, and educational systems. Furthermore, the NYASP (2010) recommended that each child's personality, characteristics, and experiences be evaluated and that the opinions of the parents should be taken into consideration. Finally, they advised that for the first few years of multiple-birth children's education all decisions should be made after careful planning and close follow-up (NYASP, 2010).

One of the characteristics of a quality education setting is the degree to which it involves families. Henderson and Berla (1994) stated that studies revealed when parents are actively involved in their children's education beyond the preschool years the children achieve higher academically, have better school attendance, and have more positive attitudes and behaviors. Higher quality school systems also have greater high school graduation rates and greater enrollment in higher education (Henderson & Berla. 1994). Henderson and Berla (1994) did not specifically identify the parents in their study as parents of single-birth children or as parents of multiple-birth children; however, their results corresponded with the statement from the Florida Center of Parent Involvement, FCPI, which indicated that parental involvement is crucial to improving the quality of education for all children (Florida Center for Parent Involvement, 1999).

### *Beginning School*

Starting school is a major life event for most children as well as many parents. For some children entering kindergarten might be the first time they have been separated from their parents or been away from home for a significant portion of the day. School officials have acknowledged that the transition into school from a preschool setting or the home could create anxiety for the new student. As a means to alleviate anxiety and promote a smooth and positive

transition into the school culture, schools often provide information and suggestions to parents prior to the beginning of school such as “*A Parent’s Guide to a Successful Kindergarten Transition*” issued by a NEA-PTA collaboration project (Florida Center for Parent Involvement, 1999). Many schools follow this guideline in order to establish good kindergarten programs. The Florida Center for Parent Involvement (1999) stated that good kindergarten programs should:

- support and encourage all children, regardless of prior preschool experience, culture, language, ability, or disability;
- use teaching practices that are challenging but appropriate for kindergarten-aged children;
- encourage children’s enthusiasm about learning;
- provide a balanced curriculum with activities in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, art, and physical education; and
- invite parents to participate in their child’s education. (n. p.)

A smooth transition and ease in adapting to the new environment could help promote a positive attitude about school. Once a child begins kindergarten he or she will encounter many new events while adapting to the school’s culture. The child will meet new teachers, make new friends, learn new schedules, and settle into daily and weekly routines. Today’s kindergarten stakeholders have high expectations for students’ academic achievement, social skills, and independence (Florida Center for Parent Involvement, 1999).

The Florida Center for Parent Involvement (1999), funded by the U.S. Department of Education and guided by an advisory board made up of parents and professionals, was established to empower parents. The FCPI collected information from parents expressing needs and then developed resources for parents and professionals alike. The resources have provided a wealth of information for parents, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders in the educational process



as they prepared students to learn. *Transition Sheet #3: Developing a Successful Transition* emphasized: (a) family empowerment, (b) parent involvement, (c) parenting support, (d) school readiness, and (e) transition to kindergarten (Florida Center for Parent Involvement, 1999).

The Florida Center for Parent Involvement (1999) has maintained that a successful transition is child-centered and meets the needs of the child and the family. Parental involvement is crucial to the success of the transition from the home or preschool into kindergarten. The FCPI has regarded the parents as decision makers and suggested that they are to be informed as advisers and advocates for public policy regarding their children (Florida Center for Parent Involvement, 1999).

The transition from the home or preschool to kindergarten is not always easy for children, parents, or teachers. The Florida Center for Parent Involvement (1999) acknowledged that sometimes parents simply do not know what the school expects of them and the teachers do not know what the parents expect of them. Some teachers complain that they are unaware of problems or situations at home that might influence educational outcomes. Both teachers and parents are responsible for sharing information so that the needs of the children are met. Parents are encouraged to visit the school early, get to know the teacher, and to show an interest in the child's education. During this time parents should be informing teachers as to what they need to know about the children who will soon be their students. This is also the ideal time to let teachers know if a child has special needs (Florida Center for Parent Involvement, 1999).

### *Historical Events for School Reform*

Historical cultural occurrences and educational events in the United States have had significant effects on education. *Brown vs. Board of Education* of 1954, *Title I* in 1965, the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, and the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 have played important roles in the educational process (U. S. Department of Justice, 2006).

On August 26, 1981, Secretary of Education T. H. Bell formed the National Commission on Excellence in Education to investigate the quality of education in the United States. The Commission's 1983 report known as *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* is considered a landmark event in modern American educational history as it kicked off a wave of school reform movements that culminated in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006):

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself (n. p.).

The report prompted school reform by alleging that students in the U.S. were falling behind students in other countries and consequently our national prosperity and our national security were threatened (Owens, 2004). The Commission's purpose was to help define the problems afflicting American education and to provide solutions. The Commission proposed a set of recommendations that included (a) strengthening graduation requirements, (b) adopting more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct, (c) devoting significantly more time to learning, and (d) improving teachers' training to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession. It recommended that citizens provide fiscal support and stability required to bring about the reforms by holding educators and elected officials responsible for providing the leadership necessary for reform (Owens, 2004). Moreover, according to Owens (2004) the Commission spoke directly about the important role of parents:

You have the right to demand for your children the best our schools and colleges can provide. Your vigilance and your refusal to be satisfied with less than the best are the imperative first step. But your right to a proper education for your children carries a double responsibility. As surely as you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a *living* example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education. (n. p.)

The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* consisted of educational goals concerned with school readiness, school completion, students' academic achievement, leadership in math and science, adult literacy, safe and drug-free schools, teacher professional development, and parental participation (U. S. Department of Justice, 2006). The Act encouraged professional development and provided opportunities for educators to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to teach and prepare students for the next century. The Act also sought to promote partnerships that would foster parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (U. S. Department of Justice, 2006).

*The Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was enacted in order to help states commit to improve education and to ensure that all children achieve higher academically (U. S. Department of Justice, 2006). *Goals 2000* initiated, supported, and coordinated school reform by planning, implementing, and focusing efforts on high expectations and achievement for all students. This was a results-focused comprehensive effort known as standards-based education reform and drove institutional changes toward improved teaching, learning, and high student performance. The goals of *Goals 2000* speak directly to some of the issues in educating multiples such as determining school readiness, professional development regarding issues related to multiples that could impact learning, and involving parental input regarding the classroom placement of multiple-birth students.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, signed into law by then-President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, was an effort to close the achievement gap of minorities,

economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and students with disabilities (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2003) the goal of NCLB was to ensure that all children be given fair, equal, and significant opportunities to achieve a high-quality education. The NCLB law proposed provisions in school management that affect staff and personnel development, parental involvement, and research-based intervention strategies.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003) the *No Child Left Behind Act* contains four components:

1. accountability for results,
2. an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research,
3. expanded parental options, and
4. expanded local control and flexibility. (n. p.)

The “*No Child Left Behind: A Parents’ Guide,*” produced by The U.S. Department of Education (2003) summarized the provisions of the law, answered questions, and directed parents to additional resources. The U. S. Department of Education (2003) stated:

No Child Left Behind supports parent involvement because research overwhelmingly demonstrates the positive effect that parent involvement has on their children’s academic achievement (Clark 1983; Comer 1980, 1988; Eccles, Arbreton, et al., 1993; Eccles-Parsons, Adler and Kaczala 1982; Epstein 1983, 1984; Marjoribanks 1979 as cited in Eccles and Harold 1996). In the event a school is identified as needing improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, the law requires the local education agency to notify parents accordingly and to explain to them how they can become involved in school improvement efforts. In any event, the law requires the same agency to provide parents with local report cards, which include data on each individual school in the district, as described earlier. Thus, parents have up-to-date information about their child’s school, which they can use in whatever manner they choose to be involved. Parents may help their child’s school in a number of ways, including: attending parent-teacher meetings or special meetings to address academic problems at the school; volunteering to serve as needed; encouraging other parents to become involved; and learning about the school’s special challenges, community resources, and the No Child Left Behind Act. In addition, parents should take advantage of the increased flexibility given local decision-makers by No Child Left Behind and talk with their school board members, principals, and other

state and local education leaders about which programs they think will help their students the most. (n. p.)

The initiatives for school reform and improvement are intended for all students including multiples. The plan's goals include suggesting or emphasizing school readiness, parental involvement, and effective home-school communication as well as implementing research-based practices, accountability, and professional development (U. S. Department of Education, 2003).

The goals of the *No Child Left Behind Act* require high expectations for student achievement and hold educational leaders accountable for higher scores on standardized tests in spite of societal issues that the school has no control over such as dysfunctional families, violence, drugs, and poverty (Harvey, 2003). According to Hammond and Berry (2006) well-prepared and well-supported teachers are important to all students especially students with greater needs such as a learning-disabled child, a diabetic student, an ADHD diagnosed student, and students who are part of a multiple-birth set.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (2010) has encouraged communication as the foundation for creating effective relationships between the school and the home. The coalition claimed that a comprehensive and meaningful partnership meets the needs of families, schools, and the communities involved; however, families might not become involved if the school does not make them feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard, and needed.

The goals of *No Child Left Behind* are to improve and ensure the education of all children. NCLB emphasizes using scientific-based research in decision-making and involving parents and families in the decision making process; it has also made schools more accountable for results (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). If schools welcome all parents and parents of multiple-birth children along with their educational and social concerns regarding their children, results accountability seems more likely.

### *The Role of the Principal*

School administrators and principals have been pressured by state and federal demands for higher accountability; consequently, a greater emphasis has been placed on standardized test scores. Effective instructional leaders do not let controversial issues interfere with their focus on what really matters (Whitaker, 2003). In his book *What Great Principals do Differently* Whitaker (2003) stated that we spend quite a bit of energy and time looking for programs to improve education, and too often we find that school-improvement programs do not bring about the improvements that we had hoped for; instead, we should focus on what really matters, “It is people, not programs that determine the quality of a school” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 8). Effective principals focus on behaviors such as social skills, self-worth, and responsibility. This would mean that a principal takes the time to listen to the parental concerns of multiples and consider what is best for the multiples.

### *Early Studies*

A 1966 study by Koch (as cited by Tully et al, 2004) is the only study found that espoused the disadvantages of school separation among identical (MZ), same sex (fraternal) DZ, and opposite sex fraternal (DZ) twin pairs. According to Tully et al. (2004) the findings of Koch’s study showed that identical twins were most often placed together and a majority of opposite-sex, especially the female co-twin, preferred a separate classroom placement from the co-twin. Koch concluded that twins benefitted from separated classroom placement; he found they had more advanced speech and showed greater differences in intellectual ability. Koch further added that a considerable amount of literature supports a closer social bond between identical (MZ) twins over fraternal (DZ) twins (Tully et al., 2004).

Results from an Australian study conducted by Gleeson et al. (1990) dedicated to the educational issues associated with classroom placement of twins involved the parents of 784 multiple-birth families and 1,264 teachers. The aim of the study was to assess the implications of school placement decisions. The researchers uncovered three main areas of concern:

1. greater communication between teacher-parent concerning placement arrangements,
2. flexibility in decision-making process, and
3. the need for more empirical data concerning the effects of classroom placements on multiple-birth-children. (p. 232)

According to Lykken (1978) some studies were considered flawed because they failed to organize the twin pairs by zygosity: identical (MZ), fraternal same-sex fraternal (DZ), or opposite-sex fraternal (DZ). Furthermore, the researchers did not provide documentation explaining how zygosity was determined. Classification of twins as MZ or DZ is critical in any psychological or medical study involving twins' zygosity and can result in misleading estimates of genetic and environmental factors as well as inaccurate conclusions concerning twin group differences in the variables of interest. MZ twins have consistently shown greater resemblances than have DZ twins in general intelligence, special mental abilities, school achievement, learning disabilities, and personality and temperament. Therefore, Lykken (1978) contended that it was mandatory to evaluate twins' adjustment to school according to their type, or zygosity.

#### *Segal's Guidelines for Educational and Psychological Consultants*

Segal (1999) wrote that decisions concerning the classroom assignment of young twin children have proven to be difficult for educators, counselors, and parents. She made no mention of the frustrations for the twins involved in the dilemma. As part of an ongoing study of cooperation and competition, she interviewed or surveyed 63 mothers of young twins and triplets

regarding their satisfaction with school policies, reasons for separate or same classroom placement, and related issues. Of the parents 48% who were aware of the school's policy did not support a general practice to separate; 38% of parents of identical (MZ) twins or triplets favored same classroom placement compared to 13% of fraternal (DZ) twins or triplets' parents. Segal (1999) added the children's individual needs should be considered by educational and physiological consultants and parents before making final classroom assignments for multiples. From her studies Segal (1999) found that within the plethora of literature on twins and multiple births a majority of the variables related to twins and twins' situations remain largely unexplored. She explained the reason: Psychologists who use twins as "pawns in the nature-nurture controversy were concentrating exclusively on differences within pairs and neglecting both the twin as an individual and the psychology of the twin pair" (Mittler, as cited in Segal, 1999, p. 69).

