

Accelerated Christian Education: a case study of the use of race in voucher-funded private Christian schools

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Abstract

President Donald Trump has promised an expansion of voucher programs for private schools in the United States. Private Christian schools are likely beneficiaries of such an expansion, but little research has been conducted about the curricula they use or their suitability for public funds. This article describes and critiques the depiction of race in Accelerated Christian Education, a curriculum used in some voucher-funded schools in the USA, as well as in private schools in 140 countries. It employs content analysis and qualitative documentary analysis of the curriculum workbooks, and builds on Christian Smith and Michael Emerson's theoretical framework of white evangelicals' 'cultural toolkit' to explain the ideas about race in the curriculum. The paper finds that in addition to some overt racism, the system promulgates a worldview which does not have the capacity to recognize or oppose systemic injustice. It is argued that such a curriculum is not a suitable recipient of federal funding.

Keywords: Christian Education, Educational Vouchers, Private Schools, Race, Racial Relations

Introduction

With the election of Donald Trump as US President, and his appointment of voucher advocate Betsy DeVos as education secretary, voucher funding for private schools is expected to expand considerably (Resmovits, 2017). Schools employing Christian fundamentalist curricula are likely beneficiaries of such expansion, yet little research

exists about their content. With the US administration heightening tensions around immigration, it is important that school curricula challenge intolerant views rather than contribute to ignorance and fear.

Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) is already used in voucher schools in several US states including Louisiana (Loxton, 2012) and Florida (DeWitt, 2017). A previous examination of ACE's social studies content found that it was politically biased and intolerant towards non-Christians and Catholics (Paterson, 2003). More recently, it has been shown that the assessment instrument used for ACE is of poor quality and inappropriate as a determinant of a candidate's suitability for university entrance (Scaramanga & Reiss, 2017). This article examines the ACE curriculum's treatment of race and ethnicity, asking whether it is suitable for use in publicly funded schools.

The US Christian schools movement, which has roots in the 1920s but proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s, was led by fundamentalist educators (Laats, 2010b; Peshkin, 1986). The extent to which these were 'white flight' schools or 'segregation academies' is sometimes overstated. Supreme Court decisions ending state-mandated prayer and bible reading, along with fears over the teaching of evolution, spurred their formation. In addition, negative reactions to the desegregation of public schools undoubtedly motivated the founding of at least some of these schools (Johnson, 2011; Laats, 2009). The resulting Christian school curriculum market came to be dominated by ACE, Abeka, and BJU Press, three fundamentalist curricula with roots at Bob Jones University (Laats, 2010a), an organisation which then explicitly promoted some white supremacist views.

We have both personal and professional reasons to focus on ACE in particular. One of us (Scaramanga) attended an ACE school. He first became concerned about ACE's treatment of race when, as a student, he found a defence of South African apartheid in a social studies PACE (ACE, 1990). While studying the PACEs for an examination of ACE's suitability as preparation for university entrance (Scaramanga & Reiss, 2017), we observed other problematic elements that prompted us to examine more rigorously ACE's language about race.

While Abeka and BJU appear to be more widely used in the USA (Guthrie, 2011), they do not claim as ACE does to be used in schools in more than 140 countries (ACE, 2017). ACE's curriculum is self-instructional and does not require formal qualifications for teachers, which has allowed it to thrive in areas with a shortage of qualified staff or where schools are too small to pay teachers' significant salaries. In the UK, for example, BJU and Abeka have almost no presence, while there has long been a contingent of ACE schools (Walford, 1995). This makes ACE of international interest.

Voucher schemes

In 2012, the now-defunct activist website CreationistVouchers.com identified nine US states where voucher funding had gone to schools teaching fundamentalist curricula (Archive.org, 2014). ACE schools were identified as beneficiaries in five of these states. Typical of voucher schemes are Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Accounts, which give eligible families 90% of the funding that would otherwise have gone to the student's public or charter school (Wingett Sanchez & O'Dell, 2017). This programme was originally for disabled students, but has been expanded to include

those in schools judged poor-performing, military children, those from Native American reservations, foster children, and siblings of those already on the program.

Countries vary in the ways private education is funded. In Australia, all private schools, including ACE, receive public funding—they are ‘private’ in that they charge additional fees (Rowe & Perry, 2016). England, meanwhile, has no voucher scheme for school-aged children, but all children aged 3-4 are entitled to at least 15 hours per week of early education or childcare (Gov.uk, 2017), which can be provided through private schools. In 2014 it was reported that a number of religious groups whom campaigners labelled ‘extremist’ had been funded this way, including nine ACE schools (Malnick & Paton, 2014). Legislation was passed that was designed to stop such schools from receiving funding, but one year later, 54 of the 91 schools of concern were still part of the free early education scheme (Espinoza, 2015).

Accelerated Christian Education

ACE is ‘a complete, self-instructional curriculum that integrates Bible truths and character values throughout all subjects and grade levels. Biblical principles and concepts are interwoven into all aspects of the programme ... and science is taught from the Biblical perspective of creation’ (Christian Education Europe, 2017). The curriculum consists mainly of PACEs (Packets of Accelerated Christian Education), workbooks typically around 40 pages in length, each of which takes a student approximately two weeks to complete (ACE, 2010a). Students complete these workbooks at desks enclosed on three sides, known as offices (ACE, 2012, pp. 78-83).

