

**Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists**

**THE ACCELERATED CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION PROGRAMME
AN EVALUATION**

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INTRODUCTION

The Accelerated Christian Education programme known as A.C.E. is a fairly new programme which has been growing fast. With the rise of secular humanism and a godless world view, the A.C.E. programme was developed in order to ingrain the Biblical world view to children by continuous exposure to the truth of God's word and application of that truth to all life's situations.

BACKGROUND

Donald R. Howard had already been involved in starting a Christian College. He served as vice-principal of a small university in Plano, Texas. During that time he became well acquainted with Dallas Christian Academy and its staff. The following year he was asked to be principal of the school.¹ The call upon his life that he experienced in 1968 was different. At the age of 35 he felt strongly impressed to go start Christian schools.²

Howard, the founder and president of the A.C.E. School of Tomorrow, was troubled that many students in his seventh grade class were not performing at their grade level. Observing the same situation with his own children, Dr Howard began questioning the structure of the conventional education system.³

It became very clear to him that there was a need for individualized education for children.⁴ Assisted by his wife Esther, he designed a programme geared to meet the learning needs of individual children.⁵

¹ *World Awakening*, p. 184

² *Ibid.*, p. 183

³ *Answer to the Crisis in Education*

⁴ *World Awakening*, p. 184

⁵ *Answer to the Crisis in Education*

He developed a self-instructional, individually prescribed, and continuous program material. Truths and character values of the Bible were integrated throughout the material.

The first school opened in September 1970 in Garland, Texas. From that one school, the programme grew. Twenty-three years later, the programme had expanded to 7 500 schools operating in 110 countries. In South Africa there are over 4 000 pupils attending A.C.E. schools.⁶

The self-instructional materials are called PACE's (Packet of Accelerated Christian Education) and they are written and updated by a team that is professionally trained to screen out humanism. Their work is based upon Biblical absolutes which permeate A.C.E. philosophy and methods.⁷

The idea of Christian education is not new. The early church began the first Christian schools in the depths of the catacombs of ancient Rome. The early believers did not send their children to polytheistic Roman schools. Throughout the Middle Ages the church continued to be the repository of learning. With the coming of the reformation, church-based education expanded as never before. Martin Luther, John Calvin and the Puritans were all utterly committed to the principle. The trend was unchallenged until the end of the last century and into the present century where we now find Christians and non-Christians alike expecting the State to provide their children's education.⁸

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

Protestant pentecostals, whose churches run most of these schools,

⁶ *The Strengths and Weaknesses of the A.C.E. Programme*, p. 33

⁷ *Answer to the Crisis in Education*

⁸ *Ibid*

consider themselves religious fundamentalists and therefore their faith is rooted in the Holy Scriptures. They believe that ``with the handing down of the Ten Commandments, Israelite society was given a list of spiritual and moral absolutes which set them apart from any other society on earth.''⁹ Quoting Deut. 6:7 they argue that the Israelites were instructed to pass on this heritage to their children. ``Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.''¹⁰ Deut. 6:7. This is the way that the Israelites gave their children a Biblical world view. That world view was ingrained by continuous exposure to the truth of God's word and application of that truth to all of life's situations.¹⁰

The goals and objectives of the A.C.E. programme are therefore:

(1) To give children a Biblical world view. The children of Israel were instructed to imprint God's commands on the hearts and minds of their children in such a way that all thinking on matters pertaining to daily living was cross-referenced to a Biblical base.''¹¹

(2) To bring out the best in every child. The A.C.E. programme began with Biblical foundations: God's unique purpose for every individual, the priesthood of the believer and the importance and accountability of every individual on a one-on-one basis toward God.¹² The A.C.E. programme believes that individualism is theistic and must be re-established as a basic philosophy of education and philosophy of life for Christian education in this time of reform.