Segal (Segal & Russell, 1992) provided the following guidelines for assisting educational and psychological consultants who work with twins and their families:

1. School placement decisions should fit the special circumstances of individual twin pairs. The more common policy of separating twins upon school entry is inappropriate in all cases because it fails to accommodate the individual needs of the pair.
2. A research basis for separating twins at school has not been established. A judicious approach would allow for periodic consultation with each family to determine an optimal solution. Several options are, in fact, available to educational and psychological consultants concerned with promoting independence in twins placed in the same classroom. Encouraging separate play or study groups may help twins function independently from the twinship, but with the knowledge and security that the co-twin is in close proximity. This may be especially applicable in nursery school settings if separate classrooms are unavailable. Consultants may additionally advise concerned parents to similarly structure the social and recreational situations of twins outside the classroom.
3. The zygosity of a given twin pair should receive some consideration in the assignment of separate versus common classrooms. More parents of MZ twins than DZ twins favored a general policy of common placement in the early grades. Final



decisions should not, however, rest solely upon twin type but should also consider the twins' social relationship, social skills outside the twinship, intellectual abilities, and other factors. (p. 78)

Segal (1999) contended that opposite-sex twin pairs were the most problematic group in early school environments and attributed this to physical, social, and intellectual development of female co-twins. Segal (1999) stated she was often contacted by parents of opposite-sex twins in search of advice for classroom placement. A majority of those requests were because of parental concerns about the male co-twin's lack of school readiness.

### *Summary*

The literature indicated that allowing multiple-birth children to remain together in school classrooms could be beneficial to the children. When multiple-birth children start school, their parents are often not sure of what is best for their children and they often look to school leaders to guide them. It is crucial that educators become enlightened on the subject of multiples in school, to be flexible, and to encourage parental involvement.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 provides a description of the design and methods used to conduct the investigation into the perceptions of kindergarten- through eighth-grade principals regarding the classroom placement of twins and other birth multiples. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of the design and methods used to conduct the study. This chapter identifies the subjects of the study, defines the data gathering instruments, explains the process by which the interviews were administered, and explains the procedures for analysis of data obtained through research.

According to Merriam (1998) qualitative researchers attempt to describe events in as much detail and complexity as possible. Qualitative research determines how those events emerged into the current state and identifies ways in which individuals comprehend that development.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate kindergarten-through eighth-grade principals' perceptions regarding the classroom assignment of twins and other multiple-birth students. Consequently, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What local, district, and state policies guide principals in making placement decisions for multiple-birth students?
2. What training do principals have to prepare them for the placement of multiple-birth students?
3. What other sources of guidance assist principals in placing multiple-birth students?
4. What knowledge do principals have about the unique needs of multiple-birth students?

5. What are principals' perceptions regarding how to best meet the needs of multiple-birth students?

### *Design of the Study*

This study addressed perceptions of kindergarten- through eighth-grade principals concerning classroom placement of multiple-birth students by interviewing subjects who served as principals in schools in Blount County, Cocke County, Greene County, Hamblen County, and Sevier County in Tennessee. The design of this qualitative study was based upon a case study. Qualitative research is inquiry in which the researcher collects data by interacting with selected persons and it describes and analyzes individuals' thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. Purposeful sampling was chosen in order to gain insightful, thick, rich information (Patton, 1990). According to Merriam (1998), "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). The primary method of data collection was through semistructured, private, and individual interviews. An emergent design process allowed flexibility during the interview process.

Professional networking and my work as a school counselor in the region for several years provided access to principals in the surrounding counties. This network of relationships assisted in building trust and rapport with those who were interviewed.

### *The Role of the Researcher*

In qualitative research the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). The data are mediated via a human research instrument instead of a nonliving device. Merriam (1998) stated that the researcher is responsive to the context and can adapt techniques to the circumstances so that the total context is taken into account. Further, Merriam (1998) stated that the researcher's prior knowledge about a situation could be expanded through the researcher's sensitivity to nonverbal expression; the researcher is able to process data immediately and clarify and summarize as the study progresses while exploring inconsistent answers.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "Qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (p. 2). A major concern for the qualitative researcher is to understand the phenomenon of the study from the participants' points-of-view and not his or her own. Merriam (1998) referred to this as the "emic," or insider's perspective, in comparison to the "etic," or outsider's view (p. 6). I gave careful consideration to the concept of "etic" in order to remain "emic"; I accomplished this by constantly acknowledging that the participants' responses represented their points-of-view and not my own.

Effective communication skills are built upon common courtesies and proper etiquette. People commonly ask questions and then wait for answers. It is considered rude and impolite to interrupt when someone else is talking, and dominating the conversation is an indication of poor communication skills (Maggio, 2005). Qualitative interviewing builds on the conversational skills that the interviewer already possesses. People know when they can talk at length and when brief answers are a better choice; they know when to change the subject and how to do it with

grace (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), "...conversations are as much about being in a relationship as they are a means of sharing information" (p. 1).

Common courtesies and proper etiquette are the rules for effective communication; however, the interview conversation is different in many ways (Merriam, 1998). A major difference is that the qualitative interview is a research tool; it is a planned way to learn about people (Merriam, 1998). Asking good questions is essential to obtaining meaningful data. I presented hypothetical situations and ideal positions, played devil's advocate, and posed interpretative questions. I asked follow-up questions and probed for deeper meaning from the participants.

My purpose in choosing this type of research study was not to resolve the issues concerning the classroom placement of multiples in school, but to discover what practices best meet the needs of multiple-birth children.

### *Validity of the Study*

The most basic question concerning qualitative research is trustworthiness according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). The authors posed, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria for trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### *Credibility*

Credibility depends more on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher than it does on the sample size (Patton, 1990). I employed

the following strategies as suggested by Creswell (2003) to ensure accuracy of the findings: Triangulation, the process of using multiple data collection methods, sources, and analysis is a method to address internal validity (Merriam, 1998). I combined data obtained from the review of literature and the interviews to develop themes and categories. I employed member checking to ensure that interpretations were accurately presented. In addition, the participants were given a copy of the entire narrative of the interview and my interpretations to check for accuracy. I identified personal bias. I engaged in prolonged time on extensive data collection in the field and detailed data analysis of interviews. A peer debriefer was used throughout the study to enhance understandability of the research; the peer debriefer was an impartial colleague. I used an external auditor who was new to the study. The external auditor's job is to read over the entire study and find what is not understandable to the reader. The external auditor is concerned with whose voice resonates in the descriptive accounts of the study, how well the study is described so that other readers can follow how the research was conducted, and bringing to light any other concerns that might diminish its credibility.

### *Transferability*

Transferability is concerned with the reader of the study and refers to the degree in which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other settings. The qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by providing sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to other situations. Transferability depends on a presentation of "thick, deep, and rich description" (Patton, 2002, p. 331); the researcher paints a picture with words that takes the reader into the setting being described. The reader is able to understand the phenomenon studied and draw his or her own

interpretations about meanings and significance. I presented the results of my study in a descriptive narrative in order to convey a holistic glimpse of each principal's experiences for the reader.

### *Dependability*

Dependability refers to the need of the researcher to describe the changes that occurred in the setting and how these changes might have affected the way the researcher approached the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested an "inquiry audit" to enhance the dependability of qualitative research (p. 317). This strategy uses reviewers to examine the process and the product of the research for consistency. To establish dependability the auditor examines how the processes throughout various stages of the study were conducted. The auditor determines whether these processes were germane to the research and if they were applied consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A colleague not involved with the research served as the inquiry auditor for this research project. To demonstrate confirmability a record of the inquiry process as well as copies of all taped interviews, discussions, field notes, and hard copies of transcriptions were maintained. These records are available from me upon request.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or supported by others because the nature of qualitative research tends to assume that the researcher brings his or her unique perspective to the study. I documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. I verified the data by asking each participant to verify via e-mail

the accuracy of his or her transcript of the interview. Any errors or omissions were adjusted per the interviewee's instructions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the researcher could demonstrate a neutral stance regarding the research interpretations through a "confirmability audit" (p. 320). This means providing an audit trail consisting of raw data, analysis notes, reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, personal notes, and preliminary developmental information (pp. 320-321). I documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. My inquiry auditor examined the processes and products of the study to evaluate the accuracy and to determine if the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were supported by the data.

I maintained the overall focus of questioning during the interviewing process. An emergent design encouraged an easy flow of conversation. Ample time and opportunity was granted for the participants to express themselves fully. I maintained objectivity throughout the study and reflected regularly to ensure this position.

### *Ethical Protocol*

Permission was requested and obtained from the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, ETSU-IRB, to conduct this study. The IRB is established to ensure that none of the participants is harmed, that his or her privacy is protected, and that each member is provided with an informed consent document. The directors of schools in the counties involved in the study were contacted (see Appendix B) seeking approval to interview principals involved in the study. Anonymity for each of the participants was guaranteed. Permission to interview principals was granted by the directors of schools in the five counties involved in the study.



Participants were contacted via school e-mail addresses listed on the school's website. E-mail (see Appendix C) sent to the principals included a description of the study and a request to participate in the study. Subsequently, a list of potential participants was developed. I followed up with phone calls to those principals who indicated an interest in participating in the study. Permission was granted before the principals were interviewed.

The participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent document (see Appendix D). The participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were informed that the interviews were being digitally recorded and that the researcher would transcribe the interviews. Permission was sought to use their quotes in the final report. The participants were assured of total anonymity in the study by the use of pseudonyms. They were informed that all data would be kept securely located. A copy of the transcript was provided to each participant and he or she was asked to verify the accuracy. Additional ethical considerations involved timing of the interviews, selecting a location for interviews, and signing of the informed consent forms.

### *Data Collection*

After securing authorization from the ETSU-IRB and permission from the directors of schools for the systems involved in the study, interview appointments were set with principals. To conduct a sound qualitative study, a realistic site must be chosen. Marshall and Rossman (1999) defined a realistic site as one where entry is possible, the researcher is likely to build trusting relations with the participants in the study, and the data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. The interview setting is important to the participants' feelings of security as it yields more open and honest responses. Every effort was made to accommodate

principals' time schedules and locations. The interviews were conducted in their respective offices at the end of the school day.

The interview guide (see Appendix E) was developed from the research questions but it was general enough not to lead the participants. The questions were semistructured and open-ended; this allowed for a freer flow of conversation. "Yes" and "No" questions were not used. The interviews were recorded.

Before the actual principals' interviews took place, I conducted practice interviews with colleagues, a spouse, and a friend in order to polish up on my interviewing skills and to improve the interview questions. Data from the practice interviews were not used in the research findings. All data recordings and transcriptions are held in a secure location within my home.

### *Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed by using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Constant comparative analysis was ongoing as data were analyzed throughout the process. This method of analysis involves taking one piece of the data and comparing it to all of the other data that are similar or different in order to develop assumptions about possible relationships among various pieces of data. This process continues with the comparisons of each new interview until all are compared (Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

At the conclusion of each interview the questions were analyzed individually to identify emerging themes and relationships developed among the pieces of data. The data were coded into themes and categories to identify common characteristics.

The tape-recorded interviews were reviewed in their entirety before the transcription process began. The recordings were personally transcribed by me in order to expedite familiarity

with the transcript content. Data were divided into designated categories with similar characteristics. Tentative ideas and possible conclusions were generated and noted as well. Theories developed as commonalities emerged.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the perceptions of principals of kindergarten through eighth-grade schools regarding the classroom assignment of twins and other multiple-birth students. Based on this rationale, I constructed a theoretical framework:

- to discover what local, district, or state policies guide principals in making classroom placement decisions for multiple-birth students;
- to discern what training principals have received that prepares them for the placement of multiple-birth students;
- to examine what other sources assist principals in placing multiple-birth students;
- to determine what knowledge principals have regarding the unique needs of multiple birth students; and
- to gain insight into principals' perceptions about how to best meet the needs of multiple-birth students.

The research involved collecting data through semistructured, private individual interviews with 10 kindergarten- through eighth-grade school principals. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting participants who indicated they had an interest in or experience with the topic. Initial contact with the principals was obtained via email at their respective schools. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What local, district, and state policies guide principals in making placement decisions for multiple-birth students?

2. What training do principals have to prepare them for the placement of multiple-birth students?
3. What other sources of guidance assist principals in placing multiple-birth students?
4. What knowledge do principals have about the unique needs of multiple-birth students?
5. What are principals' perceptions regarding how to best meet the needs of multiple-birth students?