ACE originated in Texas and now has its headquarters in Tennessee, but the standardized curriculum is distributed globally. It is used in approximately 6,000 schools worldwide, as well as by ‘thousands’ of home schoolers (ACE, 2017). Although ACE has existed since 1970, it has been the subject of surprisingly little research (Scaramanga, 2017).

Historical context

ACE’s founder, Donald Howard, earned his doctorate at Bob Jones University (BJU) during the 1960s. From its founding, BJU refused to accept black students, a policy it only reversed in the 1970s under considerable legal pressure. In 1960 BJU founder Bob Jones Sr wrote of the civil rights movement, ‘Do not let these Satanic propagandists fool you, this agitation is not of God. It is of the devil’ (quoted in Dalhouse, 1996, p. 155). Bob Jones Jr, BJU’s president, subsequently refused to sign an act of compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Dalhouse, 1996, p. 156). BJU became internationally famous in 2000 when George W. Bush began his presidential re-election campaign there (Eilperin & Rosin, 2000). Bush was criticized for failing to denounce the school’s ban on interracial dating, which it had maintained despite losing its tax exemption for this and other discriminatory policies (Dalhouse, 1996, p. 158).

Despite accusations of racism towards the Christian school movement, ACE insisted it was not a racist organisation, its founder writing:

Regardless of the reactions of the media, the Christian school movement is not racist. Schools are opening in white and black communities alike. Schools are segregated, integrated, multiracial, and as cross-sectioned as any program that’s all-American. (Howard, 1979, p. 288)

The inclusion of 'segregated' on this list of possible qualities of Christian schools implies that Howard believed the question of segregation was for schools to decide individually. By 1987, however, ACE's official policy was not to ally itself with any school that prohibited or discouraged minority students (Parsons, 1987, p. 116).

Researchers investigating ACE schools in northwest Texas found that their student bodies were almost entirely white, but were nevertheless satisfied that the schools were open to students of all races and were not 'racist academies' (Stoker & Splawn, 1980, p. 5).

Alberta investigation

In 1984, it was discovered that Jim Keegstra had been teaching holocaust denial for 15 years in private schools in Alberta, Canada (Bercuson & Wertheimer, 1985). In the wake of this scandal, the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding (Ghitter, 1984) produced a report on Alberta's private schools. While Keegstra was not an ACE teacher, ACE came under considerable scrutiny because of alleged connections between Keegstra and Stockwell Day, a politician who also operated an ACE school (Laird, 1998). The Committee was sufficiently concerned by what it found in ACE, Abeka, and other fundamentalist textbooks to commission a separate investigation.

The Alberta education department ultimately concluded PACEs 'do not display a systematic lack of tolerance and understanding toward any of the minority groups.

Occasional lapses do occur as were noted in social studies where a degree of insensitivity towards blacks, Jews, and Natives was identified. These flaws are insufficient to warrant rejection' (Alberta Department of Education, 1985, p. 25).

They did, however, judge the PACEs unacceptable for their treatment of mainstream scientists:

Those who challenge the explanations given in PACEs ... to historical events and scientific phenomena are described as being “godless”, “anti-biblical”, “foolish”, and “a fake teacher”. (Alberta Department of Education, 1985, p. 24)

Apartheid controversy

ACE was again the subject of a race controversy in 1993 when a *New York Times* article unearthed the following quotation from one of its workbooks:

Although apartheid appears to allow the unfair treatment of blacks, the system has worked well in South Africa ... Although white businessmen and developers are guilty of some unfair treatment of blacks, they turned South Africa into a modern industrialized nation, which the poor, uneducated blacks couldn't have accomplished in several more decades. If more blacks were suddenly given control of the nation, its economy and business, as Mandela wished, they could have destroyed what they have waited and worked so hard for. (quoted in Dent, 1993)

An ACE representative defended the passage, however:

Ron Johnson, an ACE vice president, said he doesn't consider the passage ... to be racist, but in a statement he referred to South Africa as “the best example of an industrialised African nation,” and added, “It's not for us to say if apartheid is the consequence, the result or the cause of so much physical abuse of human beings in South Africa.” (Dent, 1993)

Even here, however, ACE's message was not wholly consistent. Evans (1995) reports that from its first arrival in South Africa, ACE defied apartheid authorities by insisting that schools be integrated.

Curriculum reviews

Only a handful of independent reviews of the ACE curriculum exist, of which three make reference to its problematic racial content. Fleming and Hunt (1987) quote from a social studies PACE which denied that the white regime in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was racist. Regarding ACE's treatment of Aboriginal Australians, Speck and Prideaux (1993) sought advice from Australia's Aboriginal Studies Officers and

from Aboriginal people, who expressed ‘extreme concern’ (p. 285) and indicated the materials were unacceptable:

Major deficiencies identified included the promotion of simplistic generalisations about Aborigines, and lack of attention to the richness and diversity of Aboriginal cultures, and the complex social structures, values and beliefs of Aboriginal people. (Speck & Prideaux, 1993, p. 285)

Frances Paterson’s review of ACE, Abeka, and BJU Press focused on religious rather than racial intolerance: ‘To say that the authors ... portray Roman Catholicism and non-Western religions in a negative way is to understate the case by several orders of magnitude. All the texts evince a deep hostility to these religions’ (2003, p. 107).

