

One school's experience with 'Discipline That Restores' gives hope for future

by Ron Claassen

I have hope that some day restorative justice will be what most people think of when they think of justice. Maybe some day we will have to explain to our children and grandchildren that there was a time when most people thought that justice was retributive justice.

An example that is giving me hope now is the discipline program at Raisin City School. Roxanne (we've been married for 30 years) is the eighth grade teacher. She and I have been working on what we call "Discipline That Restores" (DTR) for nearly 10 years now. Roxanne completed her BA with a major in conflict and peacemaking and is now half way in completing her MA in conflict management and peacemaking. Her interest was in utilizing Restorative Justice to guide how she would deal with conflict and misbehavior in her classroom.

At first those who watched her thought she was "soft" on misbehavior. But, as the principal and other teachers noticed, her approach not only reduced the misbehavior; it began to transform the climate in her classroom. In some very ironic ways, it made it more acceptable to disagree with each other but the disagreements became occasions to understand each other better and to negotiate and learn better ways of being together rather than occasions to put people down or hurt each other. So it became increasingly clear that Discipline That Restores (DTR) was not "soft" on misbehavior.

Ten years ago, about the same time Roxanne started DTR in her classroom (with administration skepticism and blessing), the administration decided it was necessary to get "tough." The hope was that if discipline was "tougher" it would stop what seemed to be a school-wide trend toward increasing misbehavior, conflicts among students, disrespect for teachers, and fights on campus. So the school-wide system called for increasing punishment—more warnings and detentions followed by more suspensions and expulsions. What happened was that the overall climate became more tense, less cooperative, and more stressful for everyone.

At the beginning of the next year, with new administrative leadership, we were invited to provide some training for the entire staff on Discipline That Restores (DTR). We started by exploring together

See "10-year experiment," on page 2

Offender accepts responsibility through VORP

by Ken Kaneversky
with Ron Claassen

Our story is from Ken Kaneversky. Ken is general manager of a large printing business, an active member of his church, and a student in the master's program in administrative leadership at Fresno Pacific University. As part of his MA program, he is completing a certificate in mediation. Some names and details in the story have been changed.

Tim participated in stealing a car stereo from John's truck on the high school campus where both boys attended.

During the individual meeting with John, he expressed that he was very open and willing to meet with the offender. He knew the offender—at an arm's length—and was very interested in truth, restitution, and reconciliation.

Tim, though willing to meet with John, did not readily recognize the injustice. He admitted to at one time possessing the stolen stereo, but said that a friend of his was the one who had actually stolen the stereo.

Since this was my first VORP case Jay assisted me, and I was delighted that he did. The meeting began with introductions. There was myself, Jay, Tim, Tim's father, John, an interpreter, and Barbara (an observer). We then discussed the purpose of the meeting and agreed to the groundrules.

Tim was then asked to describe his experience. He said that his friend had stolen the stereo. He said that although he had knowledge of the crime, and even had possession of the car stereo for a short time, he did not see how he had any responsibility since he wasn't the one who actually broke the window of the truck and stole the stereo.

John summarized what Tim had said and then described what had happened to him. He described the feeling of being violated, and the hardship that the incident caused him and his family to have the truck in the shop to be repaired. Tim then summarized what John had said. Then John made the comment, "...with the kind of friends that you have you should not be surprised that you are being accused of stealing."

Then the offender's father had a few words to say. He recognized that his son did in fact have some responsibility in the theft. Father said, "we are all of the same blood—we are all humans—and we owe one another respect." He then said that he had had things stolen from him and that it made him feel very angry and hurt. Tim listened intently to his father describe how it felt to be victimized. He included the internal pain, hurt, and anger crime causes for the victim.

After listening to his father, Tim recognized his part in the crime and the impact

that the crime had on John. Tim then agreed that he did have some responsibility in the crime even though he was not actually the one who broke the window and stole the stereo. Tim recognized the injustice, asked John for forgiveness and agreed to pay the \$100.00 deductible with \$50.00 being paid there at the meeting, and the balance to be paid shortly thereafter. Tim also agreed to be careful in the selection of his friends and agreed that this type of action and involvement in crime would not happen again.

The meeting ended with the victim, offender, and the offender's father all shaking hands in a spirit of what I believe was true reconciliation.

Thanks Ken.

"Blessed are the Peacemakers."