(3) To excel academically. Individualization has a by-product of academic excellence. Students of the A.C.E. programme continue to demonstrate above average achievements.¹³

⁹ *Christian Education*

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ *Christian Education: Biblical Norm or Modern Day Novelty?*

¹² *Howard, Donald, R. The Strengths and Weaknesses of the A.C.E. program, p.6*

¹³ *Answer to the Crisis in Education*

(4) To mould the characters of children. The programme acknowledges the necessity for discipline, guidance and responsible leadership. The pupils must be controlled in their own lives to develop the use, and experience the material, used to educate them.¹⁴ The conventional curriculum is not as saturated with character development and wisdom as the A.C.E. P.A.C.E.'S.¹⁵

(5) To save young people. The aim of the A.C.E. programme is to captivate the minds and the hearts of the children for Christ. ``Reports come in every year of students saved right in their offices while working in PACE's.''¹⁶

In the Accelerated Christian Education programme Genesis 1:1 ``In the beginning God created'' became a unifying principle. God is accepted as the author of all science, mathematics, geography, language and history.¹⁷ The same thought is expressed by Gaebelain when he says ``All truth is God's truth.''' Walsh and Middleton state that ``Creation, then . . . is the underlying foundation.''¹⁸

The principle goes further than ownership of truth. ``The Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth came knowledge and understanding.''' Proverbs 2:6. Further, Solomon says, ``The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.''' Proverbs 1:7.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE A.C.E. PROGRAMME

The A.C.E. Programme has a loose administrative structure with the local church as the final authority. A steering committee, with the local pastor as the chairperson, guards the goals of the school. Besides the steering committee, there is a parent association which

¹⁴ *Bloemfontein Christian School*

¹⁵ *The Strengths and Weaknesses of the A.C.E. Program*, p. 11

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 13

¹⁷ *Gaebelain*, p. 20

¹⁸ *Walsh and Middleton*, p. 44

addresses the needs of the school. With the kind of Biblical world view that the participants of this programme have, naturally, the pastor plays a vital role. He assumes some of the responsibility and the authority that normally devolves on the Principal.

The whole responsibility of educating a child is based on the interaction between the home, the school and the church. The parents are therefore deeply involved in everything that goes on in the school.

At the beginning of every year, they are trained on how to help their children with their school work.

Financially, the school has to be self-sufficient as there is no higher body that appropriates money to the school. This means, then, that there are no policies governing the salaries and work conditions of the teachers. Each school develops its own policies in accordance with its resources.

In an effort to bring parents and students closer together, the school organises week-end camp-outs and picnics for parents and students.

IMPLEMENTATION

The basic assumption that there can be no Christian education without born-again teachers is very critical to the A.C.E. programme. Jesus provided a fascinating insight into spiritual leadership when He said in Luke 6:39, 40, ``Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.''

''The Bible knows no such thing as truth that is merely theoretical; in the Bible the truth is linked to the deed.''¹⁹ It is evident that ''the world view of the teacher, in so far as he is effective, gradually conditions the world view of the pupil. No man teaches out of a philosophical vacuum. In one way or another, every teacher expresses the convictions he lives by, whether they be spiritually positive or negative.''²⁰

Since co-operation between home, school and church is critical to the programme, pupils or students who attend the A.C.E. programme must have at least one parent who is a born-again Christian.

Unlike the conventional classroom with a chalkboard and a teacher in front of a group of pupils, the A.C.E. classroom is structured differently. Each student or pupil has a desk facing the wall with the sides enclosed. This is called an office. From this office the pupil pushes himself or herself on the self instructional and individually prescribed PACE's. In one classroom, the pupils may all be at different levels. ''The conventional classroom is based upon a philosophy of conformity to the group. It forces an equality of teaching upon an inequality of learners. The uniqueness of the individual is sacrificed for the expediency and convenience of grouping. A.C.E. begins with the individual. All curriculum, placement, testing, motivation, measurement and progress are chartered and graded on an individual basis.''²¹ Each classroom is supervised by two people, a qualified teacher who is known as the Supervisor and an unqualified assistant who is called Monitor. The Monitors are specially trained by A.C.E.²²

Academically, the system acknowledges that all children are different. It encourages each pupil to be on a level of curriculum

¹⁹ Gaebelein, p. 35

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 37

²¹ Howard, *The Strengths and Weaknesses of the A.C.E. Programme*

²² *Accelerated Christian Education in S.A*

whereby each one can perform and produce to the best of their ability.

