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RESOLVING CONFLICT THROUGH PEER MEDIATION

by
Scott A. Heino

A Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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of
The Graduate School
at
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Approved by
Professor

Date Approved May 5, 1999

ABSTRACT

Scott A. Heino

Resolving Conflict Through Peer Mediation
1999
Dr. Theodore Johnson
School Administration

The purpose of this study is to develop and conduct a peer mediation program in the upper elementary grades at the Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School in order to reduce conflict among students and increase the students' ability to resolve conflicts. An action research methodology was implemented to support a school environment conducive to learning with minimum instances of conflict.

The site of the study is the Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School in Haddonfield, NJ. The population of the study involves all upper elementary students at the school. The population of the study includes 25 staff members as well as the 180 students throughout the three grade levels. Surveys and interviews were utilized to collect data prior to the operational phase of the program. An additional set of surveys and interviews were utilized following the program's operation. The results of the surveys collected after the program was operational were correlated with the surveys utilized prior to the program to determine the program's effectiveness in reducing conflict in the school.

The results of the survey demonstrate no significant decrease in the number of conflicts that occur. The coordinators of the peer mediation program have developed several solutions to further enhance the program in order to achieve success in limiting the number of conflicts that occur at the school.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Scott A. Heino

Resolving Conflict Through Peer Mediation
1999
Dr. Theodore Johnson
School Administration

Each school day students enter Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School with issues that can potentially erupt into a conflict. Conflicts involving verbal harassment and teasing, gossip and rumors, access to possession of valued resources, etc. all contribute to an environment that is not conducive to learning.

The Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program has been developed to assist students in dealing with the daily conflict that occurs in school. The program has not made an immediate impact on decreasing the number of conflicts; however, future changes offer promising solutions to resolving conflict among students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Focus of the Study

On a typical school day, more than 135,000 young people bring weapons to school because they do not feel safe. One out of every six young people in America knows someone who was seriously hurt or killed by violence. Kids are coming to school more frightened and angry than ever before, and their fear and anger walk right through the doorways into the schools (Lantieri, 1996).

Violence in America's schools is a problem that every school district must face. The Haddonfield School District has developed policies to address the problems of violence in schools. At Elizabeth Haddon School a peer mediation program will be established to deal with the conflicts students encounter on daily basis.

Purpose of the Study:

The intern wants to determine the effectiveness of developing and conducting a peer mediation program in the third, fourth, and fifth grades in order to reduce conflict among students and increase the students' ability to resolve conflicts in the Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School for the 1998-1999 school year and in the future.

Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School does not have trouble related to weapons in school; however, every school day students come to Elizabeth Haddon School with issues which can potentially erupt into a conflict. Conflicts involving verbal harassment and

teasing, gossip and rumors, access to possession of valued resources, broken friendships, physical aggression, jealousy, playground disagreements, academic work conflicts, turn taking, and invasion of privacy all contribute to an environment that is not conducive to learning (Johnson, 1995).

Conflicts will not go away. Students are clearly fascinated by and drawn to conflicts. They like to start them, watch them, hear about them, and discuss them. In order to make schools orderly and peaceful places in which high quality education can take place, conflicts must be managed constructively without physical or verbal violence (Johnson, 1996). A peer mediation program is a proven method for dealing with conflicts constructively in schools. Students must be taught the skills to deal with conflict to be able to resolve conflicts in the future. In reality, a peer mediation program becomes a discipline program by giving students the procedures and skills they need to regulate their own behavior.

The purpose of this study is to develop and conduct a peer mediation program in the third, fourth, and fifth grades in order to reduce conflict among students and increase the students' ability to resolve conflicts in the Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School for the 1998-1999 school year using an action research methodology resulting in a school environment conducive to learning with minimum instances of conflict. At this stage in the research process a peer mediation program established in the third, fourth, and fifth grades in order to reduce conflict among students and increase the students' ability to resolve conflicts will be defined generally as a peer mediation program.

Each school in the Haddonfield School District is required to conduct a peer mediation program. A good peer mediation program provides the participants with both

the theoretical understanding and practical experience necessary to become effective, balanced, flexible persons (Carruthers, 1996). The purpose behind this program will not only be to reduce conflict, but also to teach the students the necessary skills to resolve conflicts in the future. The vision of the Haddonfield School District states, “The Haddonfield School District will be a community of life-long learners committed to working collaboratively to develop caring, competent, responsible citizens”. Developing a peer mediation program that teaches students the necessary skills to resolve conflicts in the future supports the District’s vision.

The purpose of this study is for the intern to develop the skills necessary to create a school climate, which encourages optimum performance of students and adults through the use of a peer mediation program using an action research design resulting in a school environment conducive to learning with minimum instances of conflict. At this stage of the research the development of the skills necessary to create a school climate, which encourages optimum performance of students and adults through the use of a peer mediation program, will be defined generally as developing the skills to maintain a proper learning environment.

The purpose of this study for the district is to meet the district’s policy of conducting a peer mediation program to deal with conflict within the school setting using an action research design resulting in a school environment conducive to learning with minimum instances of conflict. At this stage of the research the district policy of conducting a peer mediation program to deal with conflict within the school setting will be defined generally as a district policy of conducting a peer mediation program.

Definitions:

It is important to understand the term peer mediation. A peer mediation is a process of conflict resolution in which students work together to solve their own problems.

Limitations of the Study:

The study will be conducted only at Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School. Certainly the research can be referenced by other elementary schools within the district and would prove to be a valuable resource. However, the program will be developed to meet the needs specific to Elizabeth Haddon School. Obviously, the study will only be relevant to the elementary school level. The structure of middle schools and high schools greatly differ, thus peer mediation programs must be designed accordingly. The study will involve students from the third, fourth, and fifth grades. The lower grade levels will not participate in the program due to immaturity. Research has shown students below the third grade do not possess the maturity to participate with success in a peer mediation program.

