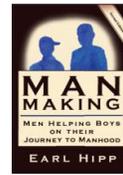


Man-Making

Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood



Men in Schools - for Boys

By Earl Hipp, M.A.



Dave Bolduc is a development coordinator, board member, and mentor for the [Boys to Men Mentoring Network of Virginia, Inc.](#) (BTMVA). This group has been doing Rite of Passage programs, Journeymen groups (for ROP weekend graduates), and group mentoring for boys since 2010. As a result, BTMVA already has a staff of volunteer, background-checked men, who know how to work with young males. It was natural next step for them to look at other ways to serve their community.

I spoke with Dave because the men of BTMVA have recently completed a pilot, site-based program for boys at the local Tomahawk Creek Middle School. That pilot program consisted of BTMVA men, and occasionally Journeymen, being in a support group circle with selected boys from the school. It ran for an hour each week during the 2011-12 school years.



I really like the school-based model of supporting boys because it provides a perfect and regular location, supportive school teachers and other staff, access to parents, and especially because it solves the big problem of getting adolescent males all physically located in one place.

In the following interview, I asked Dave about the experience, how it got started, what did he learn, and most importantly, did it work for the men and boys involved.

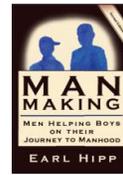
Earl: How did you get connected with the Tomahawk Creek Middle School?

Dave: My partner just happens to be the Librarian at the school. She connected me with the Principal, who then put me in touch with the Assistant Principal who was the coordinator of their Leadership Development program. They all really liked the idea of a program that had adult men involved with their boys.

Earl: Once you got those connections, were there any major bureaucratic hurdles or approvals necessary to proceed?

Man-Making

Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood



Dave: Not really. Our own rigorous background checking process to screen men for our BTMVA program met their security needs. All of our participating men did fill out the school volunteer forms. The biggest early challenge was how to fit a group like ours into the school schedule.

Earl: So what did the pilot program look like and how did you select the boys?

Dave: We started out utilizing a block of time that was already allocated to their PACK program. PACK stands for *Peers Acting with Care and Kindness*. It's a social skills development program, so our program was perfect for that slot. Our pilot program commitment was for the full school year, meeting on average three Wednesdays a month, from 8-9 AM. That time slot allowed for the men who could flex their work day to attend the morning sessions.

The boys for the pilot were recommended by the school's teachers, counselors, and the Assistant Principal. Some were kids having behavioral issues or boys who the staff felt would most benefit from this experience. Twenty-four middle school boys, age 12-16 were initially selected.

Earl: Prior to launch did you have any communication with the parents of the recommended boys?

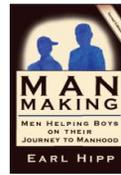
Dave: Yes. We put together a one-page overview of the program, and the Principal put a supportive cover letter on it and sent it to the parents. In the letter the boys and parents were told our school supervised program would include regular meetings with a variety of male role models who will, ". . . show up consistently, tell the truth about their struggles as men, ask the boys what kind of men they want to be, praise them for their unique gifts, support them when they screw up, and encourage them to become the good men they all want to be." We explained that in addition to the weekly meetings at school, there would also be a 48-hour *Rite of Passage Adventure Weekend* at the end of the program. The boys were invited to attend an initial meeting, and 22 out of 24 recommended boys showed up.

Earl: So how did that initial program go over?

Dave: Earl, you know how powerful these circles can be, especially for young guys who have never experienced, honest, open, caring, and vulnerable men. We did our standard Journeyman Circle format, with men and Journeyman speaking personal truth on topics we know are big for these kids. That had the boys wide-eyed and sitting on the edge of their seats.

Man-Making

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Almost immediately, many of them began to participate and support each other. After that first circle, permission slips were handed out for the boys to take home, and thirteen boys came back the next week. A couple more showed up a few weeks later after hearing about the program from their peers. .

Earl: How many men do you have anchoring these weekly groups?

Dave: We typically have 4-5 men who show up. Initially there were three women counselors from the school, but after the second session, they (wisely) stepped out and recruited the male band teacher. He came to 90% of the sessions and added a lot.

Earl: Does each session have a specific content focus / topic or do you just go with what the young guys bring?

Dave: We do have a series of themes we are prepared to offer. A program that gradually ramps up the importance of the topics discussed in the circle. We know the issues these young guys are living with, like bullying, divorce, grief, drugs, and more, so we can target these topics if they don't show up naturally.

It's amazing though, how quickly this age group is willing to go deep. After hearing from men and Journeymen, the personal vulnerability bar quickly gets set pretty high. Just as beautiful is how naturally the boys in the circle pick up the ability to be supportive for each other. In every group there are moments when kids will offer verbal or other kinds of support for a peer who is struggling.