Secondly, each child sets goals which reflect good judgement in their lives. The goals must be reasonable and achievable in a prescribed period of time. Thirdly, the system acknowledges the necessity for discipline, guidance and responsible leadership. The pupils must be controlled in their own lives to develop the use, and experience the material used to educate them. Fourthly, students are motivated to achieve through a system of privileges. These entitle them to do things that other children may not be permitted to do, e.g., attend field trips, have longer lunch breaks, etc. There is always a conscious effort to attain a balance between love and discipline.²³

As the student works at his or her own PACE in his or her office, he or she will raise a flag when academic assistance is required from a supervisor. The idea is that the supervisor will not tell the student the answer but will ask leading questions that will help the student on the path to discover the right answers.

A CRITIQUE OF THE A.C.E. PROGRAMME

The very idea of a separate Christian school is under question from some people. Brian V. Hill says he understands the urge to withdraw from the larger community (sending children to Christian schools) and to set up a Christian school. Then he says ``there is no direct Biblical injunction to do so, and the justification must be more indirect, weighing the salt principle against the principle of parental responsibility (if indeed they are at odds) and investigating whether in fact public schools damage religious

²³ *Bloemfontein Christian School*

commitment more than what I am here calling Christian garrison schools''²⁴. The A.C.E. programme is an attempt to return to the basics.

Having been in operation for about 23 years, it is a fairly young programme. That immediately raises a number of questions. Will the programme stand the test of time? How can we make a fair comparison with other systems of education that have been around for a 100 years or more? Institutions are judged by the quality of their products. Has the programme produced enough graduates through whom we may judge it?

While it is true that there may be no ready answers to some of the questions raised, yet the aim of this paper is to look at the programme as presented in the foregoing pages and to make an evaluation on that basis.

WEAKNESSES

The president and founder of the A.C.E. programme, Dr Howard, has done his own evaluation of the programme and has recorded his comments in a booklet entitled, *The Strengths and Weaknesses of the A.C.E. Programme*. Obviously, we cannot just accept his evaluation since we may suspect that as a founder he faces temptations of subjectivity. On the other hand, we cannot completely ignore his comments because, according to him, these weaknesses have been pointed out by critics.²⁵ The writer will begin with his own critique before mentioning what Howard has to say.

(i) *The absence of a super-administrative structure to supervise the programme.* Does the presence of a super-administrative structure encourage or inhibit growth? The question is debatable. What is certain is that a super-administrative structure helps maintain the same policies and standards in all schools. With a

²⁴ Brian V. Hill, *Faith at the Blackboard*, p. 74

²⁵ *The Strengths and Weaknesses*, p. 3

number of schools under one umbrella, it would be easier to ensure that the goals of integrating faith and learning were maintained.

(ii) *Financial Instability*. The A.C.E. programme tends to face financial problems. The school receives no appropriations from any higher body. The local church is the final authority. While maintaining two people in one classroom could have academic benefits, it certainly is a drain on the meagre financial resources of the school.

(iii) *Motivation*. The motivational methods used are questionable. The idea of getting rewards which other cannot get, encourages selfishness. Reference is being made here to such rewards as longer lunch breaks and field trips which others are not permitted to enjoy. Rilla Taylor suggests that 'Christ Himself never acted from any sort of selfish benefit, going so far as to regard His obedience to God as of greater importance than food even when death seemed imminent. He took care not to have more, or even as much as, His subordinates.'²⁶

(iv) *Integration of Faith in the PACE's*. The A.C.E. curriculum reflects a Biblical base which acknowledges God as Creator of all things and which declares Jesus as Lord and Saviour.²⁷ Sometimes verses are inserted in PACE's which seem not to have anything to do with the subject under study. This is done with a sincere desire to integrate faith and learning.

Howard lists the following weaknesses:

- (a) The A.C.E. is new and seldom completely understood.
- (b) The programme is different from the traditional system where you have a class with a teacher in front of the group.
- (c) It is too theistic.