Where a religion is closely associated with a particular ethnic group, this religious intolerance can have racist implications—some ACE materials describe Native Americans as ‘savages’, ‘primitive pagans’, and ‘worshippers of demons’ (quoted in Paterson, 2003, p. 159).

UK NARIC controversy

In 2008, NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centre), the UK government agency responsible for international qualification comparisons, endorsed the ICCE (International Certificate of Christian Education), a qualification awarded to students completing their ACE studies. Contemporary news reports (Shaw, 2009; Shepherd, 2009) challenged this endorsement in part by referring to an ACE workbook which appeared to defend Apartheid. The full quotation reads:

For many years, the four racial groups were separated politically and socially by law. This policy of racial separation is called ‘apartheid.’ South Africa's apartheid policy encouraged whites, Blacks, Coloureds, and Asians to develop their own independent ways of life. Separate living areas and schools made it possible for each group to maintain and pass on their culture and heritage to their children.

For many years, Blacks were not allowed to vote in national elections and had no voice in the national government. Reporters and broadcasters from all parts of the world stirred up feelings against the white South African government. These factors contributed to unrest within South Africa. In addition, there are at least ten separate, distinct tribal groups in the nation. Because these tribes are not a cohesive group but are often in conflict with each other, much of the violence in South Africa has been between different groups of Blacks. In spite of apartheid and the unrest in recent years, South Africa is the most developed country in Africa, and Blacks in South Africa earn more money and have higher standards of living than Blacks in other African countries. (ACE, 2006, pp. 27-28)

The significance of the reference to ‘reporters and broadcasters’ might be lost on those unfamiliar with conservative Christian rhetoric about the “liberal media”. In another PACE, students read ‘The humanist ... media ... is training North Americans to reason away much of the Bible and its teachings’ (ACE, 2010c, p. 13). It is likely that ACE students find themselves in a cultural milieu where the mainstream media are seen as opposed to Christian values. When they read that ‘reporters and broadcasters stirred up feelings’, students may assume that this is another instance of “liberal media” bias. The description of ‘much of the violence’ as ‘between different groups of Blacks’ minimizes the roles of the white government and of white citizens in the oppression of black people, instead blaming the victims.

Responding to accusations of racism in the ACE curriculum, spokesperson Brenda Lewis ‘said she had never seen the apartheid claims, but stressed that British teachers would strongly challenge them’ (Shaw, 2009). The apartheid material in question, however, had been in use since 1994. Because ACE is a self-instructional curriculum, it is possible for school staff to be unaware of all that students are being taught. If Brenda Lewis, an ACE school headteacher, had not noticed racist material in circulation for 15 years, it is unclear how she could be confident it would be challenged in schools.

Theoretical framework

This research builds on earlier work by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith (2000; Emerson, Smith, & Sikkink, 1999) about white evangelicals' attitudes to racial inequality in the USA. While ACE itself is fundamentalist rather than evangelical, Emerson and Smith's framework is a valid starting point because no differences were found between self-described evangelicals' and fundamentalists' explanations for racial inequality (Emerson et al., 1999, p. 402), and because ACE's curriculum is widely used in evangelical schools (Walford, 1995), and in charismatic Christian schools (Froneman, 2012; Hoon, 2010; Van Brummelen, 1989).

Emerson and Smith argue that white evangelicals are not personally prejudiced or hateful. Indeed, many evangelical ministries actively seek to end racism.

Nevertheless, white evangelicals hold beliefs which contribute to the perpetuation of a racialized society. This, they argue, is because of white evangelicals' cultural "tool kit" (Swidler, 1986). Swidler argues that culture provides a tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews, which provide a basis for solving problems and organising actions. Emerson et al (1999, p. 400) argue that this toolkit 'does not determine perspectives or actions, but limits them, in the same way carpenters are limited by the tools available'. They further argue that these guiding assumptions are transposable, so that believers use the cultural tools of white evangelicalism not only in religious contexts, but also to make sense of issues such as race relations:

The racially important cultural tools in the white evangelical toolkit are "accountable freewill individualism," "relationalism" (attaching central importance to interpersonal relationships), and antistructuralism (inability to perceive or unwillingness to accept social structural influences). (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 76)

Although modern US evangelicalism is diverse (Worthen, 2014), the emphasis on individualism, and rejection of structuralism, is rooted in their theology of salvation. According to evangelicalism, to become ‘born again’, one must make an individual decision. When we die, God will hold us individually accountable for our actions, and punish the unsaved with eternal damnation:

Underlying traditional Christian thought is an image of man as a free actor, as essentially unfettered by social circumstances, free to choose and thus free to effect his own salvation. This free-will conception of man has been central to the doctrines of sin and salvation. For only if man is totally free does it seem just to hold him responsible for his acts. (Stark and Glock 1969, quoted in Emerson et al., 1999, p. 401)

Emerson et al. suggest that Stark and Glock’s characterisation is ‘somewhat overstated’ (ibid). While it may be overstated for white evangelicalism at large, it is a fair representation of ACE, which takes an uncompromisingly individualistic position on pedagogy, economics, and theology. Students study individualized worksheets in isolated carrels. PACEs argue against all forms of welfare and state-funded healthcare because these are thought to be unscriptural: ‘Genesis declares that man is to earn bread by the sweat of his face, not by another man’s’ (Howard, 1979, p. 67).

