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## **Reflections on Incorporating Virtues in an Intercultural Communication for Teachers Course**

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### **Abstract**

Christians teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) address cultural issues to improve students' intercultural communication. In reflecting on my experience delivering a teacher training course, this article describes strategies for incorporating seven virtues in an Intercultural Communication for Teachers class. It first outlines foundational background and then offers examples of ways students in the course may go deeper with Christian virtues in their reflection and in their ESL/EFL teaching. It also introduces Scriptures and relevant resources that may be useful to professors involved in teacher training and to teachers who wish to incorporate virtues into ESL/EFL classes.

**Key words:** culture, intercultural communication, teacher training, values, virtues

### **Introduction**

During a week-long faculty seminar on Christian approaches to ethics, I learned about important options, including virtue ethics (e.g., Roberts, 2007). As an English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) educator and teacher trainer, I was particularly interested in how virtue ethics could inform my teaching, especially in a course I teach each spring entitled Intercultural Communication for Teachers. In this article I reflect on how I integrate virtues into that course, and introduce Scriptures and varied resources of interest. Understandably, this is a work in progress. Yet in line with Davis and Wadell's (2016) approach to "educating for lives of Christian wisdom" (p. 95), I hope to see my students in this course reorient their understanding of intercultural communication in light of seven virtues.

The context for the course is a private Christian university in the United States. Intercultural Communication for Teachers (hereafter ICC for Ts) is primarily geared toward students in an M.A. in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program, but it is also cross-listed for upper undergraduates, some of whom complete it as part of their pre-service teacher training or as one course in an undergraduate TESOL certificate. While many of the graduate students have teaching experience, a few undergraduates in the class have mostly completed teacher observations and may not yet have any actual teaching experience. Students

who complete the course and program most often teach English to adults abroad, though many also do so in North America. With this context in mind, let me turn to foundational background on intercultural communication, virtues, and education, before reflecting on incorporating seven virtues in the ICC for Ts course.

## **Intercultural Communication and Virtues**

As Zhu (2014) declares, intercultural communication is an umbrella term that includes both “interactions between people of different cultures and comparative studies of communication patterns between people of different cultures” (p. 114). Among the six broad strands with which the field of intercultural communication usually concerns itself, two that Zhu (2014) discusses are especially relevant to virtues as we consider them for my ICC for Ts course: cultural values and language learning and teaching.

The first strand deals with *cultural values*,<sup>1</sup> as reflected in early analyses by scholars such as Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) and in Hofstede’s (2001) more recent work, which deals with five cultural dimensions that may impact communication styles. Lingenfelter and Mayers (2016) offer a basic values orientation to six patterns of behaviour, and suggest that Christians should take an incarnational approach to adapting and responding to different cultures. While cultural values approaches are sometimes criticized as theoretical (Jaupaj, 2012), in other cases they are viewed as potentially essentializing and/or overgeneralizing the myriad complexities of culture. Yet virtually all intercultural communication textbooks and courses introduce and discuss key cultural values such as individualism versus collectivism, high versus low power distance, and long- versus short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001). One resource I have used to address such issues in intercultural communication is Stringer and Cassidy’s (2003) collection of more than 50 activities to help both individuals and groups understand value differences across languages and cultures. Yet this cultural values approach is also relevant to comparative studies of communication patterns across cultures, as reflected in Wang’s (2012) summary of Chinese and American cultural values from an intercultural communication perspective.

It is important to note that virtues are significant values within a particular culture. Thus, helping ESL/EFL teachers and students to appreciate and understand cultural values may also assist them in discerning virtues in a culture – either their own or another, different culture.

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<sup>1</sup> See Gallagher (2001) for a brief and easily accessible summary on cultural values approaches.

Wang (2012) states, “As the miniature of moral values, virtues refer to good qualities in human conduct, which perform as criteria of actions and have great influence on the value dimensions” (p. 344). In my ICC for Ts course, we integrate Christian faith and learning and emphasize language use for constructive purposes (to bless, rather than to curse; e.g., Lessard-Clouston, 2017), so reflecting on Christian virtues in general, as well as in particular languages and cultures, may be useful in helping current and future teachers and their students understand different cultures’ values.

The second intercultural communication strand from Zhu (2014) that is especially relevant is *language learning and teaching*, since all of the undergraduate and graduate students in the ICC for Ts course are either preparing to be ESL/EFL teachers or are already working part-time or full-time in this educational field. Years ago, Lado (1957) challenged such teachers to recognize and value the nature of and connections between language and culture in second and foreign language learning and teaching, and that view is not only still current, but even more influential and recognized by many in applied linguistics and TESOL.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting this emphasis, Hinkel (2014) declared, “In language teaching, focusing on the inextricable connections between a culture and its language uses should be a key characteristic of effective instruction in all language skills” (p. 395).

