

With slight modifications

VORP brings restorative justice to schools

by Ron Claassen

School discipline systems look a lot like the criminal justice system. Many of the principles, strategies, and skills developed in VORP are relevant to schools. Restorative Justice principles, with slight modification, can be applied to school discipline systems.

This article is the last in a series that has focused on nine principles I call the Fundamental Principles of "Discipline that Restores" (Claassen 1993). The January 1999 VORP Newsletter, which focused on Roxanne's (my wife who teaches eighth grade at Raisin City School) experience implementing DTR over the last eight years, generated a number of requests to know more about DTR.

While this series started before the much publicized school violence of the last few months, I believe that these principles hold great promise as one very significant step to reducing violence in our schools and in our communities.

The Raisin City School handbook now describes its school discipline system as Discipline that Restores. All teachers receive 24 hours of training.

You may find the entire series on our www.vorp.org web site or you may send \$4 for a hard copy.

Principle #9: DTR requires follow up and accountability structures since keeping agreements is the key to building a trusting community.

Trust, or more often the lack of trust, is often associated with conflict and especially with a student that has been identified as a behavior problem. Usually it goes something like this, "the problem here is that you just can't trust ____." The work of a good discipline program should be to help people turn that around to where significant trust is reestablished and getting higher. From my experience working with individuals and groups to help them build trust and from analyzing special activities designed to build trust, I have found the following to be a helpful and reliable guide. "Trust grows when agreements are made and kept. Trust goes down when we are either unwilling to make

agreements or when we make agreements and are unwilling to keep the agreements" (Claassen 1992). So, if you want to have a trusting relationship, you need to have clear agreements and clear ways to know that the agreements are being kept.

If you want to establish a trusting relationship with that most difficult and disruptive student or any person you feel you cannot trust, start by inviting them to join with you in making and keeping agreements.

When Roxanne makes an agreement with one of her students, they always set a follow up meeting. At the follow up meeting, they read the agreement and decide if they have both been keeping their agreements. If they have, they celebrate. If they haven't, they

talk about and decide what is keeping them from being able to keep the agreement. It might be that one did not try hard enough. It might be that one forgot. It might be that one understood the agreement to mean something different from the other. It might be that one needs some additional help. If needed, a new agreement is written that clarifies expectations and increases the accountability and support to the point where both believe that the agreement can work for them. Then, another follow up meeting is set. Some agreements call for several follow up meetings and some need only one.

I am often asked if a follow up meeting is necessary if things are working OK. Because of time constraints, it often seems more efficient to not have a meeting. But the problem with not having a meeting is that a significant trust building opportunity is missed. Trust goes up a bit when we make an agreement and it continues to grow when we keep the agreements. But it grows most dramatically when we acknowledge together that we are both keeping the agreement. It is an opportunity that I think we cannot afford to miss. Even in relatively minor situations, I would suggest that it is best to error on the side of having the meeting rather than not having it.

The more experiences we have making and keeping agreements, the more trust we will have in our classroom or community and the more likely we will be willing to try to use a cooperative approach when the next conflict or injustice confronts us.

So, if we are serious about building safe families, safe schools and safe communities, peacemakers will seek out those situations where trust is low and invite them into a process of making and keeping agreements. If we do, trust will grow. Stress will be reduced and the potential for violence will be decreased.

Another way of saying this is that if we have a lot of experience making and keeping agreements as a means of solving our problems and dealing with injustices, the trust that has been built makes it less likely one of us will use a violent response.

Teacher uses VORP Peacemaking Model to resolve problem with student

edited by Ron Claassen

In the place of a VORP story this month, I am going to use a story from a teacher who used the VORP Peacemaking Model (Claassen 1987), slightly modified for Student/Teacher conflict. In one of my classes designed to help teachers and counselors learn to work constructively with conflict, after they have learned some skills and strategies, I give the assignment to seek out their most difficult student or most troubling conflict situation and invite that person to consider using a cooperative process to try to resolve the problem.

The following is the experience of one teacher. You will notice that she was one of the participants in the conflict and also lead the process. Last week, I received 18 similar peacemaking stories. This could be happening in all of our schools.

"I teach high school and I am a pretty good authoritarian. I've been pretty skeptical of this cooperation stuff.

"Jeremy has been disruptive all year. Every time I start a lesson, he does something to disrupt and distract me. I have gotten to the point where I am happy if he is absent. I'm not proud of that but that is how I feel. When the class assignment was given, I knew right away, which student I should try to work with. But I had tried everything including warnings, detentions, pulling cards, and setting up a contract with his parents present. I didn't believe that he would respond to this process either so I set out to prove that it wouldn't work. I had a student teacher with me so when Jeremy started to disrupt, I counted to ten, controlled myself, turned over the class, and invited him to go outside with me."

Introduction, purpose, and groundrules: "I took my binder with me and told him I had been learning a process for resolving conflicts and I wanted to show him something. I showed him the 'four options model' and explained #1 Coercion (one dominates and the other goes along), #2 Outside Authority (an outside person makes a decision for those in conflict), #3 and #4 Cooperative Agreement (there is no agreement unless both agree, #4 just the two of us, #3 we ask a mediator to help us). Then I told him I would prefer #4 but I wondered which he would prefer. Without hesitating, he chose #4. That really made me mad. If he wanted to be so cooperative, why had he been so disruptive all year? I counted to ten and went to the next steps in the process. I stated the purpose of the meeting as being to search for a good resolution for both him and for me. I asked if he could agree to that purpose for our meeting. Again, he said yes. We both agreed to the groundrules."