Setting of the Study:

The study will take place at Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School in Haddonfield, New Jersey. The Borough of Haddonfield, a community of 2.6 square miles, has a population of 11,700. It is a fully developed residential community. Residences are generally single family homes. A few apartments and condominiums have been built near the business district. The zoning code recognizes the historic district as well as the residential character of the community. There is no manufacturing or heavy industry

within the Borough limits; there are medical and law offices, banks, insurance and brokerage company branches, as well as industrial sales offices. Shopping facilities range from art galleries and antique shops to a number of apparel shops, gourmet foods, pet shops, gift shops and music instruction. The total population of the Borough has declined slightly during the last ten years partly due to the reconversion of larger homes from duplex and triplex to single family homes. The constant turnover of 200 to 300 homes per year during the last ten years has resulted in significant public school enrollment increases even though there is no available land for development.

The Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School is located at the corner of Redman and Peyton Avenues in a residential area and serves approximately one-third of the kindergarten to fifth grade students of the Haddonfield School District. The school is heterogeneous grouped with programs in individualized reading and mathematics. The population of the school is over 350 students and a staff of 51. The population of the study will involve a random sample of third, fourth, and fifth graders. Third, fourth, and fifth graders have been chosen as the focus of the study because research supports the belief that students younger than the third grade do not process the developmental skills necessary to be effective peer mediators.

Significance of the Study:

This study is significant for two reasons: (1)district policy states a peer mediation program must be conducted in each school, and (2)a proper learning environment is an essential component in education.

Schools are filled with conflicts. The frequency of clashes among students and the increasing severity of the ensuing violence make managing such incidents very costly

in terms of time lost to instructional, administrative, and learning efforts (Johnson, 1995). Establishing a peer mediation program that reduces conflict among students and increases the students' ability to resolve conflicts will decrease the frequency of clashes and decrease time lost to instructional, administrative, and learning efforts. As a result, a learning environment with minimum instances of conflict will be established which is more conducive to learning.

Organization of the Study:

The study has been organized to develop and conduct a peer mediation program in the third, fourth, and fifth grades in order to reduce conflict among students and increase the students' ability to resolve conflicts in the Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School for the 1998-1999 school year and in the future. The study focuses on four areas: Review of Literature, Design of the Study, Presentation of the Research Findings, and Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study.

The Review of Literature will focus on the research regarding peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. Research relevant to elementary school peer mediation programs will be presented and evaluated as to its importance and relevance to the study. The Design of the Study will focus on the research design. It will identify and describe the design, a description of how research instruments were developed, description of sampling techniques, and a description of the methods used to collect and analyze the data. The Presentation of the Research Findings will focus on the results of the research. Finally, the Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study will focus the major conclusions and their corresponding implications. It will also highlight the conclusions

and implications of the study on the intern's leadership development. It will address the organizational change as a result of the study and the need for further study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Linda Lantieri, author of the article “The Road to Peace in Our Schools,” that appears in Educational Leadership, begins the article reflecting on her early years as a teacher. She writes: “The 37 children in my class had many needs, and many obstacles interfered with their learning. Yet also present in their lives was a sense of community, an unwritten code, reflected by the open doors of churches, the greetings of neighbors, that these were everybody’s children... Times have changed. More and more, chaos seems to be replacing community.”

On a typical school day, more than 135,000 young people bring weapons to school because they do not feel safe. One out of every six young people in America knows someone who was seriously hurt or killed by violence. Kids are coming to school more frightened and angry than ever before, and their fear and anger walk through the doorways into the schools.

Times have changed. Violence in America’s schools is a problem that every school district must face. The Haddonfield School District has developed policies to address the problems of violence in schools. At Elizabeth Haddon School, a peer mediation program will be established to deal with the conflicts students encounter on daily basis.

Linda Lantieri believes schools are no longer responsible for educating only the mind, rather being committed to intentionally creating community and paying attention to

young people's social and emotional lives. Lantieri is the National Director for the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) at the RCCP Center in New York, NY. The RCCP is currently operating in eight school systems in five states. The RCCP is more than a conflict resolution or peer mediation program; it is focussed on transforming the school's culture. It is a comprehensive school-based approach to developing a community of young people and adults who are taught to work out their differences and create peaceable learning communities.

Lantieri presents the RCCP model as having the following components:

1. A K-12 Curriculum: a curriculum that focuses on teaching key skills necessary for a successful RCCP. Examples include active listening, expressing feelings, assertiveness, appreciation of diversity, etc.
2. Professional Development: training for teachers and administrators in conflict resolution skills, implementation of the curriculum, strategies to implement the curriculum into other academic areas, and follow-up support.
3. Student Led Mediations: the mediation program involves a strong peer model for non-violence and an appreciation for diversity while utilizing the necessary skills for working out their own problems.
4. Parent Education: parent workshops are presented on the topic of peace in the family which presents parents with the skills that will be taught to the students to be reinforced at home.

The RCCP model differs from other violence prevention programs in its unique problem solving approach. Problems are talked about openly, people tend to respect one

another, diversity is valued, democratic environment, and sanctions against violence are strong.

The RCCP has been implemented in urban school districts where statistics of violence are rising. However, in the Haddonfield Public Schools District, the number of violent incidents is not comparable with the urban environment. That is not to state that Haddonfield is without incident, only on much smaller basis. As a result, the RCCP with developing a community of peacemakers is not necessary. Haddonfield is actually the epitome of a “community” by current standards. It is sometimes stated Haddonfield students are sheltered in the community to which they belong. However, the RCCP has some components the intern could potentially utilize to benefit the Elizabeth Haddon Peer Mediation Program.

The RCCP focuses on developing a K-12 curriculum in conflict resolution. The Haddonfield Public Schools also believe in this component. Peer mediation programs are required at every level K-12 in the district. The skills taught in the RCCP are also taught in the Haddonfield Public Schools in the form of Life Skills. Life Skills encompasses skills such as cooperation, courage, common sense, etc. Incorporating the Life Skills into the peer mediation program, the intern would establish an excellent avenue to blend the curriculum with the program itself.

A second component of the RCCP that will obviously be the focus of the intern for the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program will be student led mediations. The program will be put into place under the assumption there is a need to help students solve conflicts responsible on their own. To be successful in this assumption, students must be trained to deal with conflicts with other students. Lantieri makes an excellent

point when she states the RCCP is not a substitute for an effective disciplinary policy. Indeed, without strictly enforced sanctions against fighting, students are unlikely to turn to peer mediators for help.