The participants comprised 10 kindergarten- through eighth-grade principals in rural East Tennessee. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and they were assured of anonymity. They were informed that they could stop the interview at any time or decline to answer any question or questions. Each private interview lasted about 60 minutes and was conducted in the participant's office at the end of the school day. Prior to each interview I explained the informed consent process in detail, checked for understanding, and presented the informed consent form (see Appendix D) for a signature. At the beginning of each interview I assigned the participant a code name to protect his or her identity. The interviews were relaxed and unhurried, which led to a freer flow of conversation. A digital recording device was used to audiotape each interview. The recording was transcribed immediately by the researcher and then reviewed by the interview subject to verify accuracy. The formal transcriptions were then coded to verify recurring themes.

### *Results*

Five themes were identified related to kindergarten- through eighth-grade principals' perceptions regarding the classroom placement of multiple-birth children: (a) learning

environment, (b) meeting individual needs of all students, (c) communication, (d) perceptions, and (e) culture. All participants stated they were aware of Tennessee's new law that prohibits schools from separating twins, triplets, and other multiple-birth siblings into different classrooms solely because they are multiple-birth siblings. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3105 went into effect in July 2010. Several interviewees stated they had no strong preferences regarding separating or keeping multiples together in the classroom.

### *Learning Environment*

Throughout the interviews, the most noticeable concern expressed by all of the principals was related to creating a learning environment that is conducive to learning for all students.

Principal B said:

You have to create a learning-centered environment where teaching and learning are valued, where students feel secure and valued, and where they value the other children. That requires learning two tasks simultaneously: attending to academic tasks and social tasks. They have to learn how to learn.

I asked her to expound:

The teacher's main responsibility in the lower grades is to teach the kids how to interact with their classmates and how to pay attention to her all at the same time while she's teaching. They have to learn how to socially interact with the teacher and all the other students while the lesson is being taught. Once they've learned these two little tricks, they are ready to start participating in their own learning and they'll be able to demonstrate their understanding of what was taught.

Principal I remarked, "My goal is to create a learning environment with optimal learning outcomes as well as a caring environment where all of the children feel happy, accepted, and secure."

Comments were made about how a set of multiples being together in one classroom, similar to a few students with disruptive behaviors in one classroom, has the potential to impact negatively the dynamics of the classroom. It was the consensus of the principals that before one

could have a learning atmosphere, one first had to establish a disciplined environment built on respect. Principal A clarified:

I've always tried my best to make good sound decisions for these kids the same as I would for my own son: I want him in the best possible school and classroom environment. How can I not do the same for the children in my school? If twins' parents want them in the same room, and the fact that they are together does not create chaos, then that is where they will be as long as it doesn't put the learning environment in jeopardy. I feel this shows respect on my part to the students and to the parents. I value each of them. I want them to know they're an important part of our school.

Principal C explained that he really did not have any strong feelings one way or the other about the classroom placement of multiples but said he did have strong feelings about the learning environment. He continued by saying, "I want to make sure that students are in a situation where they are most likely to succeed, [whether] together or separate, it's not an issue to me."

Seemingly very calm and understanding, Principal F shared that when he is making classroom placements his primary concerns include the learning environment, safety, and using his staff more efficiently. He mentioned two other concerns that were always present: whether the students were being challenged and if they were meeting curriculum standards. He added that the configuration of a classroom could also play havoc with the learning environment.

Principal D said his main concern in classroom placement was finding the right combination of teaching styles and learning styles, personalities, and academic levels to make a classroom a place of learning for everyone, "... can't have too many trouble makers in one classroom, you know."

Principal E said there were presently three set of twins in her school. She said she knew the classroom environment was deemed as one of the most crucial of all the elements of teaching as she shared:

You can have a classroom with the greatest learning environment there ever was. But, let me tell you, if that classroom has a set of twins or triplets in it that are split up and they want to be together, it's not a positive learning environment anymore, now is it?

Principal F recalled a situation where he had to put a set of twins in one room because he only had one class for that grade. He detailed, "The kids were a handful, that's for sure, but they had a pretty good first semester. They kept the teacher on her toes too, and she told me every paycheck that she deserved a stipend for her extra work."

In fact, Principal F sang the praises of this teacher who had created what he called "the ideal learning environment." He described the teacher as a veteran with excellent classroom management skills. She was able to keep the children separate while in the same classroom. With the help of a part-time assistant, the teacher was able to create a busy environment with class activities that kept the twins busy, but not together. Principal F credited the teacher's success to how she used her sense of humor as a means to connect with the twins on a level that made them like her and want to please her, yet respect her. As it turned out, the family had lost their home because of foreclosure and the parents had been separated the summer prior to the start of the school year. The children were acting out because of instability in the home. Soon afterwards the couple reconciled and the twins' behavior improved. Principal F ended by saying, "It was the teacher's motherly experience and a love of teaching that was responsible for the outcome of that situation."

Regarding the learning environment Principal G contemplated the dynamics of different personalities and their effect on the classroom environment and how the teaching style of the teacher and the learning styles of the students should mesh. Principal G said of the learning environment:

There are so many variables you have to sort through when trying to help create a learning environment in a classroom. You've got this kid, and that kid, and they can't be together in the same room because of whatever, but we still have to deal with the



business of educating them, all of them. What to do, huh? There are no cut-and-dry answers for separating kids or twins or keeping them together in a classroom, so that makes this a complicated issue for me and parents who are adamant about what they want for their kids. I have twin girls myself; they're in high school now, but that forced me to take a closer look at the uncommon bond between twins and trying to develop school policies not only about their classroom placement, but the placement for all the kids in my building. I know of principals who deliberately separated twins and triplets as early as first grade because that's how it had always been done or they believed it would help them develop their own personalities. They didn't get that part; twins already have their own personalities!

Several principals suggested that the learning environment had much to do with the students' perception of that learning environment. Principal H suggested that one of the main reasons parents wanted their child in a certain teacher's room was because that teacher's classroom environment had something that was pleasing or desirable to them, thus making it a good match for their child. He reasoned that the same could be said about the motives of the parents of multiples with placement requests; like other children, multiples need an environment that is attuned to their needs and is sensitive to their sense of security. From his experiences he said multiples need first an environment that makes them feel safe and secure--then a learning environment will appear. He said that situations giving special consideration for multiples include: very few experiences of being separated; shyness; beginning-school anxiety; separation anxiety; and family situations such as separation, divorce, or the death of a significant person in the children's lives.

Although Principal H said he preferred separation, he was not totally opposed to letting twins stay together in the classroom. Before the twin law took effect he said he used a case-by-case approach to make the decision regarding placement of multiples. He expanded on this method:

For a twin in school, especially in the early grades, the school environment absolutely has to make the child feel safe and secure, to make him want to be there. If he's separated from his twin, his environment is unsafe and he feels insecure . . . that'll keep him from learning.

Principal J referred to the learning environment as being “unstable” as it relates to students and what they need from it at any given time. He passionately explained:

A learning environment in a school is for all children all the time. What makes it a positive learning environment or a negative learning environment is based on how a child senses he fits into all of it. If he senses that he matters, that he counts, it’s a learning environment. But, if nobody listens to him or shows little interest in getting to know him as a person, or as a twin, or as a kid with seizures, or a kid with Tourette’s Syndrome, or ever how he sees himself, then it’s not a learning environment.

### *Meeting Individual Needs*

Principal A recounted an earlier experience with registering a set of triples. The set consisted of two girls and a boy; the girls were definitely ready for school, but the boy was quite immature and he was small for his age. She asked the mother what she thought about letting the girls start kindergarten because they were obviously ready and let the boy delay a year to mature more. The mother burst into tears and said she could not stand the idea of them being apart. Principal A and the mother agreed that in order to help ready the boy for kindergarten that fall, he needed opportunities throughout the next few months to be apart from his sisters so he could learn to be more independent. As it turned out the little boy spent a lot of time during the summer with the paternal grandparents while the girls stayed with their aunt, the mother’s sister, and her new baby. “After all, the girls were great little baby sitters.” Principal A concluded:

Well, sure enough, that summer . . . time alone with the papaw helped him an awful lot. . . He got used to being away from his sisters, and . . . in fact, they all three started school that fall, and they all did just fine. I put them together in kindergarten and in the first grade. The teachers were really good about scheduling their activities and center time and stuff in the classroom to where they’d be separated a good part of the day.

The principals presented a variety of interpretations for “meeting individual needs.”

There was nothing found in all the literature I read regarding multiple-birth children that

addressed meeting the individual needs of the parents. “Meeting individual needs” was associated with different academic abilities or physical limitations of the children.

Principal A described an experience from a few years ago with twin boys who fought constantly; they fought at home, at school, on the bus, on the baseball field, even in church! Yet, if someone said something offensive to one of them, the other would come to his brother’s defense. She recalled that one or both boys had ADD or ADHD. One of the boys had learning disabilities and was in special education classes; however, they remained in the same grade level throughout their school years until one dropped out of high school. Principal A continued:

It’s a good thing those boys’ parents never asked for them to be in the same room, that would’ve been a nightmare for the teacher! They’re grown now and have done pretty good. The boy with the learning disability dropped out of high school and had several low-paying, sporadic jobs. When the other one graduated from high school, he started his own carpet installation business, and guess who works for him? That’s right, his brother, the one he had fought with all of his life [laughs].

The boys, now men, had installed new carpet in some apartments Principal A owns and she seemed happy to report that they did not get into a fight the whole time they were at her house.

An interesting one-classroom-per-grade-level story came from Principal F whose school’s population was under 200 students. A major concern for him was the parents’ insistence that their first-grade twins (boy and girl) be in separate rooms because of the children’s inability to get along at home. Principal F informed them that a separate class was not possible because there was only one class per grade level in the school. The parents expressed their displeasure with that explanation and then implied that the school was not meeting the needs of their children because they would not offer separate classrooms for the twins. The parents discussed the matter with a neighbor who happened to be a former member of the school board. They learned that the school complied with state law--a school’s population per grade

level indicates the number of classrooms per school. They backed off after being told they could take their children to any school they wanted. They decided to make the best of what was available to them.

I asked Principal E, who was principal of a school with only one classroom per grade level, to respond to these hypothetical situations: (a) multiples cannot get along with each other while in the same classroom, (b) one needs to be in a gifted program whereas the other struggles academically, and (c) one needs to be retained and the other one does not. She responded:

I've actually had to deal with those exact same types of situations. It's not unusual for twins to get mad at each other at home and bring it to school, so when that happens, I separate them for the day, maybe longer if it got real nasty... and it doesn't take long before they want to be back with brother or sister. I always let mommy and daddy know and that typically takes care of that sort of thing. I had a girl and boy set of twins a few years ago. The girl was extremely bright and the boy was autistic. The parents had a good hold of that situation before the kids entered kindergarten so it was pretty seamless, them entering school. Being as small as we are, they were never far enough apart to ever get fretful or worried about the other one. This was back before inclusion, and we let them sit together or apart whatever worked out best for them. They were so well adjusted.

Principal B 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.

With an undergraduate degree in psychology, Principal C said he was sympathetic to the needs of multiples and was aware of how they were perceived and treated by others and that it could be a source of frustration for them, the twins. He explained:

I disagree with comparing siblings; we should never compare children; it doesn't matter if they're multiples or singletons... or even first cousins! But for multiples, we have to do what they need--that might be to separate them, or it might mean we need to keep them together, based on what they need at the time.

I asked Administrator C if he would classify what he had just said as "meeting the individual needs" of multiples, and he said, "Yeah, I think it is!" Then he began questioning the concept of "meeting the needs of whom" by reflecting:

If we're talking about meeting individual needs, I think there are three groups we need to consider: there's the kids, the parents, and then the unit--the multiples themselves. Certainly, all of these groups have needs. For example, the parents NEED some consideration in the placement process, in the early grades, at least. Can you imagine having two or three kids, and how about more, all in the same grade? In addition to having other kids in school, or younger children? The amount of time and attention needed on homework assignments alone would drive most parents insane!

I asked if he considered the parents' individual needs in his decisions. He answered:

I'm certainly open to hearing them. And, in the lower grades, unless the kids have some mighty strong personality conflicts, I might even recommend it. Kindergarten, first, second, and third grade, all of them too important to a student's educational foundation not to ensure them the best possible environment. And, this is where I think of the multiples as one unit, they're all getting off the ground at the same time. Individually, they all need their parents' attention. There's no way parents can spread themselves out that thin--helping their kids do homework, reinforcing skills at home, and having time to take care of other responsibilities at home.