Wintergerst and McVeigh’s (2011) book, *Tips for Teaching Culture: Practical Approaches to Intercultural Communication*, is one of the required texts for the course, and a wonderful resource for ESL/EFL teachers and teachers-in-training. In its introductory chapter, it argues that language teachers should “help students understand how culture works” as it outlines Hofstede, Pedersen, and Hofstede’s (2002) “five dimensions of a culture: identity, hierarchy, social gender role, truth value, and virtue” (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2011, p. 16). Wintergerst and McVeigh (2011, p. 18) also note that the virtue dimension reflects what cultures value and stress. In short, language learning and teaching support the role of culture and intercultural communication for developing fluency in the target language, moving well beyond a simple “multicultural manners” approach to rules of etiquette (as, e.g., in Dresser, 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> Lessard-Clouston (2016) offers a recent survey of much of the empirical research in this area.

## **Ethics, Virtues, and Principles for the Intercultural**

An important and seminal book by Bernard Adeney (1995), *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World*, offers some useful principles for thinking about ethics, virtues, and dealing with intercultural communication.<sup>3</sup> First, Adeney (1995) declares, “Our cultural practices are not just personal or subjective; they are socially constituted” (p. 14). As we relate to individuals from various language backgrounds and cultures in ESL/EFL, we must remember that language is social, and that our cultural practices teaching English are not simply individual and subjective, but social as well. Second, very often our human ethics and values tend toward absolutism or relativism, yet Adeney (1995) rightly states, “As a Christian, I have no doubt that there are absolute values, but our understanding of them is always relative” (p. 20). That quote reminds me of 1 Corinthians 13:12: “Now I know in part....” As we are all sinners (Romans 3:23), we also know that our understanding is impacted by the effects of sin.

Third, Adeney (1995) believes we study ethics in order to become good, and “goodness has two outstanding characteristics” (p. 25). One is that despite important cultural differences in expressing goodness, “qualities of character or virtue...shine with clarity across cultures. The other is that all virtues and vices are made real in cultural forms” (Adeney, 1995, p. 25). All people are created in the image of God, and Adeney reminds us that goodness may be recognized in different forms in all cultures. Fourth, Adeney (1995) states, “As cultural beings, we can see goodness only as it is enfolded in real times and places and peoples” (p. 27). Context is therefore crucial in thinking about virtues in particular situations, especially because “crosscultural ethics forces us to acknowledge that the form of goodness often lies not in an act itself but in the cultural meaning of the act” (Adeney, 1995, p. 27). For students in ICC for Ts, therefore, it is important not only to examine context and relationships, but also the meaning of cultural acts as we reflect on Christian virtues and communicating through English.

According to Adeney (1995), then, intercultural ethics is about doing good socially through correct cultural acts at the right time and specific place, with particular individuals in real life contexts. Helping students come to understand this is a goal of the ICC for Ts course.

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<sup>3</sup> While no doubt a full article could certainly be written on cross-cultural ethics, some principles that offer background for the ICC for Ts class will have to suffice here.

## **Virtues and Education**

As a part of programs training teachers for classrooms, the ICC for Ts course is about preparing ESL/EFL teachers and helping them educate their students.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, we should recognize recent research on the role of virtues and values in education. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, for example, studies practices for how character may be developed and virtues learned and taught in society. An important part of this effort is through education, with teachers central to such work. Arthur, Kristjánsson, Cooke, Brown, and Carr (2015) summarize a questionnaire and interview study of 546 new and experienced teachers and their views on virtues in education and teaching practice. In the interviews, “Teachers confirmed...that they frequently draw upon virtue-based reasoning in the classroom, especially in areas of moral or practical significance” (Arthur et al., 2015, p. 5). However, due to heavy workloads, prescriptive educational systems, and narrow views of academic success, teachers also often “reported that they are not always given the time in the workplace to reflect on the best way to practice moral virtues” (Arthur et al., 2015, p. 5). One finding relevant to the present article is that teacher training programs “spend very little time reflecting on the teaching of moral virtues” (Arthur et al., 2015, p. 5). Perhaps more focus on virtues would therefore be valuable in courses like ICC for Ts.

Closer to home, both Christian (e.g., Austin & Geivett, 2012; Dow, 2013) and secular (e.g., Ritchhart, 2015; Seider, 2012) writings have encouraged character development in education that involves virtues, in assisting students in thinking and in promoting academic success (see also Arthur, 2010a; 2010b). Baehr’s (2015) e-book is geared toward practicing teachers and administrators, while Baehr’s (2016) edited collection builds more theoretically on an earlier article on this topic (Baehr, 2013).