For the purpose of this paper it is necessary to define certain terms that will be utilized often.

1. Violence prevention is a term that refers to programs instituted to combat violence in various situations and environments.
2. Conflict resolution is a term that refers to programs instituted to remedy conflicts in various situations and environments.
3. Peer mediation is a term that refers to one form of conflict resolution. Peer mediation uses the services of another person, an impartial mediator, to help settle a dispute.

The article, “Conflict Resolution as Peer Mediation: Programs for Elementary, Middle, and High School Students” published in The School Counselor, presents three models of peer mediation programs that are able to be implemented at every level of instruction. These are as follows: the total school model, the elective course model, and the student club model.

Before introducing the three models, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of a peer mediation program. As previously stated, a peer mediation program is a form of conflict resolution that uses the services of another person, an impartial mediator, to help settle a dispute. The process stresses interpersonal communication and problem solving activities designed to produce an end result of a resolution that is acceptable to all parties. Mediators are not judges, police officers, or

counselors. A mediator simply facilitates the mediation process that allows the disputants the opportunity to find a solution to their conflict. Mediators usually work in teams of two to encourage problems solving between disputants. Mediations take place among students of similar grade levels as the mediators.

The three models are described as distinct program types; however, they can overlap in operation. The total school model is similar to the RCCP directed by Linda Lantieri. All students are taught the principles and practices of conflict resolution and have the opportunity to function as peer mediators in the peer mediation process. The obvious strength to this model is that every student learns the skills to manage conflict effectively. However, also similar to the RCCP, this model requires considerable time and commitment by the faculty and administration, which in return could be costly.

As stated previously, the necessity for conflict resolution is not a major need of the Elizabeth Haddon School. As a result, the intern feels instituting a total school model is not necessary and will not be accepted by the staff and community. In addition, training a school of students would not be as cost effective as training a smaller number of students. The Haddonfield Public Schools District is in the middle of developing a plan for major construction to adapt to its increasing enrollment. Any additional programs will not be accepted positively by the Board of Education. Although, an interesting note the authors make is the total school model is best suited for the elementary level where teachers have the same students for most of the day and mediations can be made available in the classrooms.

The second model the article presents is the elective course model. The elective course model is based upon offering students the opportunity to enroll in a class that will

serve as the peer mediation program. Strengths of this model include the extensive class time provides a consistent setting for training mediators, as well as the ongoing class time provides other opportunities for instruction on related topics and further leadership development. For example, training becomes much more in depth, scheduling mediations is easy, and following up mediations with feedback is consistent.

The weaknesses of this model should be considered carefully. The training and mediations is limited to students who enroll in the class. As a result, the population representing mediators is not a true representation of the school population. Finally, mediations are restricted to the time period of the class.

The elective course model is not a model that would be successfully utilized in the Elizabeth Haddon School. Students are not given the option to choose courses at the elementary level, thus an elective course can not be established. Students are given the opportunity to join various groups at Elizabeth Haddon, i.e. chess, instrumental, art club, but each of these groups meet during the lunch period for limited amounts of time. Peer mediation needs extensive amounts of time, the time that can not be obtained during lunch. However, characteristics of this program should not be overlooked. For example, regardless of the model, the peer mediation programs rely of the willingness of students to become mediators. The intern recognizes this fact, and is aware that the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program will also rely on the willingness of student volunteers to be its mediators. Also, mediations at Elizabeth Haddon should not take a student away from instructional time. Thus, mediations will be limited to lunch periods. One weakness stated earlier of the elective course model is the restriction of mediation times. The intern believes this is one weakness the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer

Mediation Program will encounter. Mediations will involve a peer mediation coordinator, which is a teacher. Teachers are available during non-instructional times only during lunch within the school day.

The third model the article presents is the student club model. This model involves selecting students from the entire student body and bringing them together at a time and place outside their regular school curriculum. The advantage of this model is the unique opportunity of selecting students who are out of the main stream such as those who traditionally do not get involved in school activities. The main flaw in this model is the lack of time and space to conduct training, mediations, and follow-up.

The student club model is the model the intern will use to develop the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program. Selecting mediators that best represent the population of the student body is essential to developing a program that will be utilized by the students. The students of the school must respect the program and feel comfortable with its mediators. Finding the time to train and support the mediators will be an issue for the intern.

The authors of the article present three stages of the peer mediation program. First the introductory stage, second the training stage, and third the operational stage. The introductory stage involves developing and implementing the peer mediation program. It is necessary to involve all the stakeholders of the program: students, teachers, administrators, and parents. The authors of the article suggest utilizing an advisory committee that represents the stake holding groups to develop the program. The intern plans to use an advisory committee in the development of the program. However, student input will be gathered separately and not as part of the advisory group due to the

age of the students involved. The committee will consist of the guidance counselor, the principal, teacher volunteers, and a parent representative. The authors of the program note the importance of administrative support. Administrative support should not be an issue at Elizabeth Haddon because the district requires the peer mediation program.

One aspect of the introductory stage is informing the stake holding groups of the program itself. The article suggests training sessions, 15-20 hours, for the teachers and staff to familiarize them with the program. Such extensive training will not be necessary at Elizabeth Haddon. Once again, the extensive training of staff is not an option the intern wishes to explore due to cost. However, assemblies developed by the advisory committee will be developed to inform the various stake-holding groups of the program and its place in the school.

The second stage of the peer mediation program is the training stage. Several important decisions are made at this point: coordinators, training the coordinators, issues of mediation, place of mediations, confidentiality, evaluation of the program. The intern projects all decisions regarding the program will be made in collaboration with the advisory committee.

Selecting peer mediators is another aspect of the second stage: training. The article suggests students 10 years of age and above possess the necessary maturity to be effective peer mediators. The group of mediators should total 15-30 utilizing any model. Students should be selected based upon respect of peers, diplomatic, scholastic performance, and diversity. Also, peer mediators should be chosen through three means: self-nomination, peer nomination, and teacher nomination. The mediators should represent a cross-section of the population. It is advisable to start small and grow through

the years. It is better to train a small number of mediators properly, rather than train a large number of mediators poorly. Training should consist of 10 to 20 hours depending on the age level. Ironically, older students require more time in training due to the complexity of the problems compared to the elementary level.