I asked Principal C if there was anything else he wanted to share with me. He thought a minute and then said that he was born a twin, but his brother had died at birth. He said that all of his life he had felt a void and because of his loss, he felt more in tune to a child's psyche and he had a desire to help a child any way possible if that child needed it.

Principal D spoke of a situation when one of the multiples had emotional problems:

One of the boys had some real emotional issues ... was always having problems and the other one was always embarrassed by how his brother would pitch fits and get the other kids mad at him. You know, it put him in a real tight spot, but in reality, it was holding him back. Come the end of the school year, the teacher had his name on her list to be held back. Well, I called the parents in, and it was just the momma, the daddy had left them, and she explained that the one had just taken it a lot harder. She was really understanding about how the boys had reached the stage where they needed to be separated, and, surprisingly, she agreed to let one go on and let the other one repeat that year.

Administrator E shared that if the multiples were developmentally behind other children of their own age, she had advised parents to hold them out a year so that they could mature and enhance their chances of success. She said if a child enters school and he or she is not ready, she feels that school is not able to meet that child's individual needs as efficiently as it could if the child was ready for school. It has been her experience that a majority of little ones benefit from waiting out a year and by the time they are in fifth grade or so, they have caught up with the rest of the students who are a year younger than they are. She said she believes that if a child begins school and is retained in a lower grade, the child is more likely to think of himself or herself as a failure, to develop an inferior complex, and to feel shame. "[It's] not the best way to get off to a great start in school," she added. She continued by explaining:

A child in kindergarten doesn't understand that his academic deficiencies are mostly due to his developmental stage and is not representative of his ability to learn. If the child has not mastered the concepts taught in kindergarten, he is not ready to move on to first grade. He will either be in a junior primary or in kindergarten again. The child internalizes this as failure and his self-concept and self-esteem take a dive. Blue birds know they're blue birds, and red birds know they're red birds, doesn't matter how you cut it.

Principal H said he has seen some situations where he thought it was best for some twins to be together and some situations where he thought it was best for them to be apart so that their individual needs could be met. He related that one of his concerns is when they are too far apart in their social and academic development and one twin relies on the other one too much. He expounded:

We have a set of twins here; one is in an enrichment curriculum and the other one is low academically and isn't too social. The boys worry about each other, but they have lunch and their activity classes together. I think this situation is better for them so that they are not constantly being compared to each other. It's a good opportunity for them to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses and develop at their own pace.

When asked for suggestions about how best to meet the individual needs of multiples, Principal G said he felt separation was in the best interest of the children from the beginning if the twins or triplets had very different personalities, if they had different academic strengths and weaknesses, or if they had been in daycare situations and were accustomed to being apart.

Principal G maintained that each set of twins has its own relationship with different needs. He detailed:

Some twins get along pretty good and aren't competitive; they seem to do better in the same classroom. If one twin has a real dominant personality and always speaks up for the other twin, or he's awfully competitive, then that's going to affect the quieter twin's self-esteem. This is when I would ask the parents to consider splitting them up. Over time, their relationship will change.

When discussing special-needs students, Principal I said her idea of multiples as having special needs was more tied to the dynamics of their relationship. She explained:

If they are pretty mature and have been in a daycare or other type of program where they've had opportunities to be apart, then I don't worry about them; they may need each other close by for that period of adjustment to school, but starting to school shouldn't be a problem for them. On the other hand, meeting the individual needs of a set of twins who have never been to a daycare, or who have always been at home with a stay-at-home mom and haven't been exposed to much of the world outside of home, like a Mother's Day Out program, and they have never been apart, then beginning school has the potential to be a nightmare for them!

Principal J recognized that we have to place a child into an environment that is going to yield the best results for that child and that entails finding out the needs of the child.

Furthermore, according to Principal J if a multiple-birth child is separated too soon from the co-multiple, he or she has the same feelings of insecurity as a neglected, homeless, or abused child would have. To that, he added:

We have to educate the whole child, not just what we see in front of us, but what we can't see as well. Aren't these individual needs too? All kids have individual needs. Here, I'll give you something about individual needs. Imagine they're twins or whatever; they're together all day long at school; then they go home together, and they're going to be there together all night long. They wake up, and they do the same thing all over the next day. These kids are together 24/7. This is going to lead to all kind of hell-raising at home like tattle-telling on each other about every little thing that went on at school that day! That's what I call an individual need; they need some time to be an individual . . . some alone time [laughs].

I asked him if he felt multiples had individual needs. He earnestly replied, "For a fact they do; they have a need to be together and they have a need to be individuals."

### *Communication*

Nine of the 10 principals interviewed talked about open communication between the school and home as an essential element to ensure a smooth transition from home to school and identified it as a key component in both school and student success.

One of Principal A's strongest areas, she said, was her effective communication skills. "Talking to parents about their worries and concerns, fielding questions, entertaining suggestions, and listening to comments--that's what I do." She described herself as more than willing to always listen to parents. She explained, "Effective communication is one of the most effective tools for school improvement there is and it doesn't cost a dime!" She said she finds it difficult to communicate with parents who have little to no communication skills; interestingly, she added that she would rather deal with an irate parent.

Principal G told me the thing he disliked most about his job was dealing with or trying to talk to confrontational parents. Luckily, he said he rarely has had to deal with irate parents. He acknowledged that his school's policies were communicated via the student handbook and an effective school-wide policy for school-to-home contacts. He said he liked how this kept all of them "on the same page." Incidentally, he said he was happy with Tennessee's new twin law,



explaining, “It takes me out of the equation. It completely eliminates my role as the decision maker; now, I simply follow the law.” He modified that statement, however, by confessing that he had never separated twins against their parents’ wishes.

Principal D reported that he had one set of triplets and three sets of twins attending his school. He said he was proud that most of the students in his school have had him as either a teacher, coach, or a principal. He admitted that up until this past year it had always been his policy to separate multiples. I asked if his policy ever met with resistance from parents and he told me, “Nah, I’ve had most of these kids’ parents or grandparents in school--they all know me, they trust me.” I asked him how he communicated his policy to the parents who did not know him. He replied, “It’s just word-of-mouth, I guess, we never had a written policy; it was just the way we always did things.” Stating that he had never had problems with any parents regarding placements, he surmised that those not approving of his policies most likely sent their children to schools elsewhere.

In the past Principal C said he would talk to previous year’s teachers, the parents, and even to the children to see what they had to say before he made placement decisions as he wanted to make sure that he was putting the students in a situation where they were most likely to succeed. He said that placement decisions were never a big deal to him because he had “never had any real strong feelings one way or the other about it.” He added:

If the parents express a logical need or a reason for wanting their kids together or apart--either one, I’ve always tried to do my best to accommodate that. After school starts and I see that maybe I’ve made a mistake, I’m okay with calling the parents in for a conference to see if we can find a better situation.

“It didn’t take legislation” to make Principal B talk to parents about what they wanted for their children: “That’s part of my job, a big part of it!” Speaking specifically about communications with the parents of multiples regarding classroom placement, she said she was

more than willing to listen to parents' wishes, and after she heard them she would make what she felt was the best decision for the children. She added that as an educator, "My main objective is to do what is best for the child, not necessarily what the parents want."

Out of the six sets of multiples in her school, Principal B said only two mothers contacted her requesting the same class placement for their twins' kindergarten- and first-grade years. She said that three others sets of parents had contacted her seeking advice and recommendations because they were unsure themselves about placement for their children. She said she readily responded because she had already discussed the children with their previous year's teachers. One lone set of multiples' parents did not call or show any interest in their children's placement; therefore, she called them. They told her it did not matter to them where they were placed. Her main concern with placement decisions was matching a child with a classroom environment most conducive for learning.

Those in smaller schools with only one classroom per grade level had other perspectives about communicating with the parents of multiples. With one classroom per grade level, Principal E said she does not get many teacher requests in her small closely-knit community school. She continued, "I know all of the students and most of their parents by their first names. I'm confident they know they are able to come in and talk to me about anything at any time."

As administrator of a school with a similar population of about 200 students, Principal F said he had two sets of twins in his school and both sets of parents had talked to him extensively trying to determine the best possible classroom placement for their multiples. He said that he stresses to his teachers to make phone calls to students' homes--"building bridges" as he called it. He pointed out, in his school, "We don't just call when a child has misbehaved or is in trouble, we make positive calls too." Along that line of thinking, Principal I shared, "I believe

effective communication is crucial to a student's success." She said she works hard to keep the lines of communication open among her school, teachers, and parents. She also said she encourages parental participation as it helps her understand the needs of those she serves.

Principal H said he always looks forward to meeting new students and their parents and welcoming them to his school, adding, "The message I want to convey to them is that they are an important part of this school and our community." He shared that he lives in his school's community and feels very much in tune with the families he serves because he is in constant contact with them through church, civic organizations, and athletic events. When he has a decision to make, "I want to become as informed as I can about the issue or issues. I'll talk to everybody involved so I can gain an understanding of the situation from their perspective." Furthermore, he stated he was a firm believer that children needed to be heard, too.

Likewise, Principal J said he loves meeting the new people coming to his school and encourages parents to take advantage of his open-door policy. He expanded on the importance of effective school-home communication by sharing a personal experience wherein he said he was "victimized by a school administrator who was seriously lacking in communication and social skills." The dreadful encounter he spoke of involved a situation that evolved as his wife was attempting to register their twins for kindergarten. With that said, he rebounded quickly by sharing how thankful he was for this unpleasant incident. "That experience alone taught me volumes about how we as a school communicate with parents." He added, "It was classic, a textbook example of how not to communicate if ever there was one!" He continued by telling me his wife had always imagined her babies being in the same classroom when the time came for them to enter kindergarten. With much enthusiasm, she hurriedly rushed off for the anticipated kindergarten registration. However, those dreams were quashed when she was rudely informed

by a school secretary that it was always the school's policy to separate twins. His wife explained that she preferred and was requesting that her twins be placed in the same classroom. Again, she was told, with some rolling of the secretary's eyes, that it was *always* their policy to separate twins [he enunciated the word "always" with much animation and throwing up his arms].

Flabbergasted, his wife promptly scheduled a meeting with the principal to discuss this dilemma. Sure enough! The principal confirmed what the secretary had been trying to tell her: It is always their policy to separate twins! Dismayed, she asked the principal how he had come to develop his blanket policy without even as much as talking to her or her children. He explained that his years of experience had shown him separation was the best policy. Moreover, he hinted to her that he thought it was the mothers who wanted twins to be together, not the twins themselves.

Principal J interjected here that this incident happened at a time while he was working in the private sector when they were living in another state. His wife, very upset, called him at work and told him how the registration had turned out; he called the principal. He told me that the principal "was as smooth as a used-car salesman" telling him how separating the twins was so much better for them and how they would develop individually and have a healthier self-concept.

Possibly, because of his personal experience, Principal J said he is very open to ideas and suggestions that students' parents bring to the table. He explained that he felt it was not only his job but also his moral obligation to talk with the parents, the children, and the teachers.

## *Perceptions*

All the principals said that prior to the 2010-2011 school year, if their system had a policy for the classroom placement for multiples, they were not aware of it. However, each principal acknowledged that placement procedures typically were at the discretion of the principal. Although none of their individual systems had a written policy regarding the placement of multiples, common procedure was to separate them--a practice that was bothersome for some of the principals. Several mentioned having to confront difficult parents regarding the issue, but all had been able to resolve the issues to everyone's satisfaction.

All of the principals shared a personal story or talked about an on-the-job experience that produced a variety of perceptions regarding multiple-birth children. Their perceptions indicated (a) a lack of knowledge and understanding relating to the dynamics of the relationship between multiples, (b) a negative view at times of prior experiences with parents, and (c) an assumption that separating multiples will help them to develop their own personality or individuality.

The researcher learned through these interviews that some of the principals' perceptions were primarily based on myths and other untruths and misinterpretations. Some of the principals' perceptions regarding multiples changed after they became educators; however, the principals who reported life experiences with multiples in their families or backgrounds were the most knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of multiples.