One recent study by Yonker, Wielard, Vos, and Tudder (2017) describes the teaching of humility over two weeks to two classes of first-grade Christian school children, using devotional lessons based on humility-related children’s books. Pre- and post-surveys were distributed to the teachers of the two classes and to the parents of the participating children, as well as to those in two comparison classes (that did not receive the humility-focused devotional lessons). The children were also interviewed one-on-one in order to complete a self-evaluation survey “to

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<sup>4</sup> The university does offer other, separate undergraduate and graduate courses in Intercultural Communication, but the ICC for Ts course sections take the “for Teachers” emphasis seriously.

assess their own behavior and how others close to them would assess their behavior” (p. 61). Humility was operationalized as being morals-focused, others-focused, and using self-focused regulation, and Yonker et al. (2017) “found a tendency toward significance with children in the humility groups demonstrating increased levels of others-focus, morals-focus, and self-regulation than children who did not experience the teaching on humility” (p. 66). Their discussion declares that their results “also show that devotional lessons on important Christian character traits can improve children’s practice of humility, especially for those children who tend to have the personality traits of Conscientiousness and Agreeableness” (p. 66). In short, as Yonker et al. (2017) “were able to find a measurable difference between humility intervention and comparison groups” (p. 67), Christian teachers of different types may perhaps be encouraged to consider incorporating the teaching of virtues, such as humility, into their own courses as appropriate.

Turning to TESOL, I have not been able to locate any specific articles or research on virtues in ESL/EFL education, but I discovered an ESL curriculum on virtues created by the Southern Ontario Cooperative of ESL Ministries (SOCEM). The sets of lessons themselves were revised and expanded (SOCEM, 2014) and placed online so that any teacher wishing to adapt or use them for ESL classes may do so. More specifically, however, “*The Virtues* is a series of ESL lessons designed with ESL programs in churches in mind” (SOCEM, 2010, p. 2).

As Yung (2015) describes it, *The Virtues* “consists of a series of 14 topical units and a total of 39 lessons” (p. 11). Individual lessons include readings, exercises, topics for speaking and conversation, as well as some homework and short writing tasks. “Nine of the unit topics are virtues” and “the other five unit topics are festivals and holidays such as Christmas and Easter” (Yung, 2015, p. 11). The virtues addressed are contentment, courage, forgiveness, honesty, hope, humility, joy, love, and wisdom. Each lesson comes with teacher’s notes and student handouts, and each set of lessons revolves around five distinct sections, outlined as follows:

- the initial *Life* section centres on creating community and reviewing previous work.
- the *Life to Topic* category introduces the unit topic and how to make it relevant to students’ lives.
- the *Topic* section includes pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities, such as class or partner discussion of the background, “for students to understand and engage the topic” (SOCEM, 2010, p. 4).
- the *Topic to Life* focus is on applying the unit topic to students’ lives through discussion questions, mini grammar lessons, writing, and other activities, such as role plays, in order to help students use English in discussing the topic and in real life situations.

- the final *Life* section includes homework to help students reflect on the virtue and apply it to their lives. (SOCEM, 2010, pp. 4-5)

*The Virtues* lessons, as a series, start with a world culture thread, and then move to a more North American one, and finally to a Biblical focus (SOCEM, 2010, p. 4). Teachers using these lesson plans are encouraged to go through the above sections as they use the lessons with their students.

Among the principles behind this curriculum, Yung (2015) states, “we recognize that the virtues are universal and human themes and that each culture has a lot to say about them. We would like to mine the wisdom of other cultures and welcome their perspectives” (p. 11). With an emphasis on English language skills, “behind the design are also language learning principles that state that pragmatic components such as sociolinguistic, interactional and cultural competence are just as important as linguistic components such as grammar and pronunciation” (SOCEM, 2010, p. 2). These principles reflect the point from Hinkel (2014) noted earlier, that effective language instruction should incorporate the connections between language and culture. As a result, *The Virtues* curriculum is introduced in ICC for Ts as one option for incorporating materials that address values and virtues in ESL/EFL classes in North America or abroad.

### **Seven Christian Virtues for ICC for Ts**

With the background above, I would now like to outline seven Christian virtues for the ICC for Ts course and how I incorporate (or plan to incorporate) them. At this point some virtues are perhaps more easily addressed in the course, and I will begin with those. By “Christian virtues” I simply mean virtues that hold special importance for Christians, mostly because they are highlighted throughout the Bible.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, I will briefly introduce seven virtues, note some relevant Scriptures, make connections to intercultural communication, and share resources that might be used to include these topics in the ICC for Ts and/or an ESL/EFL course. While several of the virtues overlap with some common ones, including those in the SOCEM (2014) lesson plans, these seven virtues were chosen as particularly relevant to ICC for Ts.

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<sup>5</sup> As one reviewer of this article noted, people often think of specifically Christian virtues such as faith, hope, and love, in contrast to virtues that people more generally would affirm, like humility and hospitality. This article discusses virtues more generally, similar to the way the SOCEM (2014) materials do, which seems appropriate for most ESL/EFL contexts.

## **1. Hospitality**

*Hospitality* is the generous welcome of and provision for visitors, including strangers. This virtue is seen rather negatively in Genesis 19, where Lot offered to provide for the men of Sodom, but also more positively in the Luke 24:13ff. account of Jesus walking with and teaching two disciples on the road to Emmaus and then breaking bread with them. “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling,” 1 Peter 4:9 tells us, while Hebrews 13:2 says we are to do so even to strangers, “for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”<sup>6</sup> Teachers may not know who our students are or will be, but we can still welcome and support them in various helpful ways.

