Do you need an answer to the problem of academically apathetic early adolescents? A successful curriculum change during the past five years in the seventh and eighth grades at the Ruth Murdoch Elementary School in Berrien Springs, Michigan, has provided a necessary motivational solution to this puzzle.

It all began when a math teacher attempted to answer the question posed in the title of this article. Several of her students possessed math ability but were underachievers as well as discipline problems. By providing after-school opportunities for these students to learn macramé, the teacher was able to develop a rapport so that these students were then willing to attempt school work in which they had not previously met with success. The visible carryover into the classroom led to this teacher’s providing further craft opportunities for other students during the study-hall sessions. The evident improvement in both academics and personal relationships led to greater interest on the part of other students. Further minicourse offerings using the nonacademic expertise of each teacher soon followed.

Formerly, the required non-
Training Student Aides

"Where the number of students is large enough, assistants should be chosen from among the older ones." Following this counsel, the student-aiding minicourse was initiated. The lower-grade teachers requested student aides to help their pupils individually, to make bulletin boards, to assist on the playground, to run errands, et cetera. Not only did the lower-grade students and the teachers benefit, but the adolescent helper gained a sense of self-worth through the realization that his skills were useful to others. The responsibility and punctuality demanded by this work had a character-building side effect.

It is necessary to their complete education that students be given time to do missionary work—time to become acquainted with the spiritual needs of the families in the community around them. They should not be so loaded down with studies that they have no time to use the knowledge they have acquired.

Opportunity was provided for service to others in the Christian witnessing class. The students searched local newspapers for names of bereaved or hospitalized people in the community. They designed their own cards, devised ways to raise money for postage, and did follow-up, which resulted in many grateful responses. In some instances, the student contacts led to friendships between students and thankful recipient families.

A Transformation

The minicourse program has resulted in a transformation in many areas. A few of the results include: an overall reduction of discipline problems; a more balanced school program; an integration of faith and learning; improvement in student self-worth; appreciation for and active participation in unselfish service for others; a positive perception toward work; and a new awareness and use of undiscovered talents.

Previously there had been cases of serious individual and/or group behavior problems in and out of school time, but now students became more self-disciplined because they were occupied with an exciting and relevant curriculum. When a student is occupied with reconstructing his minibike in the small engine repair class, he has other things on his mind than getting into mischief.

The curriculum had formerly been overweighed in the direction of mental pursuits. Now a balance of social, emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental development was provided. Even the learning-disabled student who could not find success in the wholly academic program now had an outlet for his

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baked beans, still bubbling with onion and tomato. Maggie McDonald had made a roast out of something made in Battle Creek that tasted a little like meat.

The children looked back on that day with pleasure. And there were other days of outings and picnics.

"It doesn't seem possible that school could be so much fun," Chester confided to Jennifer, one day after he had gotten a hundred in arithmetic. "I am not scared anymore. Seems like I can think better."

"Course you can," Jennifer agreed. "No one can think when you are afraid. Miss Murphy doesn't get mad. She talks kind even when kids are bad."

"I know. Ain't no fun bein' bad when it makes Miss Murphy look at you kind of sad-like. I sure was mad at Rake when he sassed her the other day."

"Yeah. An' Bill told him at recess he'd better cut it out if he knew what was good for him."

And such was a slice of life from our family, after our father and mother decided to send us to church school. No wonder we decided to go all the way with Jesus, for we learned that happiness is found in kindliness and obedience, and love.

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**Descriptive articles and poetry that illustrate principles of Christian education are welcome from time to time. We invite our readers to submit such materials.**

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**Those Terrible "Turned-Off" Teens**

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energies and a source of fulfillment in this new, more diversified program. Though this type of student could not excel in English or math, he found his outlet in bell choir or student aiding.

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**Seeing the Teacher in a New Way**

Often a school program provides only one picture of the teacher—that of science or history instructor—but with a greater variety of experiences, opportunity for the integration of faith and learning is increased. The informal atmosphere of these minicourses helped the students to see their teachers in a new light. These courses provided an excellent milieu for the student to see the teacher as a Christian in ordinary, everyday experiences. Here was the English teacher learning macramé from a seventh-grade student who had been taught the craft by the math teacher. The English teacher's Christianity was displayed in the manner with which she coped with the same frustrations the student had met.

Due to an improvement in school spirit which resulted from the changed school program, there was a dramatic reduction in vandalism. A student who formerly had vented his frustrations with failure by smashing classroom windows now was unwilling to mar or deface the place where he found fulfilling enjoyment.

Typically, this age level is indifferent to the challenge of learning. However, the minicourses aroused the adolescents' potential for self-motivation. Not only was their enthusiasm for the minicourses obvious, but the carryover was evident in improved school attendance, better home relations, enthusiasm for academic subjects, personality development, and tolerance for the individuality of fellow students as each person found his unique skill in a variety of projects. The girl who in the past had delighted in leading her group in degrading and shaming her fellow students now found happiness in bringing joy to the sick and the disadvantaged. She has even decided to pursue a career in which she can serve the unfortunate and the handicapped.

**Encouraging Self-Confidence**

Generally speaking, an early adolescent's self-concept is not easily reinforced within the scope of the typical school curriculum. Many students lacked self-worth and were a heartache to the teacher, particularly in Bible class. The student-aiding minicourse, which helped the older student value himself as a teacher of younger students, encouraged the development of a new self-perspective. Students participating in this area subsequently felt self-confident enough to share constructive thoughts and valuable contributions in Bible class.

Obviously this curriculum change has provided an appropriate answer to our original question of the problem of the academically apathetic early adolescent. It has shown that in the invigoration of mind and body, the fostering of an unselfish spirit, and the binding together of pupil and teacher by the ties of common interest and friendly association, the expenditure of time and effort will be repaid a hundredfold. A blessed outlet will be afforded for that restless energy which is so often a source of danger to the young. As a safeguard against evil, the preoccupation of the mind with good is worth more than unnumbered barriers of law and discipline."

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**FOOTNOTES**


2 *Counsels to Teachers,* p. 200.


4 *Education,* p. 213.

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**Saving Energy—and Money—in Schools**

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work equally well as long as the "R" rating is maintained. (The "R" rating is a standard numbering system that rates the