Prior to becoming an educator Administrator B's perception of multiples was "pretty much nondescript." She elaborated:

Multiple-birth children, to me, were just like any other kids--they're just kids. I always thought twins dressed alike for the attention they got. Maybe I was a jealous kid, you know? I remember a set of twins in my second-grade class and they were always ganging up on me. They were mean to me and I thought that since they were a team, you know, I didn't stand a chance of standing up against them. Thank Goodness they moved in the third grade! I was free of them! [laughs]

Her negative childhood experiences had tarnished her perception of multiples. She said she gained a new perspective about multiples when she became a teacher and had an opportunity to interact with them on a different level. Prior to this she would have said, “split multiples and the sooner, the better!” Principal B said that her first assignment was teaching fifth grade in a middle school with grades five through eight. When she picked up the class roster from her principal, her eyes were immediately drawn to two names in the middle of the list that were highlighted and had the word “twins” written over the names. The first thing she asked him was if the twins were identical. He told her he did not remember if they were or not, but their momma did not want them separated, so he gave them to her because she was young, energetic, and enthusiastic. Reminiscing, she added:

He seemed to have a negative attitude about the twins and them being together, like his authority was challenged or something. I remember thinking he had disrespected them when he marked through their names and wrote *twins*, like he didn’t value them as individuals.

These identical twin girls were completely unlike the ones she had known in second grade. She observed that in addition to being economically disadvantaged, they were extremely quiet and shy, they were quite a bit smaller than their peers were, they wore thick glasses, and they struggled academically. They seemed to gain confidence from the support they gave each other. Principal B further explained:

The girls were so shy, and they didn’t interact with the other kids right off, but once they adjusted to school and everything, they started branching out and making friends of their own. Even after that, they still seemed to need each other, but they had really progressed!

Principal B continued to say that the end of the year had brought good things--the girls made gains academically and were more outgoing. She had begun to embrace the multiple-birth relationship almost as a sacred bond for these girls.

When asked why she had developed her policy to always separate multiples prior to the new legislation, Principal A explained, “Children are to grow independently and individually, which is, after all, the purpose of school.” She said she believes that it benefits the children more to be separated, and that she would not consider multiples as “special needs” unless they had been identified as such. From her experiences with multiples beginning school, she said, “It’s not unusual for multiples to appear to be developmentally behind their peers when they begin school.” This, she said, was apparently because they were multiples.

Principal D told me that presently his school has one set of triplets and three sets of twins. Regarding his thoughts on multiples being in the same room or in separate rooms, he offered, “I’m from the old school.” I asked what he meant by that and he said, “We ought not to coddle them so much; need to let them grow up.” How does that thinking apply to the classroom placement of multiples, I inquired of him, to which he replied, “When they start to school, they need to be in different rooms to develop their own sense of self and not become known as ‘the twins’ or ‘the triplets.’” I asked why he felt so strongly about this and he said, “If we keep them together too long it retards their individual growth.” To clarify, I asked if he was saying all multiples should always be separated. Principal D explained:

If the kids don’t have developmental problems and can function on their own, they ought to be separated. But, if they do have some kind of problem or something like that, they might need to be together, if they can get along.

Principal D said that he had heard some myths about multiples and reckoned that maybe some of them were based on the truth, but he said he did not pay too much attention to them. “In the end,” he admitted with a compassionate expression, “they’re all just kids and we do whatever we have to do to get them through school and ready to move on up to the next level.”

Administrator G, who has twin daughters, said as the father of twins 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. From his perspective as a parent, Principal G said he understands why parents want to keep their multiples together:

It's a lot easier for them [parents] to be involved with their kids, helping with projects, or going on field trips, volunteering in the classroom, doing homework, and it gives you more time for parent-teacher conferences. Multiples being in the same room can save you a little money too. You only have to buy one teacher a Christmas present and only have to make cookies or cupcakes for one classroom [grinning].

Principal I reported that her attitude and understanding of multiples was based on her personal relationship with her twin grandsons. As a veteran educator she said her work experiences prepared her to recognize various needs of students. When asked if she would consider multiple-birth children as special needs students, she explained:

Well, that would depend on several variables such as their delivery date, their birth weight, family dynamics, their health, or other issues they may have, if they've been in a preschool program, or if they've gone to a headstart.

She said there was one thing that surprised her; I asked what that was, and she replied, "I was so surprised when I found out how little my teachers know about multiple-birth children."

Principal C said he has four sets of twins in his school and was very interested in what the research had to say about teaching multiples. He readily admitted that his knowledge regarding multiples was limited. As a veteran educator he was eager to learn all he could because Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3105 went into effect on July 1, 2010. He noted that his perception of a special needs child is one who has been diagnosed with a specified learning disability, who has a physical handicap, or has medical or behavioral issues. His undergraduate degree in psychology gave him a different perception regarding multiples. He said he was sympathetic to the needs of multiples and believed that the way multiples are perceived and treated by others can be a source of frustration for them. Regarding the effects of the school environment on a child's physical, personal, intellectual, social, and emotional development, he added:



Anytime a time a kid thinks he's different from other kids, it hurts his self- concept. If he doesn't feel accepted by others, it can take years to overcome. It's not good for kids to be compared all the time, either. I think multiples might have more ADD or ADHD, or maybe they're just more active for some reason, but from what I've seen, they don't have more emotional problems. A lot of times, twins get a reputation for being over-active or hyper, but you have to stop and think, you've got to remember whatever one twin does is magnified times two--or three--if it's triplets.

Principal F said he did not necessarily consider multiples as being different from other people simply because they were multiples, "I think that we have to give some thoughtful consideration to how we place them, especially in the early years."

Preferring separation but not totally opposed to it, Principal H said, "If twins are too quiet and reserved, they might need their brother or sister until they adapt to the school environment." He said he discovered through his experiences with all parents that the majority just want their children to have a sense of security as they adjust to a new environment.

Principal E added:

I don't necessarily believe you have to separate twins or triplets for them to develop as individuals, but if there's something major going on at home like the parents separating or getting a divorce, they probably need to be together for some feelings of stability.

Principal J said he had plenty of life experiences with multiples. He is married to a twin, he is the father of college-age twins, and he has several multiple-birth children in his school. He said his perceptions about multiples did not differ greatly from those for other children. He offered:

To me, all children are basically the same and at the same time, they are uniquely different. I've seen times when they've all needed a little special consideration. Look at how many different kinds of kids and situations you can find in any classroom on any given day. It doesn't matter who they are or where they're from, or who their momma and daddy is...at the end of the day, there's just one thing that's common to all of them--that's the reason they are all with us--and that is their education and we have to teach them regardless of what their circumstances are. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so good, and I've seen it about as horrid as it can get. But, we make an effort to help the kids succeed, not because of their home environment, but in spite of it!

## *Culture*

There was a widespread consensus among the participants that one of the most crucial responsibilities of a school leader is to create a school culture that “supports,” “encourages,” and “nourishes” its students through “visionary leadership,” “school’s mission,” or the “values” that influences how the school functions. “Compassion,” “purpose,” “attitude,” “building blocks,” “dedication,” and “commitment” were some of the words or phrases that came out of the interviews when we discussed a school’s culture.

Principal A said she recognized that compassion toward others was an effective component in building a positive school culture. While working with many different family configurations, she said she consistently put herself in their place as a way to relate to them. When I asked if she could recall how that worked for her while working with multiples, she told of a time when the young mother of triplets came to register them in kindergarten. She related:

When she showed up at registration, she wanted to talk privately to me; she told me she was scared to death for them to go to school. I asked her why she felt that way and she just busted out crying, and told me she’d been so busy with her job and taking care of them and the baby, she had a 2-year old too, that she hadn’t ever sat down and thought about the day that they would go to school. She said she didn’t know what to do; she said she knew what *she wanted*, but she didn’t know what was *best for them*. She had mixed feelings about them being in separate rooms. She wanted what was best for her kids.

Principal A said she felt much compassion for this young mother because she had always worked herself and she knew how busy she was and she had only one child. She said she just could not imagine having three infants and going to work every day and then also having a 2-year old. She said she was able to ease some of the mother’s anxieties by letting her know that they [her school] understood her position and that they [school] would be acting in the best interest of the children. She explained further:

All I did was just sit down and take some time to listen to this woman, and it made all the difference in the world. She understood that we cared about her and her children. I told

her she was always welcome to come in and talk. I wanted her to know we were a team and we were kid-friendly.

Along those same lines, Principal B said she wanted the children in her charge to be happy and feel secure. She conveyed that she felt this could best be accomplished by creating a school culture that reflects that goal:

I want the kids' parents at my school to be involved, to feel like they have a voice. I want them to be a part of 'us.' We need them! We have to embrace them and welcome them in, and get to know them. We have to provide them with opportunities to tell us about their kids, what we need to know about them, what they need from us, what we can all do to help make our school the best it can be for them. That's part of our school's mission, to provide a nurturing environment and help them love leaning; we have to let them see that we value them. That way, we all win!

Principal C said that a school principal has to be flexible in so many of the tasks related to performing his or her duties. Regarding flexibility and making placement decisions, he offered, "My attitude will either promote a school culture that welcomes parental involvement or it's going to create a toxic culture that's deadly to the type of school culture that I envision for my school."

Unlike the other administrators, Principal D contributed:

Now, I know this is going to sound bad, but I don't encourage parents to get too awfully involved because it can become a power struggle. You can't get too chummy with parents because they start wanting special favors and then they get mad when you don't cut them any slack.

Explaining a bit more, Principal D acknowledged that he knows he's not known as a warm, fuzzy kind of person or principal, and he does not run his school that way. To his justification, he said:

I don't deal very well with nit-picky trivial stuff. The people here know if something's bad wrong, they can always come to me. They know I am committed to this school, and they trust me to do the job I was hired to do, and that's to run this school!

Principal E said her school was small enough that she knew all of her students and most of their parents by their first names. She shared that parents felt at ease approaching her with

any type of situation and with her open-door policy, she was usually available to them. She conveyed her opinion as to why parents felt this way:

Our school family treats the children, the parents, and each other with respect. I'm talking the whole school; I mean the kids, the custodians, the cafeteria staff, and the office staff--that's our school, we're a nourishing school.

She added that she loved her little rural school and was proud of the accomplishments of all the students.

In another small school setting, Administrator F said that the encouragement his faculty and staff members provide to the students in their studies and to the parents in their involvement with the school has shaped a culture of which he is proud. He continued:

We get to know our students and their families because we encourage them to be a part of our school and their child's educational experience. I think I'm pretty safe in saying that parents feel welcome to come and talk to any of us at any time. We're always encouraging them to come and see what we're doing.

The best policy for creating a positive school culture according to Principal G is to develop a strong two-way support system. He said the culture of his school was built on the support they got through parental involvement by giving power to the parents' voices. "But," he added, "support between the home and the school is a two-way street. We all have to be on the same page."

Principal H said he cared deeply for the community he serves:

I'm dedicated to this school and this community. I keep tabs on my kids who are lacking in motivation or those that have some behavior issues; I keep in touch with their parents--many I'm on a first-name basis with. The majority of the parents in this community are dedicated to their children. They want the school to be able to provide their children with a sense of security in the school.

Principal I summed up the relationship between having a purpose and setting goals by saying:

Purpose and goals are necessary for student success and school success. I have a purpose and a goal for welcoming parental input in my school; my purpose is to involve parents and my goal is to create a school culture that is proactive rather than reactive.

Principal J spoke of the importance of school culture. He detailed:

A school's culture influences everything that goes on in the school; it's what the school and what its people stand for. Culture impacts the order a school establishes for itself, the procedures you establish for how you do things, how you treat people. It's student expectations or expectations from parents, teachers, or the principal. It's about accountability and flexibility. A school's culture, that's the core of education.

Principal J. summed up culture at his school by saying, "How my school is perceived by the students, parents, and the community I serve is largely based on how they perceive my attitude and how I do things--that's what our culture is."

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the perceptions of principals in kindergarten-through eighth-grade schools regarding the classroom assignment of twins and other multiple-birth students. Based on this rationale, I constructed a theoretical framework to discover what local, district, or state policies guide principals in making classroom placement decisions for multiple-birth children; to discern what training principals have received that prepares them for the placement of multiple-birth students; to examine what other sources assist principals in placing multiple-birth students; to determine what knowledge principals have regarding the unique needs of multiples; and to gain insight into principals' perceptions about how to best meet the needs of multiple-birth students. The theoretical framework consisted of the following constructs: (a) learning environment, (b) meeting individual needs of all students, (c) communication, (d) perceptions, and (e) culture.

#### *Research Questions and Summary of Findings*

##### *Research Question #1*

What local, district, and state policies guide principals in making placement decisions for multiple-birth students?

Examination of the 10 interviews conducted for this study revealed that 10 out of the 10 participants were aware of Tennessee State Board of Education Policy # 4.208, Parent and Family Involvement, revised on January 31, 2003, that recognizes the family and the school share in the responsibility of a child during the time he or she attends public school (Tennessee

State Board of Education, 2010). Further, Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3105 states that in determining the classroom assignment of multiple-birth siblings no school or board of education shall place multiple-birth children into different classrooms solely due to the children being part of a multiple set effective July 1, 2010 (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2010).