One volunteer mediator's perspective

by Ken Kaneversky

How do I tie together leadership, community and values? One answer to this question is by being a volunteer mediator with the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program. As a student at Fresno Pacific University enrolled in the Master of Arts in Administrative Leadership program, I believe that it is important for leaders to recognize their responsibility to be peacemakers.

As a leader who is actively involved in church and community, I have found VORP to be a stretching and rewarding experience. VORP takes me beyond the traditional "comfort zone" and exposes me to a variety of circumstances that one would otherwise never experience. As a volunteer mediator with VORP I am actively engaged in peacemaking and making community better one person at a time.

The Bible says "Blessed are the peacemakers...." I now know why this is. It is a thrilling experience to see the transformation of two people, once enemies, become people who have respect for one another.

VORP can be a life changing experience for all parties involved. I have so much enjoyed the experience of VORP and believe in its effectiveness, that I am looking at starting VORP in Tulare County, specifically in the Visalia area. I will be working under the direction of Ron Claassen and will be looking for a few good leaders who recognize and take seriously their responsibility to be peacemakers. Time is fairly minimal and the rewards are great. So if you have a desire to be blessed by being a peacemaker in Tulare County, please give me a call at my office: 559-592-8351.

10-year experiment with Discipline That Restores transforms school climate, teaches lasting lessons

Continued from page 1

what each teacher hoped to accomplish with his or her discipline preference, whatever it was. Interestingly, what teachers with very different approaches hoped to accomplish was very similar. Everyone agreed that they wanted students to learn respect. They all wanted students to learn to get along better, to be able to solve their problems by talking rather than by hitting. So when we looked at DTR principle #4 it made sense. It says, "DTR recognizes both the danger and opportunity created by the misbehavior and conflicts that underlie the misbehavior. As soon as immediate safety concerns are satisfied, DTR views misbehavior and conflict as a teachable moment."

Roxanne starts the year by having all of the students write what they would do if they were showing respect for each other, for the teacher, for the books and furniture and what the teacher would do if the teacher were showing respect for

the students. She also writes down her thoughts and then makes a composite of all of their ideas. She asks students to consider if this is the kind of classroom they would like. After they rework some of the items together, they are all invited to sign this as an agreement for how they will be together.

Sometimes they forget. When this happens she reminds them of the agreement and if the problem persists, she invites them to meet with her to see if they can cooperatively find a way solve the problem that is keeping them from being able to keep the agreement. She tells them that she would rather never have to just use her power over them to control them and she won't unless they refuse to try to solve the problem cooperatively.

Some students actually ask her if she would just punish them because then they wouldn't have to keep making these agreements that they are expected to keep. Usually they soon change their minds and decide they really want to cooperate. They appreciate the opportunity to share the power with her in making agreements that are good for both.

At Raisin City School, all teachers have an opportunity to participate in four full days of training in DTR principles, strategies and skills to implement it. The school handbook says their discipline system is Discipline That Restores.

The results are significant. Detentions and suspensions have been dramatically decreased while the school has become a safer place to be. In the last year there was only one fight. It was just one punch because the other students, rather than cheering on a fight, broke it up and took the students to the dean for help to work it out.

One of her eighth grade students last year is now a student at Caruthers High School. In the first week she told her mother (who works at Raisin City School) that at lunch one day suddenly everyone was yelling fight, fight and running to cheer it on. When she looked around at those who remained seated, most of them were Raisin City School students. This was not part of their experience.

One other piece of good news this year is that of the Raisin City students who are first year students at Caruthers High School, 40 percent of them are on the honor roll. Maybe the cooperation carries over to learning the academic subjects as well.

This could be happening in all of our schools.

This story gives me hope that our community could become a safe, peaceful and respectful place to be. It could be a place where misbehavior, disagreements, and conflicts are viewed as opportunities to learn to know each other better and as occasions where fairness and justice can be negotiated in an atmosphere where all people are valued.

We realize that it would be naïve to assume that everyone will always choose to be cooperative. DTR principle #9 says, "DTR recognizes that not all misbehaving persons will choose to be cooperative. Therefore there is a need for outside authority to make decisions for the misbehaving person who is not willing to be cooperative. The consequences imposed should be tested by whether they are reasonable, related, restorative, and respectful."

Restorative Justice is not "soft" on crime. It is very different from retributive justice. VORP is a part of what could become a Restorative Justice system. I have hope.

VORP relies on your contributions

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 Ken's story, VORP is a community building activity for all involved.

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.

©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