In the second and foreign language literature, Christian authors Smith and Carvill (2000) argue “that hospitality must shape the spirit and manner in which learners welcome, acquire, and respond to the foreign language and culture” (p. 88). In addition, they believe hospitality means a stranger “also will be given loving attention” (Smith & Carvill, 2000, p. 91). In our first ICC for Ts meeting on campus, I provide snacks for students, which we enjoy together at the break, roughly half way through our three-hour evening class. I then use this as an opportunity to discuss food and culture, and I invite students to sign up if they would like to contribute and have snacks together each week during the semester. Students might bring snacks from a particular culture, while other times it is an eclectic spread. The point is that students are learning to show hospitality to one another, and to think about providing a hospitable environment for their ESL/EFL classes and students. Beyond welcome and provision, however, Stratman (2015) has indicated that recognition plays a key role in hospitality in the classroom, and this is something ESL/EFL teachers will need to navigate with their students’ names.

In contexts where service learning is not unusual, it may be possible to help ESL students show hospitality to others in various ways through English. An example of this would be having pairs of students visit with people in hospitals or retirement homes, where they might slowly build relationships with those they are practicing their English with over a semester. On many college or university campuses groups occasionally host festivals or special outreaches for students and staff. I have participated in one related to Valentine’s Day, for example. The point is to help students practise their English by showing generous hospitality to others, and reflecting

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<sup>6</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

this virtue in culturally acceptable ways in the contexts where they are learning the language. This can be true whether or not students are Christian, or interact with Christians.

In ICC for Ts, a key focus on hospitality is for the stranger. In the first week I use a “Christians and Intercultural Communication” PowerPoint presentation to introduce examples of culture and language in the Bible, from Genesis 11:1-19, Acts 2:1-13, and Revelation 7:9-12, noting that the Holy Spirit does not help everyone to speak the same language, but rather enables the multitude in heaven to encompass people from every nation, tribe, people group, and language. Special attention is paid to Old Testament laws dealing with foreigners (e.g., Exodus 23:9), God’s care for foreigners (Psalm 146:9a), and various narratives between Babel and Pentecost, with God’s people interacting with and dealing with the Other (foreigners), including Rahab, Ruth, Daniel, Jonah, the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). One of the early assignments is for students to complete a one-hour Prayer Project, when they are encouraged to revisit one of these narratives and talk with God about their relationships with different Others, near or far. Since many ESL/EFL teachers are the Other for their students, it is important for them to reflect as Christians on showing hospitality.

What is considered hospitable is deeply cultural, and teachers need to discover what is appropriate in their instructional contexts. In teaching at the college level in China many years ago, I regularly hosted groups of my students by taking them out to lunch or dinner. In the U.S., my family and I have occasionally hosted my classes at our home. Even if these types of options are not possible, teachers can hopefully use their office hours and leisure time to show students and colleagues hospitality, perhaps over coffee or tea together. As my ICC for Ts students have noted, taking time to be available to our students, colleagues, and others is hospitable, especially in cultures that value availability and flexibility, and where people do not mind being interrupted from their activities and routines when others need assistance, encouragement, and information.

## **2. *Compassion***

Closely connected to hospitality to the stranger is *compassion*, the virtue that is in essence a type of love which reflects yet goes beyond sympathy to show concern for others in their predicament, suffering, or weakness (Roberts, 2007). In the PowerPoint presentation noted earlier, it is clear that the hospitality shown both to God’s people (by, e.g., Rahab or the Good Samaritan) and by Jesus himself (e.g., towards the Samaritan woman) often includes

compassion. The Old Testament is clear that “The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (Psalm 145:9). In the New Testament we repeatedly see Jesus having compassion on those he interacted with (e.g., Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 20:34). Ephesians 4:32 states, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you,” and Colossians 3:12 tells Christians to clothe ourselves with compassion. Sometimes, as in John 11, when Jesus was deeply moved and showed compassion to Mary and Martha before raising Lazarus from the dead, compassion may be hard to express verbally.

“Compassion means that one’s heart goes out to someone else,” Roberts (2007, p. 183) wrote. In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), Roberts (2007) believes we learn not only about God’s compassion (since the father is God), but we also have “a model for our compassion toward one another” (p. 187). Yet there is also a clear connection with one’s neighbour: “When I am compassionate in the most centrally Christian manner, ... I am compassionate toward a ‘neighbor,’ some individual or group of individuals with whom I have to do” (Roberts, 2007, p. 196). In ICC for Ts, we note that often the Other is our neighbour, someone in our life with whom we relate, whether or not we actually live next to or near one another.