The intern feels the students grades 3-5 will be able to participate in the program. The students will be chosen utilizing the three means previously stated: self-nomination, peer nomination, and teacher nomination. The mediators will also be selected using the criteria mentioned above. The intern plans to train 10-20 mediators as a result of the author's suggestion to start small and grow.

Training agenda are consistent throughout the grade levels. Agendas include: discussion of purpose of the program, basic conflict resolution techniques, exposure to various models, practice of communication skills, and role plays of different stages of the mediation process.

The training agenda will be modeled after a program present in another elementary school within the district. The program present in the other school will not be copied, the intern feels strongly that the program at Elizabeth Haddon School should be unique to the school and designed to meet the needs of its students.

The training stage presented in the article ends with the steps of the mediation process. The author describes 4 steps that should be used in the mediation process at the elementary level: (1) introduction and ground rules, (2) determining facts and feelings, (3) identifying possible solutions, and (4) making an agreement. At the high school level one step should be added, reflections. It should be added at the end of the process to reflect upon the process and the mediation.

The final stage introduced by the authors is the operational stage. The program coordinators serve an important function in this stage. Maintenance, ongoing support, and evaluation of the program are essential to its success. It is also necessary to conduct ongoing training for the mediators to reinforce the skills taught in training. The program coordinators will be responsible for the operational stage duties with the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program. Ongoing instruction will take place to keep the mediators focused on the mediation process and skills.

David and Roger Johnson present two types of conflict resolution programs: violence prevention programs and conflict resolution programs. Violence prevention programs are implemented in schools faced with dealing with violence on a daily basis in large numbers. Violence prevention programs involve metal detectors, patrols in the school by city police, guest speakers such as police officers who advocate avoiding violence, teacher training in physical self-defense procedures to fight off attacking students, and student training in how to manage their anger and think in ways that cognitively mediate violent impulses. Research shows violence prevention programs are not successful in reducing levels of violence in schools. Rather, they are used to provide “political cover” for school officials and politicians.

Elizabeth Haddon School does not have problems stemming from violence on a daily basis and certainly not in large numbers. The components of violence prevention programs, such as metal detectors, are not proponents that would be used in the Haddonfield Public Schools.

The article offers several possible reasons for the failure of violence prevention programs. First, violence prevention programs are poorly targeted. In other words, the

small group of students who commit most of the acts of serious violence and the broad range of violence acts are grouped together as if they are one problem. The reality is different students turn to violence for very different reasons and not everyone is committing these violent acts. Violence prevention programs need to focus their resources on the most violent student. Second, violence prevention programs focus on developing materials without focusing on implementation of the program. Rather than providing the necessary support, violence prevention programs ignore the research on successful programs and do not devote enough time and energy to the program. Third, violence prevention program tactics can not be confused with neighborhood violence prevention programs. The environments are very different and must be treated accordingly. Fourth, violence prevention programs must be realistic in its strengths. Too many factors are influencing students such as guns, drugs, home life, health care, etc. that the school can not control. As a result, schools must be realistic in the results of the program and not promise too much.

Two types of conflict resolution programs that are effective are cadre or total student body programs. The cadre approach emphasizes training a small number of students to serve as peer mediators for the entire school. The total student body approach emphasizes training every student in the school in how to manage conflict constructively by negotiating agreements their conflicts and mediating their schoolmates' conflicts. The authors have developed the "Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers Program", which is a 12-year spiral program with increasingly sophisticated negotiation and mediation procedures taught at each grade level. The "Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers Program" follows six steps for implementation. Step One: Create a cooperative climate.

Conflict can have positive and negative outcomes. Negative outcomes to conflict tend to be a result of competitive or individualistic environments. Students are driven by short-term self-interest and strive to maximize their own outcomes at the expense of others. Positive outcomes to conflict tend to be the result of cooperative environments. Students are not at risk to be violent as a result of the use of higher reasoning strategies, more caring and supportive relationships, and greater psychological health. Step Two: Students must be taught to recognize when a conflict is occurring and is not occurring. Students must be taught the positive outcomes of conflict rather than the violent outcomes usually associated with conflict. Students must be taught conflicts can be managed constructively and produce positive outcomes. Step Three: Students must be taught a concrete and specific procedure for negotiating agreements. The negotiation process must be established to produce a win/win solution to conflict where relationships are maintained if not improved. Using a five-step process the concrete procedure can be established:

Define what the student wants

Describe how the student feels

Explain the reasons for the students wants and feelings

Reverse perspectives in order to view the conflict from both sides

Generate at least three optional agreements

Agree on the wisest course of action to implement agreement

Step Four: Students must be taught a concrete and specific mediation procedure. The mediation process must be instilled in the mediators and practiced often. The procedure should include stopping hostilities, ensuring disputants are committed to the mediation

process, facilitating negotiations between disputants, and formalizing the agreement.

Step Five: The program must be implemented. The experience of mediations is the true teacher of the process. Step Six: Continued training. The mediators must continue to train to sharpen their skills as mediators.

The steps presented by the Johnson brothers certainly have merit. The intern intends to develop a peer mediation program that is cooperative in nature. That students understand that conflict is a normal part of life and positive outcomes can come of it.

A conflict resolution training program becomes a discipline program by giving students the procedures and skills they need to regulate their own behavior.

In the article, "Spend Less Time Refereeing and More Time Teaching," by Meg Bozzone, 10 tips are outlined which must be considered in developing an effective peer mediation program. First, it must be recognized conflict is a natural part of life and can be positive. In other words, use classroom conflict to help children learn to use it productively. Second, create peaceable classroom communities. Utilize all areas of the curriculum to develop a school environment that emphasizes skills such as cooperation and communication. Third, lay the groundwork and teach the conflict resolution skills. Fourth, set up a forum to allow students to handle conflicts. Fifth, maintain effective discipline policies that are clear to students and are not negotiable. Sixth, focus on the positives. Rather than emphasizing the "don'ts", help students identify and practice the positive alternatives to conflict. Seventh, plan a varied program. Use various methods to approach the issue of resolving conflict. Eighth, set a good example. Teachers must model the approach of handling conflicts positively when dealing with conflicts with children. Body language, tone of voice, and active listening must be practiced and

consistent with what we are expecting from them as students. Ninth, be patient.