Additionally, the research for this study confirmed that none of the five school systems previously had a formal policy for the classroom placement of multiples; it was common practice to separate multiples. Moreover, none of the respondents reported the existence of state or district policies. The principals reported that if their placement decisions were challenged by parents, they would rescind those decisions as they had no written board policy to support them. The only exception was for schools that had only one classroom per grade level. Two of the 10 principals stated they had received requests to separate twins; all of the other parental requests were for keeping the multiples together.

The principals' placement practices prior to the July 2010 legislation were consistent with research. All 10 principals agreed that their main concern in the decision-making process was acting on what was in the best interest of the child. Prior to the newly enacted legislation the principals' practices were based on their beliefs. One principal was steadfast in his belief that multiples should be separated and said he would push the issue with parents. Five principals indicated they preferred to separate multiples and if the parents did not make requests, their practice was to separate. The remaining four participants indicated they were flexible and typically sought preferences from the parents and the multiples before making a decision. All of the principals' prior practices gave exception to special considerations based on external circumstances: family situations such as illness or death of immediate family member, parental separation or divorce, and health problems of the multiples. All agreed that before decisions are

made, an evaluation should be done, the children should be monitored, and adjustments should be made if needed.

Some of the reasons participants gave in defense of their practice to separate included:

(a) it retards their individual growth, (b) develops a positive concept, (c) to develop as an individual, (d) to develop his or her own personality, (e) to learn to function as an individual, (f) to learn how to be an individual, (g) to be independent, (h) different academic or academic abilities, (i) developmental differences, (j) to not become too dependent, (k) constantly being compared, (l) class disruptions, (m) too dominant, (n) too passive, and (o) not being able to get along.

Participants who stated they did not have strong feelings to separate or to keep multiples together did not offer reasons to defend their prior policies. Some of the reasons participants gave to keep multiples together in one classroom were:

(a) only one classroom per grade level; (b) convenience for the family; (c) one multiple needs the other--separation anxiety; (d) they can't concentrate if separated; (e) the multiples want to be together; (f) external circumstances: family situations such as illness or death of immediate family member, parental separation or divorce, or health problems of the multiples, (g) a need to eliminate additional stress for the children, and (h) parents' requests.

Many of the participants reported that parents often looked to them for advice regarding their children's placement. Several of the principals said they had a policy to incorporate a team approach to focus on the best long-term interests for the children. The teams included current teachers, school counselors, administrators, parents, and the children. Prior to Tennessee's twin law, 7 of the 10 participants' policies included getting acquainted with the multiples and seeking their preferences.

The findings for research question #1 were consistent with the research of Hay and Preedy (2006) as well as Beauchamp and Brooks (2003).



## *Research Question #2*

What training do principals have to prepare them for the placement of multiple-birth students?

Mascazine (2004) stated that many educators felt they were adequately prepared to teach multiples based on their years of teaching experiences “without consulting current research on the subject of educating multiples” (p .1). In 1989 NOMOTC (2000) conducted a survey of 1,423 teachers and administrators in the United States. Over half of the survey respondents indicated there should be a policy to separate multiples in school because separation would help the children develop a positive self-concept and promote intellectual growth. The same study indicated that only 15% of the survey respondents said that educating multiples had been addressed in their college course work (NOMOTC, 2000). All of the respondents, both parents and teachers, said that the home and school should work together in deciding on the placement of multiples in school. However, 43% of the teachers surveyed stated that if there were two classrooms, then twins should be separated (NOMOTC, 2010).

None of the participants in this study was able to recall being taught the needs of multiple-birth students during his or her preservice teacher training or in graduate level administrators’ training. All of the principals indicated their on-the-job training had prepared them to make classroom placement for multiples. All of the participants stated they felt qualified to make sound decisions regarding the classroom placement for multiples even though they had received no formal training. One participant (with an undergraduate degree in psychology) stated he felt qualified to place multiples but wanted to learn more because of the new legislation. He also said he looked forward to learning the results of this study. Another

respondent indicated confidence in placing multiples but expressed a desire to learn more about educating multiples since becoming a grandparent to twin boys.

The findings for research question #2 are consistent with previous research.

### *Research Question # 3*

What other sources of guidance assist principals in placing multiple-birth students?

All but one of the principals indicated that they sought advice from previous teachers before making recommendations for classroom placements. Another source that most of the principals looked at was the academic and developmental growth of the children. Half of the principals said they made the initial call to parents for input about their multiples' classroom placement for the next year, four principals preferred to let the parents contact them and said if they did not hear from the parents, they would separate the multiples, and one encouraged communication with parents as a way to ensure success for the student and the school. Almost all of the participants suggested that they were open to parents talking to them one-on-one with any type of issue. Examination of the responses revealed that at one time or another in their careers, half of the principals had made classroom placement decisions based on myths. One participant stated that it is common for multiples to be smaller than their peers because of being born a multiple and that was a good indication they should wait a year before enrolling in school. Others took into consideration if the children had participated in preschool, daycare, or headstart programs as a source for guiding their decisions.

The principals of lower grade classes indicated they were more aware of developmental issues related to younger children and used that as a source for helping them make determinations. Five of the middle school principals' responses indicated that separation did not

seem to be problematic in their school environments. A report from 2001 issued by the NOMOTC (2010) concluded that an educator's best resource in making placement decisions was generally the parents.

Using the tools of classroom management was a source that guided the principals' decisions. One noticeable concern expressed by all of the principals throughout the interviews was that of creating a learning environment, classroom environment, or school environment that was conducive to learning. For several respondents, emphasis was placed on finding the right combination of teaching styles, learning styles, and personalities; they then determined how these could mesh to promote optimal learning outcomes. Some of the participants likened placing multiples in the same classroom to having best friends in the same classroom--a practice they said could create havoc. Five of the 10 participants said they did not believe it was a good idea to dress multiples alike, as that alone would be a distraction to the other children as well as an inhibition to the multiples' individual growth and independence.

Interestingly, in a study conducted by Gleeson et al. (1990) educators ranked the attributes of multiple-birth children as justification for classroom separation; educators listed dependency or reliance, restrictions on each other's language, social maturity, and ability as the most common reasons for separation. Parents were asked the same question with similar results: concerns for dependency or reliance, opinions of the twins' language, social maturity, and restriction of each other. The only difference between the teachers' and parents' ratings was the parents' desire to acknowledge the wishes of their children regarding staying together or not (Gleeson et al., 1990).

Overwhelmingly, the principals of lower grade levels said they sought more outside assistance and thought more critically before making final decisions. One principal stated that he

had made a classroom placement based on information gained from watching an episode of the TV program, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

With the exception of the previous statement, the findings for research question #3 are consistent with previous research.

#### *Research Question # 4*

What knowledge do principals have about the unique needs of multiple-birth students?

Novotny (2001) discussed the lack of research designed to educate parents, teachers, and school administrators about the special social and psychological factors that affect multiple-birth children and their families. For example, during the interview one of the participants alluded to “that nature vs. nurture thing” as the only thing he remembered about multiples. The fact that many of the participants said they would choose to separate multiples is an indication that they are not knowledgeable of the problems common for multiples and the implications separation could have on school success.

A majority of the participants said that even though they preferred to separate multiples, they would consider any conditions of the children’s birth that might impact their learning. Hay and Preedy (2006) wrote that the multiples’ actual birth date is extremely important because if a school has strict rules regarding a child’s birthday to register for school, the children will be forced to begin school a year before their “correct” year. All of the participants, even those who staunchly supported separation, conceded there are times when all children, as well as multiples, need special consideration. However, unless the multiples’ physical appearance displayed obvious visual clues of exceptionality, 8 of the 10 principals assumed they were no different from their peers.

Another source of guidance for some principals came from background relationships they had with multiples. Personal experiences with multiples as children or grandchildren enabled some of the principals to advise parents of multiples who were not ready for school. As a result of life experiences, a few of the principals in this study stated that they have advised parents to wait an extra year before letting the children begin school, have provided encouragement, and have empathized with the parents. One administrator stated that she has suggested several times to hold youngsters out of school for a year. This is in accordance with good policy according to Hay and Preedy (2006) who recommended when evaluating multiples they should be compared to children a year below them and suggested that parents might want to hold their multiples back another year while the children catch up.

Many of the interviews focused on multiples with different academic, physical, emotional, or developmental conditions, reading problems, ADD, ADHD, audio-visual problems, processing disorders, and intellectual disabilities. The findings of this study revealed that all of the principals agreed that when these conditions are present, they would act in the best interest of the child. Hay and Preedy (2006) wrote that problems were more common for multiples, and the authors wanted people who work in special education to be aware of these concerns. Other researchers revealed that in order to better meet the needs of all students, school administrators and school personnel should be aware of other issues that could affect multiple-birth children (Eric Digest, 1998).

Overall, there is a general lack of knowledge among the participants of this study regarding the unique needs of multiple-birth children. Six of the 10 principals stated a deficiency in knowledge regarding the unique needs of multiples. Thus, the results from this study are

consistent with prior research about the knowledge of principals concerning special social and psychological factors that could affect multiple-birth children and their families.

#### *Research Question # 5*

What are principals' perceptions regarding how to best meet the needs of multiple-birth students?

This qualitative research study revealed more insight than was gleaned from the review of literature. This study provided insight for understanding principals' perceptions regarding the classroom assignment for multiple-birth children. The interviewees' responses showed a wide range of perceptions that they said influenced their practices prior to Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3105. All of the principals talked about their guidelines and policies regarding the placement of multiple-birth children prior to the new legislation. Numerous reasons were cited by the principals in explanation of their individual established policies. Nine of the 10 principals defended their unspoken policies.

All of the principals cited parental involvement as the most influential of the factors influencing their placement decisions. The principals said they typically honored parental placement requests if the parents initiated dialogue with them and asserted their wishes for their children's placement. If a parent heavily protested the principal's decision regarding separation, he or she eventually had to honor the parents' wishes, as there was no existing system-wide policy to govern that decision. A majority of the principals further defended their tendency to separate multiples by stating they monitored the students' academic performance and social growth. All of the principals interviewed stated that they had made changes in their placement policies during the past year. All of the principals indicated that they did not have a written

policy on school-to-home materials such as student planners or school handbooks. Additionally, all 10 principals said that they did not verbally communicate any type of classroom placement to the parents or the community. Several principals said they felt parents were unaware of Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3105.

All of the principals expressed a desire to create a school, classroom, and learning environment that was conducive to learning. However, during the interviews, a few responses regarding their perceptions of classroom placement for multiples did not seem to strongly support that claim. Interview responses revealed widely held views regarding classroom placement for multiples. A few of the principals revealed a tendency to do what they wanted to do rather than do what was in the best interest of the children because “that’s how I’ve always done it,” or “years of experience has shown separation to be the best,” or “it’s my job to run this school.” Further, to separate multiples routinely without having a basic knowledge of their needs, to make placement decisions without seeking current information from research-based studies, or to refuse to consult with parents, previous teachers, or the multiples does not demonstrate a strong desire to create a learning environment for all children. A couple of the principals articulated their disdain for parents telling them “how to do their jobs, especially parents lacking respect for education and authority,” or “parents who didn’t have any tact and diplomacy,” or “those who were deficient in effective communication skills,” or simply “the ones who just like to complain.” One stated that he did not encourage parental involvement because that usually led parents to expect preferential treatment.

On the other hand, results revealed that although many of the principals initially preferred to separate multiples, they all generally agreed that they would do whatever was in the best interest of the child. One participant said she did “not care a bit” to listen to what the parents had

to say, but she would make the decision based on what she felt was best for the children even if that was not what the parents wanted. Although the principals overwhelmingly stated that they preferred to separate multiples, they said that they found parental input greatly beneficial.

Thus, the findings for research question #5 are consistent with previous research.

### *Conclusions*

The principals who participated in this study readily voiced their perceptions about the classroom placement for multiple-birth students and they enthusiastically shared their personal stories and on-the-job experiences in working with multiples. The analysis of the information presented in this study led to the following conclusions:

1. The findings from this qualitative research study are consistent with the findings from previous studies.
2. Prior to Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 1 49-6-3102, it was common practice to separate multiples.
3. Principals did not learn the educational psychology of multiples and its implications regarding developmental, emotional, and academic issues common to multiple-birth students in their postsecondary teacher training or graduate school programs.
4. The only training principals received that guides the decisions they make for multiple-birth students was on-the-job training.
5. Few principals were aware of the needs of multiple-birth children and the implications regarding developmental, emotional, and academic issues common to them.