²⁶ Rilla Taylor, *A Study of Christ*, 1986, p. 15

²⁷ *Accelerated Christian Education in S.A.*

- (d) The massive development over a relatively brief period of time.²⁸

Howard believes that most critics do not understand enough about A.C.E. to give it a fair evaluation, but rather they are coming at it from a conventional point of view. Their presuppositions are that, "It is not the right way, therefore, it cannot work."²⁹

STRENGTHS

(i) The one feature that seems to be outstanding in this programme is the individualized approach. It is commendable both for integration of faith with learning and for academic progress. E.G. White says, "In all true teaching the personal element is essential. Christ in His teaching dealt with men individually . . . It was in private, often to but one listener, that He gave His most precious instruction."³⁰

(ii) It encourages independence of thought and action from a very early age. Arthur F. Holmes says a student should be able to say when asked, "I learned what it is to see and think and act like the human person God made me to be."³¹

In the book Education the author states that "our reasoning powers were given us for use, and God desires them to be exercised".³²

²⁸ *Strengths and Weaknesses*, pp. 3-7

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 3

³⁰ *Education*, p. 231

³¹ Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, p. 36

³² *Education*, p. 231

As has already been mentioned, when a student needs help, the supervisor will not tell him or her the answer but will ask questions that will lead the student to solve his or her own problems. ``The mind that depends upon the judgment of others is certain, sooner or later, to be misled.''³³ ``The great object of education is to enable us to use the powers which God has given us in such a manner as will best represent the religion of the Bible and promote the glory of God.''³⁴

(iii) Academic achievement is also commendable. Tests were conducted on 1460 randomly selected students representing grades 4 - 11. Students took the California Achievement Test (CAT) administered according to McGraw-Hill standards. Results were as follows: 4th Grade students were at the 4th Grade levels of achievement. However from 5th Grade up the average student began to accelerate ahead of expected Grade levels. The results showed that students, on average, achieved approximately 1 year 7 months above the ``normal'' average. McGraw-Hill Mental Maturity Tests revealed that children on A.C.E. experienced an annual I.Q. increase of 5 points in the first 3 years. Whether this increase can be attributed to the Bible, environment, increased reading, self-discipline, etc. is not determined. It can only be concluded that a combination of these factors has the effect of building creativity and capability in the child.³⁵ ``Where comparisons have been made, even by conventional educators, the following order of achievement prevails:

1. A.C.E. students
2. Conventional Christian school students
3. Conventional public school students.''³⁶

³³ *Ibid*, p. 231

³⁴ 3T 160 (also CT 361)

³⁵ *Accelerated Christian Education in South Africa*

³⁶ *The Strengths and Weaknesses of the A.C.E. programme*, p. 35

(iv) The close co-operation between the school, the home and the church is significant. All the three institutions are certainly responsible for building the character of a child. Faith needs to be integrated in every aspect of life in the home as well as in school.

(v) The element of Christian service is also very evident in the programme. In the curriculum, students study biographies of godly men and women whom the Lord used in His service. They pick up certain Bible characters like Paul as well as other historical figures like Martin Luther, John Wesley and others. As they study the lives of these men and women of God, the teacher also encourages students to prepare to serve God as did those whose lives they are studying.

In practical life, they make trips to hospitals and Old Age homes. They are also encouraged to take care of the environment in a practical way. In *Testimonies*, vol. 6, E.G. White says children should be taught to bear responsibilities.³⁷

(vi) The idea of putting each student at his own level of curriculum whereby each one can perform and produce to the best of their ability. In the book *Education* the writer states that "the youth should be encouraged to advance just as far as their capabilities will permit".

The following grid compares the ACE programme with some of the principles of education as found in the writings of E.G. White:

³⁷ 6 T, p. 198.

SDA Philosophy of Education

1. The object of education is to promote the development of body, mind, and soul.

To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized, ... this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life. Education, page 16.

2. Education aims at the highest development of the mental powers.

It is right for the youth to feel that they must reach the highest development of their mental powers. We would not restrict the education to which God has set no limit. CT 387.

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1. The Bible is the book of Life and is the foundation of all human relations and principles of teaching. It is the basis of all A.C.E. text materials. ``Daily in the Scriptures'' is designed for programming the mind to enable the child to see life from God's point of view. (Your church can have a Christian School). Reports come in every year of students saved right in their offices while working in PACE's. (The strengths and weaknesses of the A.C.E. Programs). Sport is an integral part of the school programme (Accelerated Christian Education in South Africa).
2. Academic achievement is among the greatest strengths of A.C.E., and comes as a surprise to the educational fraternity which espouses much less efficient or less productive ``status quo'' conventional methodology. (The strengths and weaknesses of the A.C.E. Program p 26). A.C.E. has undertaken

extensive tests and has also commissioned McGraw-Hill to conduct an independent survey of the results of A.C.E. schools. These show that internationally, A.C.E. is well above the conventional curriculum in its standards (Accelerated Christian Education in SA).