In ESL/EFL, students may be both the stranger and the neighbour. Ways that teachers can help students to show compassion to others include helping them learn what to say when they hear about someone’s death, medical issue, or other struggle or weakness, and how to share about their own trauma. Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, and Kincaid (2011) offer teachers strategies for helping their students overcome trauma in public schools. In the classroom, as Medley (2012) advocates, teachers can create a safe environment and clear, regular routines that offer compassion to students who struggle (see also Medley, 2017). Teachers can also display and teach compassion by example when we offer encouragement, empathy, forgiveness, and sympathy to our students and colleagues, modelling what to say, when, where, and how.

In ICC for Ts, I hope the course encourages and exhibits compassion through the weekly devotional, when we consider a Scripture passage and what it teaches us about culture, education, and intercultural communication. In addition, the class shares praises, prayer requests, and personal updates with one another, and we learn to support each other in prayer, hopefully living out Galatians 6:2: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” We live in a world where media often tell us there is “compassion fatigue.” As Christian teachers, may we always reflect compassion for our students and other neighbours.

### **3. Contrition**

The next virtue, *contrition*, is sincere remorse which recognizes one has offended God. It goes beyond regret to concede that the problem is not just with some action or deed one has done, but instead with oneself. Roberts (2007) puts it this way: “It’s a mark of contrition that its object is not directly the illicit deed or thought, but the self” (p. 100).

A detailed Biblical example helps us understand contrition. After being confronted by the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 12, following his adultery with Bathsheba and killing of Uriah, King David confesses in verse 13 that he had sinned against the Lord. For several days David pleaded with God to save his sick child’s life, yet the child died. When asked by his attendants why he carried on after the child’s death, in verses 22-23 David recounts that he had fasted and wept because he thought the Lord might be gracious to him and spare the child, but since God didn’t, there was nothing he could do. This example reflects Roberts’ (2007) point that “Contrition...is characterized by confident hope in God’s mercy,” since one recognizes “God as benevolent and a source of help, as well as angry and offended” (p. 104). In Psalm 51 by David we have a beautiful prayer of confession reflecting such contrition, as well as his trust in God.

ICC for Ts is not usually a context for sin, but it is often a conduit for God to point out students’ need for contrition at times. For example, as students read about arrogant portrayals of Westerners abroad expecting others to use their language, English, and how that seems inappropriate (e.g., in Livermore, 2009, another textbook), many students have confessed in class or in online discussion threads that they have been guilty of such attitudes and actions and recognized the problem in themselves. The fact that they have shared these perspectives with the class is a sign, I hope, of their trust in God’s mercy and help, in addition to admitting their offense. I am not sure, however, how one might address contrition in an ESL/EFL context, especially if the students are not Christian or open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. One possibility, though, is that the SOCEM (2014) lesson plans on Forgiveness may create opportunities to discuss contrition with students, since those lessons include a number of stories of forgiveness, including Corrie ten Boom’s and parables of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35) and the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Such lessons might well lead to discussions of contrition, and might be accepted in church ESL classes, for example.

Recent ICC for Ts students have offered additional ways to incorporate contrition into ESL/EFL classes. One suggested teaching conflict management skills and the English required to

practise them. Another shared that she uses the teaching of letter writing in order to help students process grief, which “basically involves expressing your true feelings, asking for forgiveness for your own part, and extending forgiveness to those who have wronged you.” She noted this works well with short stories where characters experience loss and model this process. Yet another student declared that the human tendency is often “to blame everyone but ourselves. We tend to minimize our ‘mistakes’ and emphasize the ‘sins’ of others.” He believes that helping our students acknowledge personal guilt through lessons on forgiveness can lead to contrition and help people move beyond grudges that run deep and can last long. Finally, in classes with learners from different cultural backgrounds, discussions, readings, and carefully selected video clips can prompt the correction of misunderstandings between students and enable reflection on previous actions and thinking, and potentially lead to a change of mind and/or behaviour.

#### **4. Humility**

Related to but separate from contrition is *humility*, which Roberts (2007) defines as not being overly proud of oneself, yet nonetheless having a self-confidence in one’s abilities. Proverbs 22:4 states, “Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honour and life.” Philippians 2:3 teaches, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” After encouraging younger people to submit to their elders, 1 Peter 5:5 commands, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.’” For ICC for Ts, Adeney’s (1995) comment that “A humble spirit of openness to God and the stranger may be our most valuable asset in a foreign culture” confirms the value of humility as a virtue to cultivate (p. 28).

Yonker, Wielard, Vos, and Tudder (2017) observed: “References to humility can be traced back thousands of years. Most of the early references to humility stem from religious writings from the Bible to the Quran to Buddhist and Hindu writings” (p. 55). In working with young children, their intervention drew upon children’s literature shared in morning devotional messages, which students later reflected on by writing in their faith journals. “Teachers would also provide reality-based feedback for students during the week on what behaviors the teacher observed that were in line with humility or were deviating from the essence of” it (p. 62). Breaking down the concept of a virtue like humility, into morals-focused (e.g., “The student tells the truth.”), others-focused (e.g., “The student helps others.”), and self-focused regulation (e.g.,

the student doesn't boast or interrupt others), in their surveys also seemed to be a useful strategy (p. 63), which might be adapted in teaching this and additional virtues in other contexts.