6. Few principals were aware of the relationship and the bond that exists between multiples and the implications regarding developmental, emotional, and academic issues common to them.
7. Myths about multiples influenced principals' perceptions.
8. Primary school principals gave consideration that was more thoughtful pertaining to the task of classroom placements for multiples than did middle school principals.
9. Most principals stated they believe that separating multiples will promote the children's individuality and foster their independence.
10. The principals reported that a majority of parents request keeping their multiples together in the same classroom.
11. Most of the principals referred to the multiples of whom they spoke about during the interview as "the twins" or "the triplets."

#### *Recommendations for Practice*

Based on the interviews in this study and in accordance with the constructs that emerged from this research, the following recommendations for practice are presented:

1. Schools of education should modify the teachers' education curriculum to include research-based instructional coursework to teach educators the psychology of multiples and their implications regarding developmental, emotional, and academic issues common to multiple-birth children.
2. Principals should enlighten themselves regarding: (a) the educational psychology of multiples, (b) the needs of the multiple-birth child or multiple-birth children, (c) the multiples' relationship and the bond that exists between co-multiples and their

- implications regarding developmental, emotional, and academic issues common to multiple-birth children.
3. Principals should have an understanding of the dynamics of multiples so they can advise parents who seek their professional counsel.
  4. School districts should provide staff development opportunities regarding the attributes of multiples.
  5. Principals should recognize that the parents of multiples are often their best source of guidance.
  6. Principals should look to school psychologists as a resource for guidance in making placement decisions for multiples.
  7. Principals should work with families to help meet the individual needs of each child.
  8. Principals should get to know the multiples in their schools and ask for their opinions when making decisions that affect them.
  9. To help each multiple become independent and develop as an individual, principals should call them by their individual names rather than “twin” or “triplet.”

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

The literature I was able to locate relevant to educating multiples was authored by and pertained to parents, psychologists, or teachers. There is a plethora of literature related to education reform in America and a sparse supply of reliable research-based literature regarding multiples in school. I could find no prior studies that addressed the perceptions of education and classroom placement from the multiples’ point-of-view.

Further studies should be conducted to investigate the perceptions of multiple-birth students in various grades concerning their reactions, experiences, assessments, and conclusions about classroom placement decisions that were made for them. A study of this nature with multiples addressing their school progression and the impact their multiple-birth relationships had on their individual learning experiences might give administrators a better understanding of multiple-birth children and it should add to the existing body of knowledge.

In addition, I would suggest the following studies:

- quantitative studies to gain wider representation of practice policies;
- studies at various levels of schooling; K-5, 6-8, 9-12, and postsecondary;
- principal practices at middle school and high school; and
- studies of quality of data-based decisions by school leaders

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Questionnaire (Pat Preedy)

#### MULTIPLE BIRTH CHILDREN STARTING SCHOOL A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS Pat Preedy

*This questionnaire is for completion by parents and educational professionals prior to multiple birth children starting school. The questionnaire is designed for twins, but may be adapted for triplets or more. It is intended that the questionnaire should be completed in a meeting between the parents and the teacher, as discussion resulting from the questionnaire is as important as the responses to the questions. By the end of the process it is hoped that parents and professionals will have a shared understanding of the children both as individuals and as multiples so that decisions*

#### **Instructions**

*Please tick X the relevant boxes or where applicable write your answers. There is space in the column on the right of each page for further information or comments.*

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1.

|   |                                                | Twin A<br>First born | Twin B<br>Second born |
|---|------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| a | Child's first name                             |                      |                       |
| b | Child's date of birth                          |                      |                       |
| d | Child's sex                                    |                      |                       |
| d | Language spoken in the Home other than English |                      |                       |

2.

|   |                                           |  |
|---|-------------------------------------------|--|
| a | Number of brothers older than the twins   |  |
| b | Number of sisters older than the twins    |  |
| c | Number of brothers younger than the twins |  |
| d | Number of sisters older than the twins    |  |

**TWIN TYPE**

3. Indicate the zygosity of the twins (whether identical or not):

|   |                                   |  |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| a | Identical – one egg – Monogygotic |  |
| b | Fraternal – two eggs – Dizygotic  |  |
| c | Unsure of zygosity                |  |

*Identical twins are formed when one egg splits. Non identical twins are formed when individual eggs are fertilized.*

4. How sure are you of the zygosity of your twins?

|   |                                        |  |
|---|----------------------------------------|--|
| a | Completely (different sex)             |  |
| b | Completely (blood typed)               |  |
| c | Completely (diagnosed by placenta)     |  |
| d | Completely (look so alike / different) |  |
| e | Reasonably                             |  |
| f | Not at all sure                        |  |

*Many people are unsure of twin-type. Sometimes identical twins have two placentas. Sometimes the placentas of non-identical twins fuse so that there appears to be one placenta.*

5. If your twins are identical, did they experience the transfusion syndrome at birth with one being much smaller and paler than the other? Yes  No

**BIRTH HISTORY**

6. What was the length of your pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_ weeks (*37 weeks is normal for twins*)

7. Birth weight: twin A \_\_\_\_\_ lbs or gms  
twin B \_\_\_\_\_ lbs or gms

*Multiple birth children are frequently smaller than singletons.*

8. Number of days in special care (if applicable): Twin A: \_\_\_\_\_ days  
Twin B: \_\_\_\_\_ days

9. Number of days in intensive care (if applicable): Twin A: \_\_\_\_\_ days  
Twin B: \_\_\_\_\_ days

10. Since birth how many times has either twin stayed in hospital?

Twin A: \_\_\_\_\_times

Twin B: \_\_\_\_\_times

10a. Why did they receive treatment?

Twin A: \_\_\_\_\_

Twin B: \_\_\_\_\_

### **CURRENT PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

11.

|   |                                              | Twin A       | Twin B       |
|---|----------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| a | eyesight problems                            | Yes / No     | Yes / No     |
| b | hearing problems                             | Yes / No     | Yes / No     |
| c | speech disorder                              | Yes / No     | Yes / No     |
| d | epilepsy                                     | Yes / No     | Yes / No     |
| e | asthma                                       | Yes / No     | Yes / No     |
| f | allergies                                    | Yes / No     | Yes / No     |
| g | child's handedness                           | Left / Right | Left / Right |
| h | Other (please specify)<br>Twin A:<br>Twin B: |              |              |

12. In your opinion does either twin need additional support in:

|   |                                                                 | Twin A | Twin B |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| a | speech and oral language                                        |        |        |
| b | gross motor skills - running, jumping, balancing, throwing, etc |        |        |
| c | fine motor skills - e.g. using pencil / brush                   |        |        |

**IDENTITY**

13. Are your twins very similar in: *[tick those applicable]*

|   |                        |  |
|---|------------------------|--|
| a | physical appearance    |  |
| b | social skills          |  |
| c | emotional behavior     |  |
| d | affection              |  |
| e | spoken language skills |  |
| f | maturity               |  |
|   |                        |  |
|   |                        |  |

14. Do you make any deliberate efforts to make the twins easy to tell apart?

a) yes  b) no  c) not necessary - easily distinguished

If yes, how?

|   |                                          |  |
|---|------------------------------------------|--|
| a | dress differently - colours / styles     |  |
| b | different haircuts / hairstyles          |  |
| c | name distinguishing badges               |  |
| d | point out subtle physical differences    |  |
| e | point out subtle behavioural differences |  |
|   | Oyhrts(specify)                          |  |

15. How often do family members confuse the twins' identity?

a) most of the time  b) frequently  c) sometimes  d) never

16. Do the twins ever use their 'twinship', especially if they are very alike in looks, to confuse you or other friends and relatives?

a) a little  b) frequently  c) never  d) not possible

**COMPARISON**

17. Do you make comparisons between the twins?

a) often  b) occasionally  c) very seldom  d) never

18. Do other children make comparisons between the twins?

a) often  b) sometimes  c) usually not

19. Do the twins compare themselves? *[tick those applicable]*

|   |                            |  |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| a | in physical appearance     |  |
| b | in popularity              |  |
| c | in terms of adult approval |  |
| d | achievement                |  |
|   | Other (specify)            |  |

**FAIRNESS**

20. Do the twins demand to do the same things at home?

A) yes, often  b) only sometimes  c) hardly ever

**COMPETITION**

21 How competitive are the twins?

|   |                                                   |  |
|---|---------------------------------------------------|--|
| a | they compete constantly with each other           |  |
| b | they co-operate and have pride in each other      |  |
| c | they have a healthy competitiveness               |  |
| d | they compete for you and other adults' approval?  |  |
| e | the twins are jealous and never praise each other |  |

22. If one twin is obviously more talented in a particular area do you find the other will opt out completely?

a) usually  b) sometimes  c) seldom  d) not applicable

**DOMINANCE**

23. Who is usually dominant or leader in the twins?

a) Twin A  b) Twin B  c) dominance alternates  d) not applicable

If dominance is evident, what form does it take?

|   |                                                |  |
|---|------------------------------------------------|--|
| a | one mothers and / or bosses, the other follows |  |
| b | one speaks for the other                       |  |
| c | one invents and leads / bosses                 |  |
|   | Other (specify)                                |  |



24. Do you believe the twins show a tendency to go to opposite extremes in behaviour, personality, interests (e.g. quiet/noisy, indoor/outdoor, outgoing/shy, placid/aggressive)?

- a) usually  b) sometimes  c) seldom  d) never

### FRIENDSHIPS AND DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS

25. Concerning the twins friendships do they?

|   |                                            |  |
|---|--------------------------------------------|--|
| a | mostly share the same friends              |  |
| b | have some separate and some common friends |  |
| c | mostly each have their own friends         |  |
| d | stick together mainly, few friends         |  |

### BEHAVIOUR

Tick against the item if this behaviour is typical.

#### 26. Attention, Concentration, and Organisation

|   |                                                                                         | Twin<br>A | Twin<br>B |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| a | Is easily distracted by external stimuli e.g. noise / conversation                      |           |           |
| b | Cannot follow through on instructions without close supervision. e.g. jobs around house |           |           |
| c | Has difficulty keeping attention on tasks or play activities                            |           |           |
| d | Often does not seem to listen to what is said to him/her                                |           |           |
| e | Often loses things necessary for tasks e.g. toys, pencils                               |           |           |
| f | Often breaks things necessary for tasks or activities e.g. toys or tools                |           |           |
| g | Has difficulty organizing tasks or activities                                           |           |           |
| h | Often shifts from one uncompleted activity to another                                   |           |           |

|   |                                                                                                                            |  |  |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| i | Often fails to give close attention to detail                                                                              |  |  |
| j | Often acts before thinking                                                                                                 |  |  |
| k | Often leaves seat in situation in which remaining seated is expected                                                       |  |  |
| l | Has difficulty awaiting turn in games/group situations                                                                     |  |  |
| m | Often blurts out answers to questions before they are completed                                                            |  |  |
| n | Has difficulty playing quietly                                                                                             |  |  |
| o | Runs about or climbs in situations where it is inappropriate                                                               |  |  |
| p | Often engages in physically dangerous activities without considering consequences e.g. running onto street without looking |  |  |
| q | Often fidgets with hands or squirms in seat                                                                                |  |  |
| r | Often interrupts or intrudes on others                                                                                     |  |  |
| s | Often talks excessively                                                                                                    |  |  |

### 27. Conduct

|          |                                                                                              | Twin A | Twin B |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| <b>a</b> | Often argues with you / other adults                                                         |        |        |
| <b>b</b> | Often loses his / her temper or throws tantrums when he / she does not get his / her own way |        |        |
| <b>c</b> | Often refuses to do things that you / other adults have asked him / her to do                |        |        |
| <b>d</b> | Often does things on purpose to annoy people or to get back at them                          |        |        |
| <b>e</b> | Often gets into fights with other children                                                   |        |        |
| <b>f</b> | Often lies or makes up stories to get out of trouble                                         |        |        |
| <b>g</b> | Has this stolen money - from home<br>- from outside the home                                 |        |        |
| <b>h</b> | Often torments small animals                                                                 |        |        |
| <b>i</b> | Lights fires / tries to use matches                                                          |        |        |
| <b>j</b> | Has been withdrawn from playgroup / nursery                                                  |        |        |

## Emotional Development

28.

|   |                                                                                                                            | Twin<br>A | Twin<br>B |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| a | Has the child often felt sick when he / she was away from his / her parents or family or anticipating being away from home |           |           |
| b | Has the child regularly refused to go to playgroup or nursery?                                                             |           |           |
| c | Does the child often need a parent or other close person nearby to fall asleep                                             |           |           |
| d | Is the child worried a lot about something bad happening to his / her parents or him / herself                             |           |           |
| e | Does this child worry a lot about death or dying                                                                           |           |           |
| f | Does this child follow you around from room to room                                                                        |           |           |
| g | Does he/she find ways to keep from being around people he/she does not know well                                           |           |           |