3. Education trains children for service in the work of God and in society.

The true object of education should be carefully considered ... cultivate our powers, and attain the highest possible capacity for usefulness, that we may do noble work for God, and bless humanity. *FE4*, 82.

4. Education aims at training the "youth to be thinkers."
To develop this power; to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts. *Education*, page 17.

3. The life work of a believer is the conquest of this world for Christ. As followers of Christ our children need a Christian Education to equip them for this task. (Agape Christian School for Accelerated Christian Education).

4. The Supervisor will not tell the student the answer but will ask leading questions that will lead the student on the path to discover the solutions. (Accelerated Christian Education in South Africa).

5. The primary object of education is harmony with the Creator.

And this is all in keeping with the primary object of education; for in encouraging activity, diligence, and purity we are coming into harmony with the Creator. *MYP*, 178.

6. Education should awaken a love for goodness, truth, and beauty, and arouse a desire for excellence.

''... to awaken the love for goodness and truth and beauty, ... to arouse the desire for excellence.'' pp 595.

7. Education should equip the student with a set of principles which can serve as a guide in conduct and service.

It is his ambition to inspire them with principles of truth, obedience, honour, integrity, and purity, - principles that will make them a positive force for the stability and uplifting of society. *Education*, p 29.

5. The A.C.E. model is a system that puts God first in every subject and relationship. (Agape Christian School for Accelerated Christian Education).

6. Academic learning and a high sense of Christian value can be attained through Christian education. A Bible-based school provides an atmosphere that enriches lives and encourages full-time Christian service. (Your church can have a Christian school).

7. The school is based on Godly principles and will train your child to accept responsibility for his or her own choices and actions. (Bloemfontein Christian School).

8. Education should acquaint the student with his obligations to himself, the world, and God.

It teaches the best use not only of one but of all our powers and acquirements. Thus it covers the whole circle of obligation, ... to ourselves, to the world, and to God. *Education*, page 225.

9. Education seeks to "impart that vitalizing energy which is received through the contact of mind with mind, and soul with soul."

It is not the highest work of education to communicate knowledge merely, but to impart that vitalizing energy which is received through the contact of mind with mind, and soul with soul. *DA*, 250.

10. True education develops character.

He who co-operates with the divine purpose in imparting to the youth a knowledge of God, and moulding character into harmony with His, does a high and noble work. *Education*, p 19.

8. The school of Tomorrow has emerged as a world-class leader in a revolutionary "back to God; back to parents; back to basics and back to the individual" movement in education. (Answer to the Crisis in Education).

9. There are other times during the day when pupils have necessary interaction:

-hourly short breaks

-lunch breaks

-group Bible studies (devotions)

-physical education

-group lessons (music, home economics, local history and geography, orals, etc)

- (ACE Education in S.A.)

10. Prior to its beginning in 1970, there had not been a complete self-instructional curriculum spanning all twelve grades, recognizing and integrating the truths and character values of the Bible throughout. (Answer to the crisis in Education).

CONCLUSION

The A.C.E. programme has grown very fast in a short period of time. Educators would do well to do an in depth study of such a system. The founder attributes the fast growth of the programme to Biblical principles.³⁸

The following are some of the features in the programme that need further study with a view to inco-operating them into the Adventist system of education:

- (a) Individualized approach. 'A.C.E. began with Biblical foundations; God's unique purpose for every individual, the individuality of the individual, the priesthood of the believer, and the importance and accountability of every individual on a one-on-one basis toward God.'³⁹
- (b) The integration of faith in the subject lessons. Faith is integrated in all the PACE's.
- (c) The reason for better academic achievement. ACE schools perform better academically than private schools which are known to do better than public schools.
- (d) The element of training in independence of thought.

³⁸ Donald R. Howard, *World Awakening*, p. 185

³⁹ Donald R. Howard, *The Strengths and Weaknesses of the ACE programme*, p. 6

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