In ICC for Ts we often discuss the fact that the same action may reflect different meanings in different cultures. For example, one discussion of high- versus low-context communication pointed out that if a child is being reprimanded, looking someone in the eye in North America is expected and considered respectful. If the child is not looking at the person talking, they might hear something like, "Look at me when I'm talking to you!" Yet a Korean American student pointed out that in Korea that same action would be seen as a challenge or insult, and the best way to respond when being reprimanded is to look down or away. She noted that doing so reflects humility and, we might add, could be taken as a sign of contrition. The point is that humility may be reflected in different languages and cultures in different ways. When I was living in Japan, for example, I was a professor at a well-known university. However, following the custom, when people asked what I did, I said I was a teacher. When they asked where and I explained, they would then usually say, "Oh, you're a professor." This was the humble way for me to share about myself and my work in that status-oriented culture.

Both TESOL teacher educators and ESL/EFL teachers would do well to learn from Baurain's (2017) essay on imitating the humility of Christ in language teaching. Following a detailed discussion on the temptation of pride for all teachers (and especially Christian English language teachers), Baurain introduces the imperative of humility and draws upon Philippians 2 to reflect on the imitation of Christ. The lessons for teachers, Baurain (2017) argues, are for us to learn to step down (taking the position of a servant), step away (letting our students be at the centre of our classes), and step forward (obeying Christ even in the face of criticism of our faith). That is how we can "develop and practice Christlike humility with our students and colleagues, in our classrooms and professional lives" (Baurain, 2017, p. 126).

For ESL/EFL classes, the SOCEM (2014) lesson plans on Humility are a great resource for introducing and discussing this Christian virtue. They begin with definitions and consider proverbs and famous quotes from around the world about humility, and then they look at some stories and case studies. Finally, the lessons consider John 13:1-17 where Jesus washes his disciples' feet, and Philippians 2:5-9, describing the mindset of Christ Jesus. A final potential resource is chapter six in Baehr (2015), which discusses intellectual humility in education.

## **5. Gratitude**

The virtue of *gratitude* is about being thankful and showing appreciation for kindness received. Roberts (2007) describes “the conditions for gratitude” as follows:

The situation is that of two parties and a good. One of the parties is the beneficiary, one is the benefactor; and the good is a gift from one to the other. Gratitude is the beneficiary’s concern-based construal of the situation in these terms. (p. 143)

Gratitude means we recognize a good we have received, and we realize that we are the beneficiary of it. A perfect example of “Christian gratitude is thankfulness to God for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life” (Roberts, 2007, p. 144). Colossians 3:16 reflects this, encouraging believers to “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your heart.” The Bible also encourages believers to come before God with thanksgiving (Psalm 95:2), which should flow from each of us (Ephesians 5:4).

In ICC for Ts students learn about ways that different cultures and languages experience and express gratitude. In many cultures gratitude is communicated through gifts of various kinds. I believe gratitude is a virtue that I need to think carefully about incorporating into the course more explicitly, in order to develop activities that will help (student) teachers understand and live out the virtue of gratitude. For example, in both teacher training and in ESL/EFL, sharing with students ways that we are grateful for them and all that we learn from them could help them to reflect on ways that they are thankful for experiences, gifts, people, opportunities, etc.

For ESL/EFL, the SOCEM (2014) Thanksgiving holiday lesson plans introduce the American and Canadian backgrounds for these holidays and use readings to highlight various traditions. They also encourage students to express what they are thankful for and are one way that ESL/EFL teachers might create opportunities to discuss gratitude. At various levels of proficiency, ESL/EFL teachers can also help their students learn to express thanks and gratitude in specific ways and contexts. For example, teachers might ask students to reflect on someone special in their life that they particularly appreciate, such as a parent, sibling, coach, friend, or teacher. Students could note a few things that they especially appreciate and value about that person, and then verbally share a summary of those points with a partner or small group. Next teachers could help students compose written thank you notes or emails to those people, which could then be presented to those special people in order to extend students’ gratitude to them.

This is one simple yet valuable way to incorporate examples of and discussions on the virtue of gratitude in ESL/EFL classes.

## **6. Hope**

*Hope* is the belief that one's future includes good prospects. As Roberts (2007) outlines it, "Hope is a construal of the future in some terms, and Christian hope is the construal of our future in terms of God's promises of eternal life and righteousness" (p. 155). Psalm 62:5 reminds us, "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him." Christian hope thus comes from God and involves trusting in God and following him faithfully in the present and as we head into the future. Romans 15:13 states, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Discussing the ways that languages and cultures express and view hope is one way to consider this virtue and its various expressions across cultures.