Recognizing the Injustice/Violation/Conflict: "Then I asked him if he wanted to start, if he wanted me to start, or if we should flip a coin. He said he wanted to start. I asked him to describe how he has been experiencing our conflict (it was difficult for me to say our conflict because I wanted to put all of the blame on him). He said, 'when you start a new lesson, you talk so fast I can't keep up and when I do something, it slows things down.' Now I really needed to count to ten again. Could it be something that simple? I really had to control myself from not giving him a lecture. But there was a ring of truth in what he said. I do talk fast and English is not his first language. I followed the process and summarized what he said and he really seemed to appreciate it. Now it was my turn. I told him how

See 'Skeptical teacher, disruptive student....' on page 2

VORP relies on your contributions

This is a good month to make a resolution to continue or to start supporting VORP financially. As you can see from the story of our teacher/student conflict, the VORP Peacemaking Model can have a powerful and positive impact on communities.

If each person receiving this newsletter gave \$20 per month, VORP could double its case load.

Please consider making a modest yet significant contribution to building a safer and more peaceful community.

Sharpen your peacemaking skills this summer

This summer, the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies of Fresno Pacific University is offering two training events that will help people in all walks of life develop and enhance their peacemaking skills.

JULY 19-22: Classroom Conflict Management and Peer Mediation. Designed specifically for teachers and school administrators, this four-day interactive seminar gives teachers the tools they need for effective classroom management and conflict resolution—and for teaching students to resolve their own conflicts. The cost of the training is \$400; additional fees are required for those seeking graduate or professional studies credit. (Lead instructor: Ron Claassen)

AUGUST 2-6: Basic Institute in Conflict Management and Mediation. Designed for people who wish to acquire basic understandings and skills for managing and resolving conflict, the Basic Institute provides valuable insights and strategies for dealing with interpersonal and group conflicts in the home, workplace, school, and congregation. The Basic Institute is especially valuable for people in positions of leadership in business, human resources, health care, education, social services, and congregations. The cost of the training is \$450; additional fees are required for those seeking graduate or professional studies credit. (Instructors: Ron Claassen & Dalton Reimer)



**FOR INFORMATION
Call the Center for
Peacemaking and
Conflict Studies
559-455-5840**

Skeptical teacher, disruptive student use VORP principles to find solution that works for everyone

Continued from page 1

disrespected I feel when he interrupts and disturbs our lessons. I told him that I dread starting a lesson when he is there in class. I told him that I am not proud of it, but what was going on between us had caused me to be thankful when he was absent. I hope we can change that. I had just rambled on and forgot that he would have to try to summarize it all. He didn't and he did a very good job of summarizing. I appreciated his willingness to listen and summarize what I had said.

"The process calls for us to move now to what it would take to restore equity and what future intentions need to be clarified in order to make things as right as possible. We decided to work on the future first."

Future Intentions: "We each wrote down a few ideas that we thought would prevent our problem in the future. We agreed that I would slow down my speech when introducing a new lesson, giving instructions, etc., and he would try as hard as he could to keep up. If I was forgetting and still going too fast, we devised a signal that he would use to remind me. If I didn't want to slow down or repeat at that point because it seemed like most of the class was getting it; I would give a signal back to him. That would mean that I would meet with him individually and for now he would just try to pick up what he could. Then, when the others started working independently, I would go over the material with him alone. We agreed that this should take care of our problem for the future."

Restore Equity: "We each wrote down a few ideas that we thought would help make things right between us now. We decided that both of us would apologize to each other, and we did it right then. We also decided that we both needed to apologize to the class because we had wasted a lot of their time by not having worked this out earlier in the year. We did that before the end of the class period."

Writing our Agreement: "We used the DTR Student/Teacher Agreement form to record our agreements and we both signed it. We were both feeling much better now than when we started. I told him I would make a copy and give it to him immediately after lunch."

Follow up Meeting: "Included in the agreement was a time set for our follow up meeting, two weeks from the date of the agreement. The purpose of this meeting, I told him, was to pull out the agreement and read it together and then we would each answer the questions: Have I been keeping my agreements? Have you been keeping your agreements? If one says no, we will clarify our expectations or renegotiate our agreement with more accountability built in. If we both say yes to both, we will celebrate. We didn't say how but I think just a handshake along with our great feelings of accomplishment will be enough.

"I set out to prove that this process wouldn't work with my most difficult student and I was really wrong. It worked great. He has been like a different person. I have felt like a different person. And the whole class seems to be working together better. They are still kids and we still have some usual class stuff but this has made a great improvement. I actually enjoy seeing him walk in the class now. On the one hand it seemed to take a long time, maybe a half-hour, but we have made up that time in just the week since our agreement. Thanks for the process."

Blessed are the Peacemakers!

Volunteers needed!

VORP mediators learn and practice peacemaking skills they can use in the home, workplace, and congregation. The next three trainings are scheduled on: September 10 & 11; October 5, 12 & 19; and November 12 & 13.

For participants who agree to take three cases, the cost of the training is only \$20; for others, the cost is \$100.

VORP is planning a work day on Saturday, July 24. To hire a young person to perform yard, office, or house work, please call Sara at the VORP office. By providing a work site, you are helping a young person who is unable to find a job and ensuring that a victim receives a timely restitution payment. Your contribution to the program is much appreciated!

Call VORP for details at 291-1120

©1999 Ron Claassen. Any portion of this newsletter may be reprinted. Please acknowledge source and send us a copy of the reprint.

Fresno VORP
of the Central Valley, Inc.

2529 Willow Avenue • Clovis, CA 93612 • (559) 291-1120

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Clovis, CA 93612
Permit # 376