Teaching and learning new ways to resolve conflict takes time. However, the investment of teaching the skills will last a lifetime. Tenth, have fun. Conflict is a motivation topic, children as well as adults are drawn to it. Use that as an advantage and make resolving conflicts positively fun.

These ten tips offer excellent suggestions for the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program. Previously mentioned authors have addressed some of the tips, however there are a few tips that must be expanded on. The intern feels strongly that setting a good example is an asset to the program all teachers must be aware of. Conflict does not only occur between students, it also occurs between students and teachers. This is an excellent opportunity for teachers to model the preferred behaviors and skills to resolve conflict positively. Also, conflict is of interest to people. Using that interest as an avenue to teach conflict resolution skills is an excellent idea the intern will pursue.

This intern has learned from this review of literature that a peer mediation program can be developed in several ways. However, regardless of the specific program, the components of all programs are similar. It will be necessary to develop an advisory committee to assist the intern in developing a program that meets the needs of the students of the Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School.

Chapter 3: The Design of the Study

General Description of the Research Design

The intern wants to determine the effectiveness of creating and implementing the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program. The program will be developed to address conflicts that occur in the third, fourth, and fifth grades at Elizabeth Haddon Elementary School. The purpose of the program is not to eliminate conflict, but to rather bring positive results to daily conflicts occurring among students. The program will be developed to train sixteen students, known as peer mediators, in the necessary conflict resolution skills to assist peers in resolving conflicts through a mediation process.

To research the effectiveness of the Elizabeth Haddon Peer Mediation Program, the intern will conduct the research in the natural setting of the school environment without manipulating or intervening with that setting. A qualitative research design will be used to determine the effectiveness of the peer mediation program in the Elizabeth Haddon School. Qualitative research is a research design that supports the type of research the intern intends to conduct. Qualitative research is research conducted in a setting without manipulating the variables; it also encompasses fewer rigors than quantitative research as a result of the fact that qualitative research is a working design. Utilizing the working design of qualitative research, the intern intends to follow four steps involving several components.

The first step in the process is the working design. During the working design step the intern will need to establish four key components: (1) who are the subjects to be studied, (2) what is the site of the study, (3) what is the length of the study, and (4) what are the possible variables. The second step in the process is the working hypothesis. During the working hypothesis the intern will develop several hypotheses. Combined with the development of the hypotheses, the intern will introduce foreshadowed problems and questions about the research problem. The third step in the process is the data collection. The data will be collected using surveys and informal interviews. The fourth step in the process is the data analysis and interpretation. A large amount of data will be collected as a direct result of the population of the study that includes 180 students. In order to effectively organize the data, the intern will categorize the data into the following categories: (1) how often does conflict occur, (2) where does the conflict occur, (3) what is the response to the conflict, and (4) what type of conflict occurs. Survey research is probably the single most widely used research type in educational research.

The intern has chosen to use surveys to collect the necessary data to conduct the research. The survey design used by the intern will be a cohort study. A cohort study is a longitudinal study in which a specific population is studied over time. The population involved in the study will include all of the third through fifth grade students at Elizabeth Haddon School. They represent the specific population that will be studied for the length of the research.

Surveys given to teachers and students will identify common conflicts and the rate at which they occur within the Elizabeth Haddon School. The results of these surveys will assist the intern in providing the necessary information to develop the peer mediation

program tailored to the needs of Elizabeth Haddon School. After the program has been implemented, a second round of surveys will be used to determine the effectiveness of the program in reducing the rate of conflict in the school as well as yielding a positive response to conflict.

Description of the Development and Design of the Research Instrument

The instrument used to determine the effectiveness of the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program will be a survey. Two separate surveys will be utilized, a student survey and a teacher survey. The surveys will be developed using two sources. First, informal interviews with students grades three through five will be used to identify conflicts which commonly occur at Elizabeth Haddon School. Second, an interview with the Elizabeth Haddon School counselor to identify sources of conflict which the counselor has observed through normal working situations.

The surveys will reflect the information gathered utilizing the two sources. The surveys will seek to identify types of conflict, where conflict typically occurs, and results of conflict.

The intern intends to use a questionnaire survey. The items of the survey will be constructed to collect data in four areas: (1)how often does conflict occur, (2)where does the conflict occur, (3)what is the response to the conflict, and (4)what type of conflict occurs. The intern intends to use several guidelines for constructing the items:

1. related to research problem
2. clear and unambiguous
3. one concept per item
4. non-leading questions

5. no questions demanding delicate information
6. relevant to respondent
7. appropriate reading level
8. simple, not complex
9. specific when quantitative in nature
10. exhaustive
11. no negative items

There are two types of items used for questionnaires: (1)selected response or forced choice and (2)open-ended. In selective response/forced choice items the respondent selects from two or more options. In the open-ended items the respondent constructs the response. The intern intends to use both types of items in the survey to collect data that reflects the needs of the school. To insure there are no deficiencies with the items, the items will be first tried out in a fourth grade classroom to uncover any problems not apparent by reviewing the items. The fourth grade class is involved in the study and would make an excellent group to use to test the questionnaire items. The questionnaire will be developed to be attractive and easily read. Instructions for completing the questionnaire will be clear and concise. A cover letter will not be used to introduce the questionnaire. The intern will present the surveys to the classroom teachers who will be involved in administering the surveys to explain the purpose of the study and the use of the data.

Description of the Sample and Sampling Techniques Used in the Study

The population of the study involves third, fourth, and fifth grade students at Elizabeth Haddon School. Third, fourth, and fifth grade students have been chosen as the

focus of the study as a result of research which supports the belief that students younger than the third grade do not process the developmental skills necessary to be effective peer mediators or use conflict resolution skill successfully. There are 180 students that comprise the third, fourth, and fifth grades at Elizabeth Haddon School. As a result of the simplicity of surveying all students through the assistance of their classroom teacher, all students grades three through five will participate in the survey. Thus, a sampling technique will not be necessary.