Unfortunately, thus far hope is not a virtue that I have emphasized in the ICC for Ts curriculum to date. I plan to do so in the future, however. A reviewer of this article pointed out that hope also deals with expectation, and since TESOL students learn about dispositions, one that is often focused on is the expectation that all English language learners can learn English. ESL/EFL students in various contexts sometimes experience less success in their English learning than they would like, but ESL/EFL teachers are trained to teach in such a way that the expectation is communicated that their students can and will indeed learn English.

In ESL/EFL courses of beginning and intermediate levels, we often teach students about hope as they learn verb tenses, to express their hopes for the future. The SOCEM (2014) lesson plans for Hope are a potential teaching resource, drawing on a number of famous quotations, discussion tasks, and readings that include a story on The Power of Hope (about a tutor teaching nouns and adverbs!) and Bible passages from Job 30-40 and Luke 24:13-35, Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Christian teachers know that "we have been justified through faith" and "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). As such, our "hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). May our lives reflect such hope as we incorporate this virtue into our classes.

In my most recent ICC for Ts course, one of the students described lesson plans on hope that she developed for intermediate level English students who are refugees in Houston, Texas.

Like the SOCEM lesson plans, hers included discussions, songs, video clips, and readings. For example, a TED talk on “Overcoming Hopelessness” by Nick Vujicic, a Christian evangelist and speaker who was born with no arms or legs, was used to focus on the value and dignity of every human being and to note the great good that can come in life despite its many challenges and difficulties. A UNICEF photo series “Finding Hope”<sup>7</sup> was used to provide a global perspective and to help students reflect on and consider hope for their own lives and circumstances.

## **7. Joy**

*Joy* is the seventh and final virtue I would like to highlight for intercultural communication. While the world thinks of joy as great happiness with pleasure, as a Christian virtue Roberts (2007, p. 116) describes it as “one kind of spiritual pleasure.” The Christian virtue of joy is not the product of one’s circumstances, but rather a wonderful feeling that results from one’s knowledge of and experience with God through Jesus Christ. We know from Galatians 5:22 that joy is one fruit of the Spirit, and Christians are commanded to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 3:1). In the beautiful John 15 vine and branches passage, Jesus encourages his disciples to keep his commands and to remain in his love. Then he declares, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). Even amidst sorrow or suffering, God’s people know from Nehemiah 8:10 that the joy of the Lord is our strength. We can call on God to give us joy when we trust in him, as the Psalmist (86:4) does.

In terms of intercultural communication, Proverbs 15:23 teaches us, “A person finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word!” The challenge of course is that what is considered an “apt” reply in a particular situation is very cultural, as is a “timely word.” ICC for Ts helps students learn about culture, language, and nonverbal communication, as well as communication styles, pragmatics, and other issues to help teachers and students analyze such situations, on individual, community, national, and other levels. In doing so my hope is that students in the course will experience Christian joy. Once more I confess that this virtue is not one I have thus far explicitly incorporated into the ICC for Ts course, though I believe that I have glimpsed students’ joy that is beyond their circumstances and our class relationships. In the online section of the course one semester, graduate students were given the chance to reflect on which of the seven virtues they had particularly experienced or been challenged by, and one

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<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://medium.com/photography-and-social-change/finding-hope-dc5af886a39a>.

participant wrote, “I’ve...found a lot of joy in this course through the celebration of culture and the different interactions and stories we share in our discussion boards.” I hope to learn to bring Christian joy more to the forefront of my on campus and online sections of ICC for Ts.

For ESL/EFL, thankfully *The Virtues* includes a series of lessons on Joy (SOCEM, 2014), which use pair work to discuss and define joy, as well as to consider different proverbs and sayings on it. The readings there include Ecclesiastes 3 (A Time for Everything), and there are discussions of various idioms reflecting joy. In church ESL classes, teachers might discuss the joy of the Lord as the Christian’s strength, and sing the worship chorus that communicates that truth, or listen to one of the more recent pop culture versions (from, e.g., Rend Collective). The student I mentioned above paired her lesson plans on hope with two on joy. These included having her ESL students consider definitions of and famous quotes on joy, plus watch a short video on a “theology of joy” from the Yale Center for Faith and Culture (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YjiJwUwMgA>) and discuss and reflect on Seppälä’s (2013) blog “The Science Behind the Joy of Sharing Joy.” These are just some great ideas that might be adapted or spark yet other possibilities for teaching the virtue of joy in ESL/EFL. As language learning is a difficult, long, and involved process, one ICC for Ts student observed that joy helps learners and teachers by making “the small day-to-day moments enjoyable” in class and out.

## **Final Reflections on Christian Virtues and Intercultural Communication**

In order to offer a summary for teachers in ICC for Ts to begin to think about potential ways to incorporate any of the above seven Christian virtues into their ESL/EFL classes, I created an “At A Glance” summary, included as an Appendix, where the above virtues are listed alphabetically, with a short definition and focus, some related Bible passages, and potential teaching resources. Readers might also use this chart as they attempt to incorporate these virtues into their lessons and the curricula for their own teacher training and/or ESL/EFL courses.

