**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.

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

While this series started before the much publicized violence of the last few months, I believe that these principles hold great promise for a 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 DTR that Restores. At 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 such as keeping agreements is the key to building a trusting community.

Trust, or more often the lack thereof, is usually associated with conflict and especially with a student that has been identified as a behavior problem. Usually it goes 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 re-established 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 grows 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 involving 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 review 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. It could 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 is 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 grows dramatically when we acknowledge that we both made the agreement and it continues to grow when keeping 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 future potential to avoid violent response. If we will have in our classroom or community and the more likely we will be trying to use a cooperative approach rather than the more likely we 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, our ability to resolve our problems and dealing with injustices, the trust that has been established through agreements is a likely one of us will use a violent response.
VORP relies on your contributions

This is a good month to make a resolu-
tion 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 stu-
dents to resolve their own conflicts. The cost of the training is $400; additional fees are required for those seeking graduate or profes-
sional studies credit. (Lead instructor: Ron Claassen)

AUGUST 2-6: Basic Institute in Conflict Man-
gerement 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 espe-
cially valuable for people in positions of leader-
ship 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 pro-
fessional studies credit. (Instructors: Ron Claassen & Dalton Reimer)

Follow up Meeting: "Included in the agree-
ment 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 ques-
tions: 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 ac-
countability 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 differ-
ent 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."

"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 de-
cided 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 de-
vised 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 prob-
lem for the future."

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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 prob-
lem for the future."

Restoring 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."

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

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FOR INFORMATION

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: Sep-
tember 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 Satur-
day, 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 per-
son who is unable to find a job and ensur-
ing that a victim receives a timely restitu-
tion payment. You contribution to the pro-
gram is much appreciated!

Call VORP for details at 291-1120