Surveys given to teachers and students will identify common conflicts and the rate at which they occur within the Elizabeth Haddon School. The results of these surveys will assist the intern in providing the necessary information to develop the peer mediation program tailored to the needs of Elizabeth Haddon School. After the program has been implemented a second round of surveys will be used to determine the effectiveness of the program in reducing the rate of conflict in the school as well as yielding a positive response to conflict.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

In a majority of studies, data collection begins with gaining access to the institution where the study will take place. As a result of working within the institution where the study takes place, the intern's data collection will be automatic and unobtrusive. The data collected utilizing the surveys will be collected using a noninteractive method. The intern will not directly interact with the population of the study to collect the data. The intern will present the surveys to the classroom teachers informing the teachers of the purpose of the survey, how the data will be used, and any special instructions. The completed surveys will then be returned to the intern to

organize and analyze the data. However, some data will be collected using an interactive method. All interviews with students will be interactive as a result of the intern directly questioning students. The results of the interviews will be documented by the intern and organized and analyzed with the data collected for the surveys.

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

Through the use of the interviews and surveys data will be analyzed to determine the rate at which conflicts occur and the nature of the conflicts. Using this information the peer mediation program will be developed to address the specific types of conflict most commonly present at Elizabeth Haddon School. After the implementation of the program a second round of surveys and interviews will determine if conflicts have dropped in number as well as the response to those conflicts.

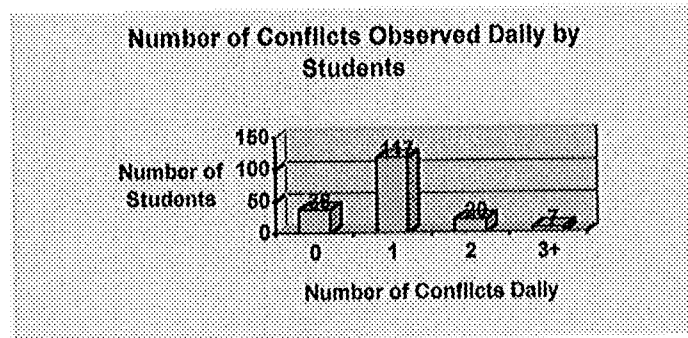
Like most qualitative research, data analysis will be ongoing. By organizing the data into categories, the intern will be able to more effectively deal with the data and report the results.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Findings

The research involved in creating and implementing the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program will be presented in two areas. First, the intern will present the results of the follow-up surveys and interviews. This information determines the effectiveness of the peer mediation program. Second, an explanation of the research results will be presented.

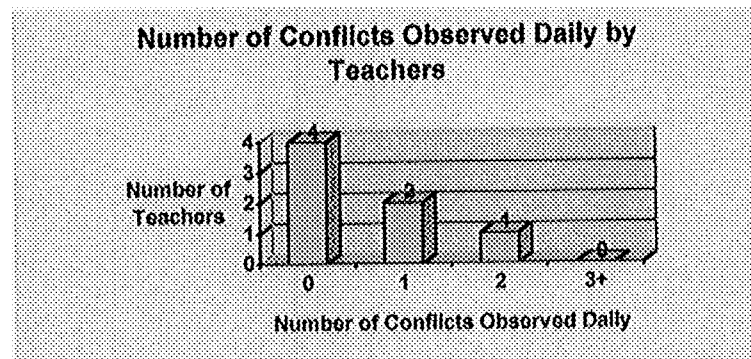
Initial surveys were given to students and teachers in grades three through five at Elizabeth Haddon School. These surveys were used to develop the Elizabeth Haddon Peer Mediation Program to meet the needs of the students of Elizabeth Haddon School. A second, follow-up, survey was used to determine the effectiveness of the program. These surveys were once again given to the entire population of the study. This comprises seven teachers and 180 students. The results of the surveys the teachers submitted greatly varied from those of the students. After compiling the results of the follow-up surveys, it was clear that the peer mediation program had little effect on the study body.

The following table presents the results of the surveys completed by students:



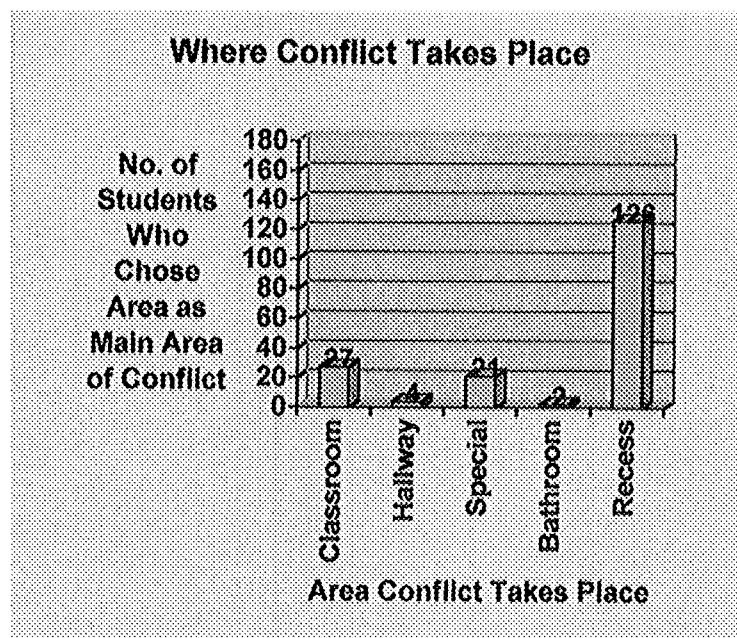
The information provided in the chart demonstrates that students are involved in conflict daily. However, it is important to note that conflict is a natural part of life and should not be misconstrued as negative. Sixty-five percent of the students report being involved in one conflict each school day. This is significant due to the fact that the school did not have in place a conflict resolution program other than the guidance counselor prior to the peer mediation program. However, these results are similar to the results of the initial round of surveys. The results of the follow-up round of surveys prove that there has not been a significant change in the number of conflicts occurring daily. It is important to note that what constitutes a conflict is any altercation that involves a controversy or disagreement. Minor conflicts are reported with the same weight as major conflicts.