Religious lessons emphasize ‘God created us as individuals. Jesus died for us as individuals and we will one day be judged as individuals’ (Dennett, 1988, p. 40). As a result, ‘it is a necessity for evangelicals to interpret the problem [of racial inequality] at the individual level. To do otherwise would challenge the very basis of their world, both their faith and the American way of life’ (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 89).

Emerson and Smith’s (2000) survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,000 US white conservative Protestants found that they were much more likely to endorse individual explanations for racial inequality and to reject structural explanations. They

tend to overlook or deny societal and institutional forms of racism. From qualitative interviews used to illuminate these findings, Emerson and Smith explain that white evangelicals see racism as simply the result of original sin.

In addition to the factors Emerson and Smith identify, we argue that ACE employs other cultural tools that lead to blind spots where racism is concerned: its particular reading of history as the unfolding of God's plan, and its conflation of "white" values with "Christian" values. Williams (2010) argues that evangelicals, through initiatives against evolution, Catholic political power and communism, came to see the Republican Party as the vehicle through which they could reclaim the US as a Christian nation. This is not to forget the importance, albeit in a minority role, of the evangelical left in US politics (Swartz, 2012).

Of central relevance to our argument is Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey's (2012) *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*. Here the authors examine the apparent paradox that the image of Christ has been used both to justify the atrocities of white supremacy and to inspire the righteousness of civil rights crusades. From a theological perspective, this is not that surprising – it has long been held that it is as easy to undertake eisegesis (the opposite of the more desirable exegesis); in regards, for example, to issues to do with the family and sexuality, Christians, while generally conservative, are sometimes, on scriptural grounds, deeply radical (Reiss, 2014).

Methods

Our methodological approach draws on content analysis, literary analysis, and critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Drawing on historian Richard Beringer's work, Derrick Alridge argues that literary analysis is a primary method in intellectual history, in which researchers (1) read the literature, (2) note the themes, (3) discuss the themes, and (4) support their conclusions by example (Alridge, 2006, p. 40). This methodology has successfully been employed in evaluations of the role of race in curricula (Alridge, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2010). We read the PACEs word for word, paying particular attention to wordings and visual representations that alluded, expressly or otherwise, to issues of race. As will be seen below, there is no real need for any formal use of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 2003); the attention to documentation typical of historical enquiry (e.g. McCulloch, 2004) suffices.

In addition to a qualitative examination of a selection of ACE's English, social studies, and science curriculum, we performed a content analysis on the cartoons that appear in the PACEs. A character strip is 'A pictorial storyline of the A.C.E. characters throughout the curriculum that illustrates Biblical principles with the purpose of instilling Godly character into the lives of students' (ACE, 2010a, p. 8). Looking at the ethnicity of the depicted characters, we examined the number of representations of white people and people of colour in the PACEs. Our hypothesis was that all skin tones other than white would be under-represented, because they are under-represented in curricula produced by ACE's main fundamentalist competitors, Abeka and BJU Press (Agiro, 2012).

Of the PACEs examined, 55 English, 20 Science, and 11 Social Studies PACEs contained character strips. The differences in number are because English PACEs

include character strips in every grade, whereas in science they stop after the 8th grade and in social studies after the 7th. Each PACE typically contains three or four character strips. The PACEs were obtained between 2012 and 2014 and were the most recent available at the time of purchase.

Results

For Table 1, we counted every character in each strip, even if that character had previously appeared in another strip in the same PACE. Using this method, there are 854 character appearances in 272 cartoons, of which 754 (88%) are white. For Table 2, we calculated the percentages of cartoons to feature one or more white people and one or more person/people of colour (POC). At least one POC appears in 19% of reviewed cartoons. Almost all of these are black; representation of other ethnicities is very limited. This is in part because at the time of our examination, ACE was still in the process of releasing the 4th edition PACEs, which include some Asian and Latino characters. In the 3rd edition, the only character not black or white is Victor Manley, an adopted orphan from the Pacific Islands, who appears in seven cartoons.

[Table 1 about here]

[Table 2 about here]

In the United States, where ACE is based, white people are 77.4% of the population (US Census Bureau, 2015). By this measure, white people are over-represented and POC under-represented in the PACEs. ACE, however, is sold around the world in 140 countries, including many where whites are a minority. For use in such places, the under-representation of POC in the PACEs is glaring.

POC are also under-represented in ACE's English materials. ACE English consists mostly of traditional grammar exercises. From the seventh to ninth grade, the example sentences tell stories of modern-day Christian heroes. Of the 38 heroes mentioned, all but one (George Washington Carver) are white (and all but two are male). One of them is Confederate general Robert E. Lee, who is repeatedly described as 'wise' and 'a strong Christian', while secession is depicted as the conscientious result of 'differing opinions' (ACE, 1995, pp. 13-27, 42).

