NOMOTC's Guidelines For The Education of Multiples

The general guidelines which follow are intended for use at all levels of education and provide a broad framework within which educators may begin to dialogue on this topic. Further resources will be listed at the end of the paper.

Basic Principles

Due to the ever-increasing number of multiple births in the U.S., and due to the special social and psychological considerations involving multiple birth children, educators and educational training institutions should consider the following:

1. **School should provide an atmosphere which respects the close nature of the multiple bond while at the same time encouraging individual abilities.** A basic knowledge of the psychology of multiple birth children, especially as it differs between identicals and fraternals, is essential. An awareness of the depth of bonding between identical siblings and some same-sex fraternals will promote greater sensitivity to the needs of these children. An understanding that each multiple birth child is unique (even when the child is part of an identical set) will prompt the school staff to recognize and encourage each child's abilities. Educators should learn to recognize each child in a set of multiples individually without resorting to extraordinary means such as requiring identical twins to wear name tags, different color clothes or different hair styles. The children should be called correctly by their own names and not simply referred to as "the twins." The classroom teachers should be able to recognize each child's particular academic strengths and weaknesses. No overt comparisons should be made between siblings in a multiple set.

2. **Schools should maintain a flexible placement policy throughout the early elementary school years.** Consultation with parents and the involved children will provide clearer insights into how the children's needs can best be served. Placement decisions should not be made for the purpose of promoting the children's individuality or for the teachers' convenience and ease of name/face recognition. Successful placement involves a collaborative decision which allows for ease of separation from the parent and the other multiple as well as for successful social and academic growth. These decisions should be reviewed annually to see if they are accomplishing the desired purpose.

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 and classroom management.** Teachers at the same grade level need to coordinate their efforts when a set of multiples is split between their classrooms. Primary-age multiples often experience disappointment, confusion, anger and other negative emotions about their school experiences. These are often the result of teacher-directed activities in one classroom which may be lacking in another. Jealousy and anger may be directed toward the sibling who is perceived to have the "better classroom." Multiples who are separated in same grade classrooms can become a catalyst for improving team-teaching techniques and inspiring a more evenly balanced program of instruction. While this problem may lessen by the middle school years, teachers and administrators still need to recognize the very real problems which placement in separate classrooms can cause for multiple birth students.

4. **Educators should move with extreme caution when considering retention, acceleration, or designation in any one of the areas of exceptionality of one or more children in a set of multiples.** Psychological and social considerations involving the nature of the multiple bond must receive equal weight with academic considerations. The effects of school retention, acceleration, or designation in any area of exceptionality are much greater on a multiple birth child since they may alter the sibling relationship in a profound manner. These effects can range from mild loss of self-esteem and confusion over the status of the siblings in the multiple-birth grouping to a deeper sense of loss of identity with the co-multiple(s) and feelings of anger and rejection. On the other hand, there is a definite need to separate the multiple birth issue from the issue of what is best for the individual child. As a result, the question of retention, acceleration, or designation in an area of exceptionality of a multiple birth child is highly complicated and needs to be approached with full consideration of all the possible benefits and harm which may result from the decision. Teachers needs to be sensitive to the feelings and actions of all co-multiples and alert to possible problems for all of the children. If retention or acceleration is unavoidable, counseling services should be made available to all of the affected multiples.

5. **Teachers at the primary, middle and high school levels should value parental input regarding the nature of the multiples' relationship.** Classroom observations, particularly if the multiples are in separate classrooms, will not provide educators with enough knowledge to make informed decisions which may affect the children's social or psychological well-being. Usually, parents can provide information into the dynamics at work within the children’s relationship at any given point in their development. At the primary level teachers need to become aware of the level of dependency between the co-multiples and respond in a manner which makes each child comfortable. Adolescent multiples may be having difficulty with their relationship as each strives to establish an independent identity. Identical and fraternal relationships will differ, as will relationships between same sex and different sex fraternals. Parents can offer insights which will enable the educator to respond in a more effective manner to the needs of the children.

6. **School districts should provide staff at all grade levels with multiple-related research and reading materials.** Educators should seek out the latest research findings regarding the psychology of multiple birth children and incorporate these findings into their pedagogy. Reading materials regarding multiple birth children should be available in all faculty libraries. Inservice programs related to this topic would benefit the instruction of multiple birth children. Parents of older multiple birth children should be contacted as resource persons. Teachers who are aware of the literature and the issues affecting multiple birth children are another welcome source of support for multiple birth families and may become the vital link between these families and available support groups and programs.

7. **At the university level, schools of education should include research findings into the psychology of twins and higher order multiples in their curricula.** Attention should be paid to preparing teachers who are informed and sensitive to the needs of an increasing population of multiple birth children.