Interestingly, once again the teachers provided information very different than that of the students.



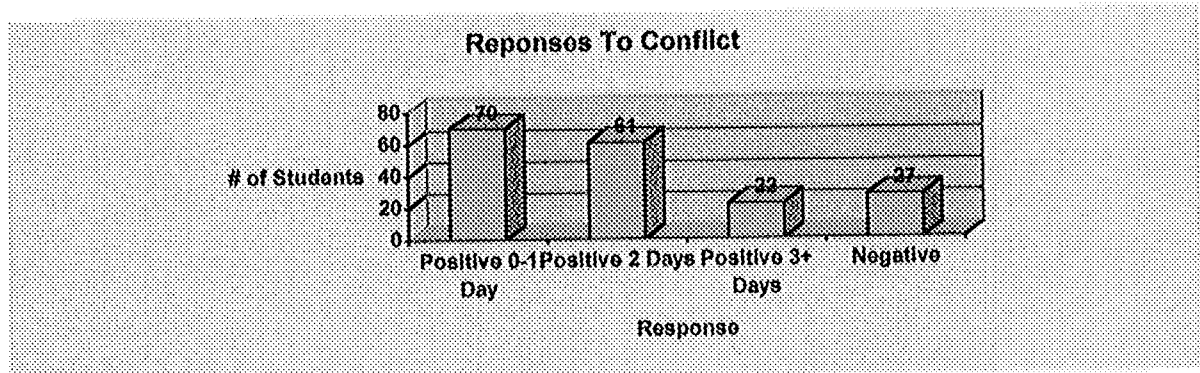
The results of the survey show teachers are not aware of the conflicts that are occurring on a daily basis at school. Seventy-one percent of the teachers report observing one or less conflicts a day. These results are similar to the initial round of surveys. Teachers are unaware of the number of conflicts occurring each day in school. Although, the surveys were also able to provide a reason why teachers are unaware of the number of conflicts that occur on a daily basis.

The following chart demonstrates the results of the survey questions that inquired as to the actual area of conflicts within the school boundary. The results of this chart offer overwhelming evidence as to the reason the teachers are unaware of the conflict.



As the chart demonstrates, conflict is regularly occurring on the playground at recess rather than inside the building. Teachers are not aware of the number of conflicts because they are not present as the conflict occurs and the response that the conflict has. The students are observed by educational assistants on the playground and not the classroom teachers.

The third part of the survey was developed to determine the response to the conflict. The respondents to the survey are given a choice to identify how the conflict was resolved. The results of the survey are as follows:



The results of the survey show the majority of the students solve their conflicts within a three-day period in a positive manner. However, the focus of the intern and the peer mediation program is to assist the remaining 27 students in resolving their conflict in a positive, not negative, manner.

The results of the survey indicate what the research suggests, conflict commonly occurs daily in schools. The two points of the data that should be given special attention is the fact that conflict occurs typically on the playground during the lunch hour and that students have been able to resolve conflict in a positive manner within a three day period. The issue of conflicts occurring on the playground is significant because that is an area of the school that is supervised by adults that are not trained in elementary education. These are adults who have met the minimum requirements of completing sixty credit hours at the college level to become educational assistants. These individuals are people who typically are employed to gain experience with working in education while pursuing a

degree. There is an extremely high turnover of educational assistants at Elizabeth Haddon School.

I think it is important to note that the majority of students are resolving their conflicts in a positive manner within a three-day period. It should now be the focus of the peer mediation program to address the students with conflict that is not being solved.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

Conclusions

The data of the study clearly demonstrates the Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program was ineffective in reducing the number of conflicts in the school environment as well as producing a positive outcome to the conflicts that do occur. In the three months the program has been in effect at Elizabeth Haddon School, there has not been one referral. However, it is clear that conflict continues to occur on a daily basis.

The peer mediation coordinators have arrived at several possible reasons the program has not been effective. First, mediations are scheduled to be held during the lunch hour. Depending on the specific peer mediators that are mediating the session, the mediation could be held during the lunchtime or the recess time of the lunch hour. During informal interviews with students, the peer mediation coordinators have found students are reluctant to go to peer mediation as a result of missing lunch or recess during the lunch hour. The program is designed to meet during the lunch hour because the peer mediation coordinators feel strongly, and the administration agrees, peer mediations should not interfere with instructional time. As a result, the lunch hour is the only time available to hold mediations due to the coordination of the participants: the peer mediation coordinators, the peer mediators, and the disputants. This is an issue the peer

mediation program has little control over adjusting. The lunch hour is the time that must be used for the mediations.

Another reason the peer mediation coordinators feel the program has not been successful is the lack of trust between the student body and the mediators. Confidentiality is an issue that the coordinators have stressed during the introduction assemblies. However, the meaning and seriousness of confidentiality has not been effectively communicated to the student body so that the student body trusts the mediators to maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality is a part of the training and the mediators have been effectively trained in keeping what occurs in mediations private. The coordinators of the program feel confident the mediators can maintain confidentiality; however, they also feel this is an issue that the program must establish through practice.

An additional reason for the lack of success of the program is a decreased commitment from the administration, teachers, and staff. As demonstrated in the surveys, most conflict occurs out on the playground during the lunch hour. The school staff rarely deals with the conflict that occurs at that time; instead the conflict is usually left unresolved. Through informal interviews with students, the peer mediation coordinators have determined the unresolved conflicts occur repeatedly until the situation reaches levels that require administrative discipline. These are the situations the peer mediation coordinators feel would benefit most from the peer mediation program.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications of the study determine that there must be a change made for the program to be successful in the future. The areas of focus for the program will deal with

encouraging support from the school staff and building a trusting relationship with the student body.