It is not, however, under- or over-representation that is most problematic in PACEs, but the way different ethnicities are represented. Third edition PACE character strips are set in a fictional city called Highland. In Highland, there are two church schools, named Highland and Harmony. All the staff, students, and church attendees at Highland are white, while all those at Harmony are black. Fourth edition PACEs add another church-school, Heartsville, where everyone is Latino or Asian. In the PACE world, churches and schools are segregated. While the PACEs never explicitly acknowledge this fact, ACE's list of main characters from each church-school shows that they are separated by skin colour (ACE, 2012, pp. 146-150). In 23 of the examined cartoons (8%), characters of different ethnicities are shown interacting outside of church or school, however.

ACE claims 'There is an ethnic awareness quality that illustrates how diverse ethnic groups can live harmoniously' (ACE, 2010a, p. 19). Given that schools depicted in PACEs are segregated, it might be inferred that ACE believes the way for diverse ethnic groups to live harmoniously is for them to be largely separate. Even if this is not the intention, ACE's depiction of segregated communities serves to normalize the

idea, particularly for those students who attend schools where all students are of the same ethnic background.

There is some evidence that ACE has tried to improve the representation of POC in the 4th edition PACEs. An exception to the depiction of segregated schools appears in *Science 1021* (ACE, 2010b, pp. 6, 23); two cartoons show black characters from Harmony church-school in the background of a scene at Highland (their presence in the “white” school is not explained). The cartoons in the 3rd edition (ACE, 2005) show white characters in the background, but are otherwise similar. Although it may be a welcome sign of increased inclusivity, this change also raises questions: if ACE wishes to depict integration, why not abolish the segregated schools altogether? Why, judging from our sample, are the changes towards inclusivity so few?

The representations of different ethnicities are not obviously stereotyped. In fact, there is nothing distinctive about any of the characters, who all dress alike and perform the same activities. Of the examined 4th edition cartoons, 11 depicted Latino and Asian characters; the text and actions shown are identical to 3rd edition cartoons depicting white characters. There are no cultural differences between the characters because for ACE’s authors, Christianity entails a particular way of behaving. As one early review of the curriculum put it:

[In ACE’s] Statements of Practice, a Christian life-style, which includes “modest clothing, appropriate hair styles, and general deference to the tastes of fundamental Christians,” is described. A specific style of dress and grooming seems to be required ...

ACE materials generally reflect a Christian perspective, but as an outgrowth of the Christian faith they also promote a certain life style, an allegiance which is not necessarily part of that faith. (Moser & Mueller, 1980, pp. 10, 15)

The PACEs make little or no distinction between Christian values and the values of the white, middle-class, Southern US milieu from which they originated. The authors' preferences for dress, musical style, and behaviour are presented as requirements for holiness. Being "Christian", then, means assimilation to white, middle-class culture. This is seen in both ACE's prescriptivist grammar curriculum, which presents traditional standard (white) English grammar as the only "correct" way to write or speak, a practice which disadvantages speakers of Black English Vernacular and other dialects of English (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). It is also present in the uniform guidelines for boys at ACE's student conventions, which state 'Extra curly or afro hair is not to exceed one inch in length', while other boys' hair may be any length so long as it is 'not touching the ear or collar' (ACE, 2016, pp. I-8, I-13). White America has long depicted black men's bodies as hyper-sexualized, thuggish, and inferior (Ford, 2008). As Mercer (2000, p. 113) notes, 'black people's hair has been historically *devalued* as the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin'. ACE's ban on Afro hair, a symbol of Black Pride and Black Power (Mercer, 2000), can be understood in this context. It might also be seen as an attempt to apply a Biblical injunction against long hair (*I Corinthians* 11:14-15) to African hair types. Nevertheless, it is a rule which explicitly targets afro hair, implying that it is somehow improper at lengths considered acceptable for other hair types.

Anti-racist sentiments

It is clear that the ACE does not think of itself as racist, and in places the PACEs position themselves as anti-racist. Of cartoons appearing in PACEs, ACE claims 'There is an ethnic awareness quality that illustrates how diverse ethnic groups can live harmoniously' (ACE, 2010a, p. 19). A more recent history PACE describes

present-day South Africa: ‘Great churches, where all races worship God together, are being built throughout the country and are establishing schools where children of all races learn and play together’ (ACE, 2010c, p. 55). The texts state, albeit infrequently, that integration is desirable and prejudice is unchristian.

One PACE endorses the Supreme Court’s 1954 integration of schools, saying: ‘No one should be oppressed because of race, religion, or color. Leviticus 25:17 states, “Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God”’ (ACE, 2015, p. 30). The same PACE favourably mentions Martin Luther King, although descriptions of his activism are limited and there is no description of the injustices perpetrated under segregation or Jim Crow. King is the subject of a total of 345 words in the PACE text, which is approximately 13,000 words long and covers the period 1945-1965. The struggle for integration in US schools receives a further 489 words; the 1964 Civil Rights Act gets 55 words. This is the entirety of coverage of the Civil Rights Movement in this period. By comparison, Supreme Court decisions removing compulsory prayer and Bible reading from public schools receive 733 words.