Next year we'll have returning kids from this year's group, who are comfortable in our circle, and they will have been through our powerful Rite of Passage weekend too. This will really help us to set the tone for the new kids. These guys really like belonging to a tribe where other men and boys can be trusted and have their back . . . where the really feel safe.

Being part of a support group that shares feelings and understands yours, having mentors to help you realize that you're accountable for your actions, having a shoulder from a peer when you need one and being a shoulder for your friends to lean on...these are things that have been shown and validated to my son thru Boys To Men. He's learned that people do care, it's not just a bunch of talk. He now truly realizes that he's never alone.

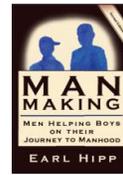
Christine B. (Jaired's mom)

Earl: So how about sharing a few of your big lessons after your first year.

Dave: Well there are several.

Man-Making

Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood



At the top for me are how important it is that we did this at all. Like so much of this work, there have been huge gains for the kids, the school, families, and considerable impact on the men involved.

Getting enough time from the school to do the program is hard. The school has a lot of other important things to accomplish. With 15- 20 males in the group, we really needed more than an hour. We're thinking that next year we'll move to an evening program at the school. That way it's still school based, but we'll have more time for fun and the important work in the circle. An evening time frame will also allow the boys going into high school to come back and continue to be part of the group.

Next time, we are going to put more energy into connecting with parents early on. We'll meet with the parents once the boys are identified and have expressed interest in joining the group. We may hold an Open House at the beginning of the year, and then have additional gatherings during the year to keep the connection with parents strong. It will also give us another check on the boy's progress from the parental perspective. Community building is important in this work, and letting the parents make connections with other parents is a very good thing. It's interesting to note that out of 14 boys we had in our group, only 4 of them were in stable, two parent households. There are a lot of parents who can use the support of a "tribe" too.

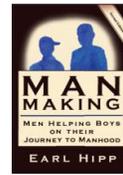
Finally, we're going to do a more in-depth application package. We want more detailed parent contact information to do a better job of staying in contact with parents. We also want the permissions necessary from the parents to get more personal data on their boys from the school. In addition to knowing our young guys better, we can have approval for counselors to talk to us directly about their issues. In these ways, we'll be even better equipped to give these kids the focused kinds of support they need.

I'm thinking that Dave and other good men like him, showing up for all "our sons" in these school based initiatives, could represent the vanguard of a powerful movement to change the trajectory of the lives of boys, families, schools, and our communities.

If you are inspired to get a few men together to do something similar, [send me a note](#) or send Dave Bolduc [an email](#). You never know what a very large difference this small action by a few men might could make!

Man-Making

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Earl Hipp knows a lot about man-making!



Earl Hipp is an author, publisher, speaker/trainer, organizational adviser, and community consultant. Since 1982, he has consistently been involved with groups and organizations that focus on men's issues and development. His most [recent book](#) is for men, titled, *Man-Making – Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood*.

Earl speaks at national conferences and delivers workshops across the country, teaching organizations how to call men into service to young males. He has worked with communities on violence prevention by developing initiatives to get adult men involved with boys and community life. He has led and participated in many rites of passage initiations and group mentoring activities for men and boys.

As a direct result of his interest in man-making, Earl works with boys who are or have been incarcerated, maintains a number of ongoing mentoring relationships, offers coaching to mentors, and personally sponsors boys-and-men events. Today he is involved with a variety of groups and organizations who are calling men into service to boys.

Earl describes himself as a man who was under-fathered and under-male-mentored in adolescence – a man who was “left with the women and children to figure out manhood on his own.” Today he is using his instructional and motivational skills to do something about what he calls the “**epidemic of under-male-nourished boys**” in the world. His personal mission is to do whatever he can to ensure fewer boys and men will be left to wander alone in the dangerous never-never land between boyhood and manhood.

Since 2005 Earl has published the [Man-Making Blog](#). It discusses manhood, male culture, mentoring, and men's rites of passage. He has written seven [books about and for adolescents](#), which together have sold almost half a million copies. The books are on themes such as coping with the stresses in their lives, moving through grief and loss, and understanding and preventing violence in our communities.

Earl has a bachelor's degree in Psychology, a Master's Degree in Applied Psychophysiology, and a background as a clinical psychotherapist.

If you're planning a meeting and feel his *Man-Making* content would be appropriate, Earl will be happy to create a [customized keynote, training program, or workshop](#) program for your group. Visit the Man-Making website for more information.