Fortunately, major program developmental changes are not necessary. As demonstrated by the results of the surveys and interviews, conflict consistently occurs during the lunch hour. During the lunch hour, educational assistants are responsible for the students. Developing an inservice for the educational assistants regarding the purpose and steps of the peer mediation program will enable the educational assistants the opportunity to utilize the program when they feels it is necessary. It is important to remember that not only students can request peer mediation, the staff of the school can refer students to peer mediation. Other possibilities for effectively dealing with conflict on the playground is to have peer mediators stationed on the playground during the lunch hour prepared with the necessary forms and skills to either help students request mediation or perform mediations as conflicts occur.

The coordinators of the program have attempted to communicate to the student body the importance of confidentiality. They also feel strongly that time will be needed to build a trusting relationship between the program and the student body. When students come to mediation and experience the positive solution of going through mediation, trust will begin to develop between the student body and the program. Support from the staff will be essential in increasing the number of referrals to the program in order to build the trust necessary for success.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This intern was able to demonstrate several leadership competencies throughout the study. However, this intern feels strongly that the competencies demonstrated

through developing and implementing a new program were most valuable. This intern was in a position to experience first hand the steps of developing and implementing a new program.

Communication was a key to the success of developing the program. This intern kept an open line of communication between the building principal, the peer mediation coordinators, teachers, the peer mediators, parents, and the student body. Through the use of meetings, phone calls, memos, e-mail, informal meetings, and surveys communication was established and kept open throughout the study. Through the open line of communication, this intern was able to develop human relation skills to effectively interact with others.

A second skill key to the success of developing the peer mediation program was applying the principles of effective curriculum development. The peer mediation program was based upon the needs of the students as well as the existing curriculum. Through the use of surveys and interviews, the intern was able to identify the needs of the students and to develop a program designed to meet those specific needs. In addition, interrelating the new peer mediation program with the existing Life Skills curriculum, the intern experienced a valuable lesson in curriculum development.

A third skill key to the success of developing the peer mediation program was applying effective strategies for evaluating the program in its entirety. Although, the evaluation of the program demonstrated a need for improvement, it is clear to the intern where improvement is needed in the peer mediation program. This intern feels it is important to experience the ability to effectively evaluate a program and determine the specific changes needed for success.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Elizabeth Haddon School has changed as an organization. A program is in now place to potentially limit the number of conflicts at the school as well as develop positive outcomes to future conflicts. As previously mentioned, the peer mediation program was not successful in decreasing the number of conflicts during the three months of implementation. However, students, as well as the staff, are well aware of the program existence and the purpose of the program. Developing trust between the program and the student body and staff will take time. Ideas for improving the program have been developed to provide the steps to success in the future.

FURTHER STUDY

The Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program offers further study in several areas; however, two areas that must continually be studied and evaluated are the effectiveness of the program after specific changes have been implemented as a result of this intern's study and the effectiveness of decreasing the number of conflicts in the school through grade level training.

The changes in the program that have been determined to be necessary as a result of this study are to encourage a more dedicated support of the program from the staff of the school and to build trust between the program and the student body. With these changes in place, the coordinators of the peer mediation program feel strongly that the program can be successful. Evaluating the effectiveness of these changes on the program will need to be a focus of the coordinators of the program.

Grade level training is another possible solution to developing a school environment conducive to learning with minimal instances of conflict. Grade level

training involves training an entire grade in the skills necessary to become peer mediators. The skills learned through peer mediation training would benefit all students in resolving conflict positively, a skill which a student needs throughout formal education and beyond.

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Appendix A
Student Survey

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Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program

The Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program needs your help in developing our peer mediation program. A peer mediation program is a program designed to help students solve problems or conflicts. Your input will be helpful in developing a program that best helps all of our students here at Elizabeth Haddon. Please answer the following questions by placing an X in the box next to the answer you chose for each question. Definitions of specific words have been included to help you complete the questions. Thank you for your help!

Definition: A **conflict** is any controversy or disagreement between two or more students.

1. How often are you involved in a conflict?

- less than once a day
- once a day
- twice a day
- three or more times a day

2. Where do the majority of the conflicts that you are involved in occur?

- classroom
- hallway/bathroom
- cafeteria
- specials
- recess/playground
- other _____

3. What kind of conflict are you involved in most?

- name calling and teasing
- gossip and rumors
- broken friendships
- physical attacks
- jealousy
- invasion of privacy
- other _____

Definition: A **positive solution** to a conflict is when both students involved in the conflict solve the conflict and both students feel happy about how the conflict was solved.

Definition: A **negative solution** to a conflict is when one or both of the students involved in the conflict solve the conflict and feel unsatisfied or unhappy about how the conflict was solved.

4. When you are involved in a conflict, what kind of solution to the conflict do you experience most of the time?

- positive solution
- negative solution
- the conflict does not get solved

5. After a conflict occurs, how long before most of your conflicts are solved?

- less than one day
- one day
- two days
- three or more days



Appendix B
Teacher Survey

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Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program

The Elizabeth Haddon School Peer Mediation Program needs your help in developing our peer mediation program. Your input will be helpful in developing a program that best helps all of our students here at Elizabeth Haddon. Please answer the following questions by placing an X in the box next to the answer you chose for each question. Thank you for your help!

1. How often do you observe conflict among students on a daily basis?

- less than once a day
- once a day
- twice a day
- three times a day
- four times a day
- five or more times a day

2. Where do the majority of the conflicts you observe among students occur?

- classroom
- hallway/bathroom
- cafeteria
- specials
- recess/playground
- other _____

3. What type of conflict do you observe most?

- name calling and teasing
- gossip and rumors
- broken friendships
- physical attacks
- jealousy
- invasion of privacy
- other _____

Definition: A **positive solution** to a conflict is when both students involved in the conflict solve the conflict and both students feel satisfied with the solution.

Definition: A **negative solution** to a conflict is when one or both of the students involved in the conflict solve the conflict and feel unsatisfied with the result of the solution.

4. When you observe a conflict, what type of solution to the conflict do you observe most?

- positive solution
- negative solution
- the conflict does not get solved

5. When you observe a conflict, how long before the conflict is solved?

- less than one day
- one day
- two days
- three or more days



BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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