No doubt ACE would reject accusations of racism, arguing that God commands us to love everyone equally. This rejection is unsurprising. Emerson and Smith (2000) argue that white evangelicals are not more personally prejudiced than others, nor are they less concerned about racism. Rather, their cultural toolkit means that even where they engage in anti-racist activities, they can act in ways that reinforce and reproduce racial inequality.

History

In ACE's view of history, God continually intervenes:

[W]e cannot study history without acknowledging that God is the Author and Finisher of all history – it is 'His - story'. We see God intervening directly in human affairs right from the beginning – the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the call of Abram and so on. No human authority or government is in power without His permission, as Romans 13:1 says: *'There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.'*

God also works through principles which he demonstrates over the course of time. For example, the principle *'righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people'* (Proverbs 14:34) has been worked out in the history of several great nations and empires across the world. (CEE, 2011, p. 3)¹

As ACE's vice president explains: 'Observing historical cycles of civilization, ACE writers correlate subordination to God to the life spans of civilizations' (Johnson, 1987, p. 520). In the PACEs, the fall of empires is associated with the loss of Christian morality. The success of the British Empire and later of the United States, by contrast, are said to be the result of the Christian foundations of these countries. Of Queen Victoria's reign, students read:

Queen Victoria's exemplary virtue and longevity contributed much to the stability and high moral tone of the Victorian Age. So, too, did Britain's position as a dynamo of industrial power, a showcase of material prosperity, a fearsome military threat to all would-be challengers, and a paradigm of democratic reform ... Now, at the zenith of her history, the Christian faith of Britons—the very foundation of British society, culture, and civilization—was under serious attack. (ACE, 1997a, p. 7)

This 'serious attack', according to the text, came from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, from biblical scholarship which challenged literal interpretations, and from Karl Marx. Thus, 'The fragmentation of Britain's traditional belief in Biblical principles could not fail to bring negative results ... the Empire was in decline' (ibid).

¹CEE (Christian Education Europe) is ACE's European distributor. It publishes PACEs primarily for use in the UK and Europe, but which are also available in other territories.

The view that ‘righteousness exalteth a nation’ requires a selective reading of history.

In order to defend the view that the British Empire was a godly enterprise, British

History PACEs minimize the evils of colonialism:

For the past thirty years it has been fashionable with popular historians and journalists to ‘write off’ the Empire as a repressive and negative venture in the subjugation of peoples and nations. The very words ‘imperialist’ and ‘imperialism’ have come to mean all that is horrible about the suppression of one race of people by another. However, there is no doubt that the British Empire has brought many benefits to the modern world. Both the first British Empire (c.1600–1776) and the second (c.1830–1968) contributed very significantly to the spread of western European culture, values and beliefs throughout the world ... Most importantly, British missionaries, like the apostles in the first century, used the British Empire to spread the gospel to nations that may not have otherwise heard the glad tidings of salvation. It is true that there are a number of disreputable events in the history of the British Empire, including three centuries of slave trading, the Opium Wars and the exploitation of naïve ‘natives’. However, on balance, the British Empire has given the modern world much for which it should be grateful. (CEE, 2012, p. 2)

This results in an ahistorical understanding of the present. Grappling with the history of racial injustice would threaten ACE’s theology and, by extension, the beliefs it wishes to impart about who we are today. The PACEs’ view of history does not provide an adequate context for understanding the racialized societies that exist now.

The view that obedience to God results in nations’ prosperity is not limited to ACE’s history curriculum, however, but informs their analysis of current events. This is exemplified by the Geography PACE about Africa. Sometimes the non-Christian dominant religion is identified, and a description of poverty in the area immediately follows:

In southern Sudan, most people speak local languages and practice pagan religions. In the desert regions, most of the people are Arabic-speaking Muslims.

The Sudanese have made very slow progress in their attempt to modernize their nation. Most of the people are uneducated, diseases are common, and skilled laborers are few ...

Almost all Somalians are Muslims. A severe drought during 1992 and 1993 led to widespread famine in Somalia. By 1994 the rains had returned and a good harvest was expected, but conflict continued among the tribal groups in the nation. (ACE, 2006, pp. 16, 17)

This contrasts with the nations identified as predominantly Christian:

Zambia is one of the world's largest producers of copper. Zambia also has rich deposits of zinc, lead, and gold. Unlike soil in most of Africa, Zambia's soil is good for agriculture ... Christianity has played an important role in the life of Zambia ... Today most Zambians are Bible believers ...

The first white settlers came to South Africa in 1652. These Dutch Europeans settled in what is now Cape Town and founded their society on Scriptural principles. They built a progressive, economically sound culture and developed the natural resources of the country. Before the arrival of the Dutch, South Africa was undeveloped. The native Africans followed traditional tribal ways and worshiped pagan gods. (ACE, 2006, pp. 21, 27)

The success of the United States is explicitly attributed to its 'Christian heritage' and the Christian faith of its citizens. ACE's geography curriculum accordingly emphasizes the work of missionaries, since becoming 'born again' is seen as a prerequisite for the alleviation of poverty.