### SEPARATION AND THE CLOSENESS OF THE TWIN BOND

29. Have you found if one twin is ill or upset the other is affected also?

a) usually  b) sometimes  c) seldom  d) never

30. If one twin is reprimanded do you find the other reacts or is affected also?

a) usually  b) sometimes  c) seldom  d) never

31. Do the twins combine forces to be:

|   | often      | sometimes | seldom | never |
|---|------------|-----------|--------|-------|
| a | helpful    |           |        |       |
| b | creative   |           |        |       |
| c | disruptive |           |        |       |

32. Prior to nursery / playgroup, how much time did the twins spend apart?

|   |               |  |
|---|---------------|--|
| a | Often         |  |
| b | half the time |  |
| c | sometimes     |  |
| d | rarely        |  |
| e | never         |  |

33. The separation was in the form of:

|   |                                         |  |
|---|-----------------------------------------|--|
| a | separate rooms                          |  |
| b | separate child care                     |  |
| c | visiting friends / relatives separately |  |
| d | separate outings                        |  |
| e | hospitalisation of one only             |  |
| f | none (by choice)                        |  |
| g | none (no opportunity)                   |  |

34. If the twins have been separated for more than one day what was their reaction?

|   |                  | Twin A | Twin B |
|---|------------------|--------|--------|
| a | very disturbed   |        |        |
| b | a little unhappy |        |        |
| c | d fairly happy   |        |        |
| d | e very happy     |        |        |
| e | f not applicable |        |        |

35. Were your twins together in nursery?

a) all the time  b) some of the time  c) not at all  d) did not attend

36. Does one twin check what the other one is getting or doing?

Twin A: a) often  b) occasionally  c) seldom  d) never

Twin B: a) often  b) occasionally  c) seldom  d) never

37. At present what do you think each twin would prefer?

|   |                           | Twin<br>A | Twin<br>B |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| a | to be in the same class   |           |           |
| b | to be in separate classes |           |           |
| c | to be in separate schools |           |           |
| d | the twins don't mind      |           |           |
| e | haven't asked them        |           |           |

**Having completed the questionnaire, reflect upon the information with regard to the children as individuals and as multiples.**

*Are the children premature and possibly in the wrong year group?*

*Are they likely to need further assessment to determine if they have special needs?*

*Will separation support the children's individual development or would they benefit from being together?*

*If the children are separated will they need to check what the other is doing?*

*When will the needs of the children be reviewed?*

*Can arrangements be changed in the future?*

APPENDIX B

Letter to Director of Schools

Dr. XXXXX XXXXX,  
Director of Schools  
XXXXXX County  
XXXXXXX, TN XXXXX

Dear Dr. XXXXX,

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University currently involved in the dissertation phase of the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis doctoral cohort program. *My dissertation is entitled Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions.* The purpose of this study is to examine principals' perceptions regarding classroom placement of twins and other birth multiples. I would like your permission to interview K-12 principals in XXXXX County.

After you have granted approval for my study, I will contact the principals via e-mail to introduce myself, explain my research project, and request their participation. The interviewing process will be conducted in a manner to limit the disruption of normal school activities. Participation in this study would be based on their free will.

If you have any questions pertaining to this study, please feel free to contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Eric Glover, at (xxx) xxx-xxxx, or me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,  
Joy Parton  
Doctoral Student  
East Tennessee State University

I \_\_\_\_\_ give Joy Parton permission to conduct her study  
(please print name)  
entitled, *Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perspectives.*

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Director Date

APPENDIX C

Letter to School Principals

XXXXXX XXXXX

Principal

XXXXXX School

Dear XXXXX,

My name is Joy Parton, and I am a school counselor in the Sevier County School System at Sevierville Middle School. I am currently involved in the research phase of my dissertation in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis doctoral cohort program through East Tennessee State University. My dissertation is entitled, *Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions*. The purpose of this study is to investigate kindergarten-through eighth-grade principals' perceptions regarding the classroom assignment of twins and other multiple-birth students.

I would appreciate your participation in my research. Prior permission was granted by the director of your school system.

If you have any questions regarding the study, feel free to contact me at the above email address. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Joy Parton

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

Page 1 of 4

PRINCIPLE Investigator: Joy Brown Parton

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions*

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT

The purpose of this note of INFORMED CONSENT is to explain a research project in which I am requesting your participation. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer. By no means is there any pressure for you to participate in this research.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study will be to examine the perceptions of kindergarten-8<sup>th</sup> grade principals regarding the classroom placement of multiple-birth children in rural East Tennessee.

DURATION:

Participants will be asked to participate in an interview where data will be collected. The interview should last about 60 minutes.

The results of the study will be presented Central Office to be considered for staff development.

Version: September -, 2010

Subject's Initials\_\_\_\_\_



PRINCIPAL Investigator: Joy Brown Parton

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions*

PROCEDURES:

In all forms of qualitative research, some or most of the data is collected through interviews (Merriman, 1998). Therefore, interviews will be conducted by using a script and allowing the questions to snowball as the respondent discusses their experiences and perceptions of the mentoring program. Interview respondents will be determined through purposeful sampling to ensure all respondents are a part of the official mentoring program.

The director of schools in Sevier County, Tennessee, has given his approval of this specific research. Principals at each of the schools also allowed permission.

All interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the participants and will be conducted by the researcher using audio-taping and researcher transcription. The researcher will listen to the tapes in their entirety and then transcribe. Member checking will be used.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES:

There are no alternative procedures. Participation is voluntary.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORT:

No known or expected risks are associated with this research.

Version: September -, 2010

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL Investigator: Joy Brown Parton

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions*

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

By participating in this research project, the participants will broaden their knowledge regarding the education of multiples.

CONTACT FOR QUESTION:

If you have any questions, problems or research related medical problems you may call Joy Brown Parton at xxx-xxx-xxxx or Dr. Eric Glover at xxx-xxx-xxxx. You may call the chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423-439-6314 for any questions you have about your rights as a participant in this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Every attempt will be made to keep the participant's responses confidential. A copy of the records form this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the Principal Investigator's home. The use of pseudonyms will be used when describing the participant's responses in the research project and will be sufficiently changed to protect the identity of the participants. My data will be shared in the final research project; however, the individual participants will be protected unless required by law.

Version: September -, 2010

Subject's Initials\_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL Investigator: Joy Brown Parton

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Classroom Placement of Twins, Triplets, and Other Multiples in Grades Kindergarten Through Eight in East Tennessee Schools: East Tennessee Principals' Perceptions*

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

The nature, demands and risks of this research project have been explained to me and are known. I also understand that I may refuse to participate without penalty. I also understand that my information will be held confidentially at the principal investigator's home and will not be shared unless required by law. I have read and had read to me, and fully understand the informed consent. A signed copy has been provided to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

---

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER DATE

---

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Protocol

#### I. Introduction

1. Warm-up
2. “I would like to thank you for your participation in this study about your opinions regarding the classroom placement of multiple-birth children. Your participation in this study will remain anonymous. This session should take approximately one-hour. Do you have any questions before I begin taping this conversation?”
3. I will have each interviewee sign a consent form.
4. Begin the session.

#### II. Main Interview Questions for principals

1. Do you know how many sets of twins or other birth multiples are in your school at this time?
  - What did you hear from the parents?
  - How did you go about assigning them to classrooms?
  - How much do you involve parents in the decision-making process?
  - How about asking the multiple-birth children’s feeling regarding placement?
2. What are your primary concerns when assigning students to a classroom?
  - What about special-needs children?
  - In what way would you consider a multiple-birth child as one who has special needs?
3. Does your system have a formal policy regarding the placement of twins and other birth multiples?
  - How do parents find out about procedures for placing multiple-birth students?

- If not, how do you determine the placement of twins or other birth multiples in your school?
  - If you had to make a policy, what would it be like or include?
  - Describe a flexible policy for multiple-birth children classroom placement.
4. What factors should administrators consider before making classroom placement decision for any student? How about multiples?
- What training have you had as a teacher or administrator to assist you in making decisions about the placement of multiple-birth children?
  - What can you tell me what you know about the different types of multiples?
  - What do you know about bonding and attachment?
5. What kinds of experiences have you had dealing with the placement of multiple-birth children?
- Have parents of multiples approached you concerning their wishes for the placement of their multiple-birth children?
  - Did they feel strongly either way about the placement of their multiple-birth children?
  - What was the least positive experience you have had with parents regarding the classroom assignment or placement of their multiple-birth children?
6. About how many or what percentage of multiple's parents requested their multiple-birth children to be in separate classes compared to keeping them together
- What were their reasons for wanting to keep the multiple together
  - For wanting them separated?
  - What would you say would be the greatest benefit for multiple-birth children in separate classes? Being together?
    - A. For teacher
    - B. Parents

### C. The children

7. How does the school environment affect the physical, personal, intellectual, social and emotional development for school children?

- How about for multiple births?
- Are you aware of any characteristics of the multiples' relationship with each other that would influence how well they would fit in with their teacher?
- Their peers?
- How do you suppose non-multiple children view multiple-birth children?
- Have you ever had an opportunity to observe multiple-birth children as they interact with the other children?
- How would you compare their self-esteem to other children's?
- Have you observed how well or poorly multiple-birth children share, cooperate and get along with others?

8. Let's talk a bit about a child's development... We know that most multiple children are preterm, so...

- Are you aware of some of the health problems low-birth weight or premature babies are more likely to experience?
- Are you aware of any long term, residual effects of low birth weight or premature birth? Or low-birth weight?
- How does that affect evaluating multiples? Should they be compared to their own age or a year younger?
- What are your feelings about holding multiple-birth children out a year before enrolling them?
- Have you ever advised parents to hold their multiple-birth children back one year?
  - Why? Why not?

8. From your past experiences dealing with multiple-birth children, do you recall any multiples that, in comparison to their non-multiple peers:
- Showed more signs of behavioral or psychiatric problems
  - Seemed more depressed, or anxious, or not as social as their non-multiple peers?
  - Who were more affected with ADD or ADHD?
  - What do you know about multiple-birth children's feelings about the separation from their co-multiple?
9. What is your understanding of how an individual sees him/herself is being responsible for positioning his/her attitudes, behaviors and he/she views him/herself, others and the world?
- What impact do you think hereditary factors affect how a child sees himself,
  - Such as: inherited physical attributes? Mental capabilities? Health? Skin color?
  - Gender?
  - What can you tell me about a child's behavior who feels accepted by others as normal? Or who feels abnormal and unaccepted?
11. How are early childhood experiences important in building relationships in the future?
- How does a lack of stability or unresponsive care lead children to feel helpless or become antagonistic toward society?
  - What factors influence a child's socialization?
  - What do you know about birth-order and how it affects behavior?
  - What do you think about birth order and multiple-birth children?
  - How do you think a child's gender, physical attributes or being a multiple might affect how he/she is perceived by other students?
12. What are your feelings about the belief that separating multiples promotes their individuality and independence?
- How do children form identities?
  - Tell me what the term "individual" might mean for a multiple-birth child.

- What can you tell me about multiple-birth children's sense of individuality?
- Respond to this statement: "In order to understand people, we must see them as entities rather than parts within the context of their physical and social environments."

12. What can you tell me about multiples who were in the same classroom; what were teacher's feelings?

- What were the multiples' feelings?
- How did their peers respond to them?
- What kind of effect did it have on the classroom environment?
- How did the multiples relate to his/her classmates?
- What do you know multiples cheating or "helping" each other?
- What are some sources of frustrations and distress for multiples?
- How about constant comparisons, why is that?
- How about if one needs to be in a gifted program and the other one doesn't qualify?
- Or if one needs to be retained and the other one doesn't?

14. How often should classroom placements be evaluated?

- When should adjustments be made?
- What are some reasons to keep multiples together?
- What are some reasons to separate multiples?

15. Are you part of a multiple-birth equation? If so, could you tell me about your educational experiences?

- Do you have multiple-birth family members, if so, whom and how did schooling go for them?
- Do you have multiple-birth children? If so, tell me about them.
- Do you have any multiple-birth friends? If so, tell me about them.
- In what way do they seem different from your other friends, if any at all?



16. Are you aware of any legislation related to the placement of twins or other birth multiples in school? If so, can you tell me about it?

17. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to share with me?

### III. Conclusion

- “Let me clarify, this is what I understand that you believe to be the most important aspects of our time today.....Do you agree?”
- Ask for additional comments.
- Turn-off the tape recorder. Ask for any off-the-record comments.
- “Thank you for your participation.”

VITA

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