One issue I have not explicitly addressed here is how teachers and students might work to internalize and thus exhibit the virtues I have discussed. That is beyond the scope of this article, but as I have alluded to several times, I can attest to glimpses of my ICC for Ts students displaying, or reporting on growth in, these virtues. Also, while I teach Christian students at my university, I believe that others working with students from diverse religious backgrounds at other Christian schools could potentially benefit from incorporating virtues into their relevant

ESL/EFL and/or teacher training courses. In short, while the seven virtues I have outlined are Christian because they are highlighted in the Bible, they are not limited to Christianity, and thus could also be considered appropriate for those of other backgrounds and traditions.

While Baehr's (2015) e-book deals primarily with intellectual virtues in kindergarten through grade 12 teaching contexts, it is nonetheless an insightful resource for all teachers who wish to focus more on virtues in their teaching. I highly recommend chapter 35, where Baehr (2015) discusses integrating virtues language into one's instruction, including what to avoid, opportunities to practice the virtues, and giving virtues-based feedback.

As the above discussion reveals, the first several of the seven virtues are more clearly integrated into my ICC for Ts course at this stage, but the last few need to be addressed more explicitly. This is thus a work in progress.<sup>8</sup> One further limitation here is that I have not yet incorporated any specific assessment where I might help students reflect on their learning of these virtues during the ICC for Ts course, although authors like Curren and Kotzee (2014) suggest there may be such a possibility, in terms of what they call routine "evaluation of student virtue-related learning" (p. 266). So far, I have seen a number of virtues and issues related to them come to the fore through students' written reflections in the course's two Prayer Projects, but the focus there is not on the virtues themselves.

## **Conclusion**

This article briefly considered virtues and intercultural communication, drawing on principles from cross-cultural and virtue ethics. It has also noted the importance of virtues in education and described one ESL/EFL curriculum that focuses on virtues. Finally, it considered seven key Christian virtues, outlining ways I incorporate some of them in my Intercultural Communication for Teachers course, while noting that I still need to develop means to bring some of these virtues more explicitly into the curriculum. My hope is that readers will benefit from this overview and learn about and consider ways that they might incorporate Christian virtues into their TESOL teacher training and/or ESL/EFL courses. As my future students consider virtues and intercultural communication, I look forward to receiving additional

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<sup>8</sup> Recent curriculum changes in our program mean that I am developing a new iteration of the ICC for Ts course, entitled "Ethics, Values, and Intercultural Communication for TESOL Professionals." Virtues should continue to be of particular interest and assistance in this new version of the course.

feedback on and suggestions concerning these virtues and the new intercultural communication course, so that I may revisit and hopefully improve these efforts when I teach it each year.

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**Appendix**  
**Seven Virtues for Intercultural Communication,**  
**Alphabetically ‘At a Glance’**

<b>Virtue</b>	<b>Definition/Focus</b>	<b>Bible Passages to Consider</b>	<b>Potential (Teaching) Resources</b>
Compassion	Compassion is a type of love that reflects (and goes beyond) sympathy to show concern for others in their suffering or weakness.	Psalm 145:9, Matthew 9:36, 14:4, 20:34, Luke 10:25-37, John 11, Galatians 6:2	Wolpow et al. (2011) on compassion, resiliency, and academic success. Austin (2012).
Contrition	Contrition is sincere and complete remorse, recognizing one has offended God. Synonym: regret.	2 Samuel 18:21-35, Psalm 51, Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 15:11-32, 23:39-43, Romans 7:22-25	Mann (2015) and SOCEM (2014) Forgiveness lesson plans. McCullough (2008); Geivett (2012).
Gratitude	Gratitude is being thankful, showing appreciation for kindness. Synonym: being grateful.	Psalm 95:2, 105:1, Ephesians 5:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:18	SOCEM (2014) Thanksgiving holiday lesson plans.
Hope	Hope is the belief one’s future includes good prospects.	Psalm 62:5, Romans 15:13, Luke 24	SOCEM (2014) Hope lesson plans. Mattison (2012).
Hospitality	Hospitality is the generous welcome of and provision for visitors, including strangers.	Luke 24:13ff., 1 Peter 4:9, Romans 12:13b, Hebrews 13:2. Hospitality and Strangers: Exodus 23:9, Psalm 146:9a, Luke 10:25-37, John 4:1-42	Smith and Carvill (2000) chapter 5; see also Smith (2006, 2009).
Humility	Humility is not being overly proud of oneself, but having self-confidence. Synonym: being humble.	Proverbs 11:2, 18:12, 22:4, John 13:1-17, Philippians 2:3-9, 1 Peter 5:5-6	SOCEM (2014) Humility lesson plans. Baehr (2015) ch. 6; Baurain (2017); Bridges (2016); Pinsent (2012); Powell (2017).
Joy	Joy is great happiness with spiritual pleasure, due to a relationship with God, not one’s circumstances.	Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 86:4, Proverbs 15:23, John 15:11, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 3:1	SOCEM (2014) Joy lesson plans.