Insensitive language

Racially insensitive terms appear periodically in the PACEs. People of east Asia are referred to as 'Oriental' four times in one Geography PACE (ACE, 2002), and people of mixed European and African ancestry are called 'mulattoes' eleven times in another (ACE, 1997b). This term derives from the Spanish and Portuguese term *mulato*, meaning mule, the hybrid offspring of a horse and a donkey. Some dictionaries label it archaic and offensive (cf. Cambridge, 2017; Chambers, 2017;

Merriam-Webster, 2017). It is at the very least a potentially offensive and non-technical term that is out of place in educational literature. Native Americans are sometimes called ‘savages’ (e.g. ACE, 1996b, pp. 32, 38, 1996c, p. 7), and a native of China a ‘Chinaman’ (ACE, 1996a, p. 35).

ACE’s ethnocentrism is perhaps best exemplified in the way it introduces students to the study of Asia through a story about a western visitor to China:

Michael tried to fight his panic as he raced from place to place, searching vainly for something familiar. With pointed roofs and upturned eaves, the buildings around him looked like nothing he had ever seen before. Signs on streets and buildings were covered with strange characters that looked as though someone had been doodling with a paintbrush ...

In desperation, Michael watched the people passing him on the street, but their physical appearance provided him no comfort. Their skin was light brown, their hair was dark and straight, and the inner fold of their eyelids made their eyes seem to slant ...

Far Eastern cultures, languages, and religions seem alien to most Europeans and Americans. Oriental people appear mysterious and inscrutable, and their religions seem strange. Do these people have anything in common with European or American Judeo-Christian heritage and beliefs? (ACE, 2002, p. 2)

Conversation about racial justice

In the second-to-last English PACE (ACE, 2007), characters from Highland (the “white” school) and Harmony (the “black” school) are depicted on a trip together, the only time in the reviewed PACEs that they are shown interacting for an extended period. Within the story, the characters discuss three questions: ‘why are so many people racially prejudiced? How can I apply Biblical principles to resolve racial conflict? [and] ... How can I break down racial barriers that exist between me and people of other races?’ (ibid, p. B). The discussion begins with Booker, a black student, remarking ‘I asked for this steamboat trip because I also wanted to get a feel

for my heritage ... what it might have been like to have been a slave' (ibid, p. A). The characters speaking in these quotations are Victor Manley, an orphan from the Pacific Islands who lives in Highland, Reginald Upright, another Highland student, and J. Michael Kindhart and Miriam Peace, black students who attend Harmony. The conversation contains a reminder that it is Christlike to love everyone:

“Well,” said Reginald, “when a person emulates Christ, he views and regards other people as our Lord did. He loved everyone individually and personally, regardless of race, social status, or physical characteristics.” (ibid, p. D)

Elsewhere, other priorities emerge:

[Victor Manley:] Jesus always looked beyond physical conditions and focused on meeting the other person's needs ... He was more interested in drawing them to God than He was in debating social injustices between Jews and Samaritans or Romans. (ibid, p. C)

This seems to imply that conversations about social justice are a distraction from the more important business of evangelism. It could therefore be used to silence those who seek to prevent injustices.

[J. Michael:] My dad taught me to be myself and to respect myself. He said if I did that, others would respect me too. I understand that not everyone is trained in Biblical principles, so I don't take every careless remark or expression as a racial slur. I work at breaking down barriers, not building them up.

[Miriam:] Some people have a hard time forgetting offenses and abuses done to their ancestors ... especially when others generalize and force everyone of a particular race or ethnic group into the same mold. They make something a racial issue when it's not.

Taken together, these two quotations seem to imply that there is a correct way for black people to behave, and it involves not making a fuss about casual racism, and forgetting about slavery because it was a long time ago. Again, this silences conversations on social justice and makes it harder for current inequalities to be addressed. It has been argued that some conservative Protestants' emphasis on

individual responsibility and individual salvation prevents them from considering social structures and institutional problems that perpetuate racial inequality (Dupont, 2013; Emerson et al., 1999). Emerson and Smith (2000) found that white evangelicals tend to believe all obstacles to equality have now been removed, a position the above quotations seem to support. ACE explicitly rejects the value of conversations that would address racial inequalities.

Conclusion

The ACE curriculum has features that perpetuate white supremacy, overtly and covertly. Given the intersection of race, embedded social (school-based) practice and the exercise of power (by teachers over students), critical race theory provides a useful way of helping to understand the extent to which and why racism is engrained, and thus perpetuated, within ACE. Within ACE, whiteness, maleness and having been converted to a particular understanding, experience and practice of Christianity, are necessary for those who wish both to be powerful and to exist in a state of righteousness.

The overt features of the ACE curriculum are the most obviously egregious, and should immediately disqualify ACE from consideration for use in publicly-funded schools. They could, however, be removed from a future version of the ACE curriculum without destroying its identity. There is some evidence that this is has started to happen (Scaramanga, 2017). ACE could integrate the segregated communities in its cartoons, remove any defence of apartheid, and replace the PACEs' occasional derogatory language, while remaining recognisably the same curriculum.

While these cosmetic improvements to the curriculum could be made easily, the deeper ways ACE perpetuates white supremacy could not be removed without a radical overhaul of its ideology. ACE denies the value of worldviews and cultures other than its own, and through its rugged individualism, denies the reality of structural racism. While the offensive references to ‘savages’ could be removed without major changes to the curriculum, the worldview ACE promotes does not have the capacity to acknowledge the scale of historical or contemporary injustices. Teaching students the reality of slavery, colonialism, or Jim Crow would threaten ACE’s contention that US history has been ordained by a just God. Recognising contemporary injustices would threaten ACE’s individualism. Individualism is so essential to ACE’s worldview that the entire curriculum is individualized, and group activities eschewed (Speck & Prideaux, 1993). ACE exists primarily to impart a particular view of the world (ACE, 2017; Speck & Prideaux, 1993). This view is tightly bound up with implicit notions of white supremacy.

It could be argued that mainstream textbooks have an ugly racial history of their own. Uncomfortably recently, US public school textbooks have contained racist language and ethnocentrism of the kind for which we are now criticising ACE. More generally, it would also be a mistake to think that racism has been erased from mainstream social studies education. Relatively recent studies of US textbooks find important omissions that militate against students forming an informed and contextualised understanding of the history of racial violence (Alridge, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2010). *The American Pageant*, a nationally used advanced placement text, has been

criticised for minimising the evils of slavery and promoting racist stereotypes (Reed, 2015).

The failings of aspects of mainstream schooling do not exonerate ACE. Racism is no less harmful when it occurs in private institutions. There is a qualitative difference, however, between the kind of racism found in ACE textbooks and that noted in contemporary mainstream textbooks. In textbooks examined by Brown and Brown (2010), racial violence is described as the actions of bad individuals rather than contextualised as systematic and institutional. Those same acts of violence are not mentioned at all in the ACE materials focusing on 20th Century US history.

In this examination, we have not focused on ACE's omissions but on those aspects which might be seen as promoting prejudice or discrimination. In this respect, the ACE materials are more similar to textbooks from before the Civil Rights era (Foster, 1999; Zimmerman, 2004). Civil Rights activists successfully argued for the removal of discriminatory content from textbooks, and these arguments can equally be applied to the curriculum content of voucher-funded private schools. They argued that if white children absorbed prejudiced messages, this would be an obstacle to racial equality in society; that history which minimises the evil of slavery or segregation is not merely insulting but *inaccurate*; and that racist messages in textbooks were psychologically harmful to black children (Zimmerman, 2004). Those arguments are now almost universally accepted, and they are equally applicable today. If they are sufficient to exclude racist material from directly state-funded schools then they ought also to exclude it from schools funded by vouchers.

From this argument, it should not be inferred that we consider white evangelicalism to be a homogenous movement (cf. Marti & Ganiel, 2014; Steensland & Goff, 2014). It is far from the case that all evangelicals accept the portrayals of race found in the ACE curriculum. However, owing to the history of private Christian education, fundamentalist curricula are widely used in Christian schools, even if those operating the schools are not themselves fundamentalist (Walford, 1995). Because ACE is self-instructional, students' interaction with the text is for the most part not mediated by teachers. Of course, students may draw their own understandings and interpretations from the text, and further research would be required to investigate these. Interviews with ACE students, parents, and school staff would help to illuminate how they understand and respond to the PACE text. However, the evidence suggests that textbooks are highly influential (Foster, 1999), and it is plausible that this would be even more strongly the case with a self-instructional curriculum.

This paper has only considered one curriculum in common use in private Christian schools, but there is evidence that certain other Christian school curricula have similar problems. Fundamentalist curricula such as Abeka, BJU Press, and ACE are sufficiently similar that scholars and journalists frequently group them together for discussion purposes (cf. Alberta Department of Education, 1985; Laats, 2010a; Menendez, 1993; Paterson, 2003; Wilson, 2012). Agiro (2012) found evidence of racial and gender discrimination in Abeka and BJU textbooks, while Wilson (2012) reports that one Abeka textbook defended the Ku Klux Klan. This is not to deny the possibility of a high quality religious education (cf. Chapman, McNamara, Reiss, & Waghid, 2014; Gardner, Cairns, & Lawton, 2005; Hand, 2012) and we recognize that forms of Christian education intended to combat systemic racism have been proposed

(e.g. Fears, 2017). Nevertheless, the ACE curriculum has a history of explicit and implicit racism which makes it a poor candidate for public funding.

Notes

The PACEs examined for this review were:

English 1061-1071, 1073-1080, 1084-1108, 1112, 1118, 1121, 1127, 1129, 1130, 1134, 1135, 1142-1144; Science 1013, 1015, 1017, 1021, 1045-1048, 1085-1108; Social Studies 1029, 1045-1048, 1073-1078, 97-108, 1097-1108, UK1085-UK1096, 1139.

In all cases the author and publisher is Accelerated Christian Education, except Social Studies UK1085-UK1096, whose author and publisher is Christian Education Europe. Place of publication is not given.

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Table 1. Appearances in cartoons of white and POC characters

Subject	White:POC %	Sample²/population³
English	89:11	55/144 (38%)
Science	90:10	20/96 (21%)
Social Studies	82:18	11/78 (14%)

² Sample refers to the number of PACEs examined.

³ Population refers to the total number of available PACEs featuring character strips.

Table 2. Cartoons depicting one or more white or POC characters

Subject	One or more white (%)	One or more POC (%)
English	88	18
Science	89	21
Social Studies	90	23