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Cultivating Community through Language Learning in a Benedictine Seminary Network

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Abstract: St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, a seminary located in southern Indiana, was founded in 1857 by monks of the Benedictine order of Einsiedeln in Switzerland. The seminary has since been devoted to the education of faith leaders—priests, deacons, and graduate lay students. Due to the growth of underserved Latino populations in the Midwest region of the United States, there is a need to prepare future faith leaders to serve Latino congregations. This work provides an exploration into the ways in which language learning collaborations based on Benedictine hospitality can cultivate community. It outlines a Benedictine pedagogy of community that is threefold. First, given the importance of language to communicate with members of Latino communities in the United States, the cultivation of community is understood in terms of the world readiness standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Second, because Benedictine monasteries were founded on the value of hospitality, these interactions are imbued with Benedictine hospitality. Third, it is argued that Benedictine communities are contexts in which the liminal intertwines with the liminoid, resulting in fertile ground for the creation of what we call liminal/liminoid encounters that have the potential to level asymmetric power relations and lead to meaningful dialogue. The final section shows how this Benedictine pedagogy of community is enacted in one specific Spanish language learning immersion that takes place at a sister Benedictine Monastery abroad, Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It also provides a small sample of seven students' responses to two critical questions from a survey questionnaire. Even though this small qualitative sample is not generalizable, it helps illuminate how these interactions may lead to the development of cultural sensitivity, of a sense of community, between students and members of this language learning immersion abroad. Responses indicate that students who participated in this program for at least eight weeks exhibit an interest in continuing to interact and collaborate in multicultural communities as well as a willingness to learn the target language beyond this experience.

Keywords: Benedictine hospitality; language learning; communities; liminal; liminoid; ACTFL



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1. Introduction

St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, a seminary located in southern Indiana, was founded in 1857 by monks of the Benedictine order of Einsiedeln in Switzerland. The seminary has since been devoted to the education of faith leaders—priests, deacons, and graduate lay students. Most of this seminary's ordained priests are placed in parishes across the rural Midwest of the United States, a region with a growing number of underserved Latino immigrant populations.¹

Susan Dieterlen (2015) notes that, according to the 2010 US Census, even though Latinas/os constitute 7 percent of the Midwest region's overall population, Latino immigration to this region is growing at a staggering rate, increasing by 49 percent since 2000 (p. 8). The growth of the Latino population in the Midwest far outpaced that of the overall population of the Midwest, which grew by only 4 percent during these same years (Dieterlen 2015, p. 8). In their study of Latina/o immigrants and Mexican Americans in the Midwest United States, Millard et al. (2004) argue that unlike other regions of the

United States, in the Midwest there exists “a racial hierarchy of privilege and opportunity with whites at the top” (p. 115). In fact, most of the opportunities available to Latina/o immigrants are predominately those created by the meatpacking, food processing, and light manufacturing industries with lower labor costs and less unionization (Dieterlen 2015, p. 8; Millard et al. 2004, p. 115). They also observe that most non-Latinas/os who participated in their study, who they refer to as Anglos, denied being prejudiced, while every Latina/o in this same study reported having experienced discrimination (p. 115).² For this reason, parishes as spaces of safety and refuge are critical for Latina/o newcomers, immigrants, and their first and second generations, whose faith practices are tied to daily lived experiences in their newly found homeland.

The National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry underscores the importance of parishes as places of refuge and safety for Latina/o Catholic immigrants. As Hosffman Ospino (2015) points out, the parish is the place where Latina/o immigrants choose to establish a familiar experience of community in the United States (p. 9). Moreover, the Spanish language “plays an important role in the process of faith formation of Hispanic Catholics” (Ospino 2015, p. 61). Among the main reasons for the importance of language learning in faith formation is that most adult Latina/o active members of the parishes prefer to use Spanish to live and share their faith. Additionally, faith leaders who develop strong communication skills in Spanish will be better equipped to engage in intergenerational conversations with Latino families. In addition, faith leaders who develop a connection to the culture and history of the Hispanic world are more likely to develop a deeper interest in, and an increased sensitivity toward, members of their underserved communities.

This work provides an exploration into the ways in which language learning collaborations can cultivate community in the formation of vocations by outlining a Benedictine pedagogy of community that is threefold. First, given the importance of language to communicate with the members of Latino communities in the United States, in this work the cultivation of community is understood in terms of the fifth goal area of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), that is, “to prepare language learners to interact and collaborate in multilingual local and global communities” (History ACTFL 2023). Second, this work discusses the premier Benedictine value of hospitality through the lens of Catholic social teaching, arguing that at Saint Meinrad the cultivation of community through multilingual interaction and collaboration is imbued with Benedictine hospitality. In the third section, this work asserts that Benedictine monasteries are ideal sites for active collaboration through encounters and underscores the significance of liminal and liminoid encounters in leveling asymmetrical power relations to allow for meaningful dialogue. Then, it describes several language and international learning collaborations offered at Saint Meinrad. The final section shows how this Benedictine pedagogy of community is enacted in one specific Spanish language learning collaboration; an immersion that takes place at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It also provides a small sample of seven students’ responses to two critical questions from a survey questionnaire. Even though this small qualitative sample is not generalizable, it helps illuminate how these interactions may lead to the forging of affective bonds, of solidarity, and ultimately of a sense of community, between students and Hispanic members of this language learning immersion abroad. Responses indicate that students who participated in this program for at least eight weeks exhibit an interest in continuing to interact and collaborate in multicultural communities as well as a willingness to learn the target language beyond this experience.

2. Cultivating Community through Language Learning

In 2020, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), an organization that represents language educators and learners globally, decided to question the term ‘foreign’ in its acronym because “times have changed” (History ACTFL 2023). Using the term ‘foreign’ “[sends] a message that language learning should be viewed as ‘strange’ or ‘unfamiliar’”. Despite this, the final consensus was to keep its acronym, which

represents its highly respected brand, and to add to it the tagline “Language Connects”, two words that convey “how language acts as a bridge to cultural competence, career readiness, and empathy ... and represents [ACTFL’s] aspirations to be inclusive and inviting” (History ACTFL 2023). ACTFL’s decision to change its corporate identity from representing the unfamiliar, the foreign, to becoming inclusive of difference pervades all areas of language learning and it opens new horizons in the field of language education.

The realization that communication is key to cultural competence and the primordial role of language learning in connecting cultures and building inclusive multicultural communities led ACTFL to revise their standards for language education. In 2015, the National Standards Collaborative Board (2015) incorporated two new goal areas to the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (W-RSLL 2015): connections and communities. Today, the standards target five goal areas for teaching and learning languages: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. The main objective of the five goal areas is to develop cultural competence by linking communication and culture “which is applied in making connections and comparisons and in using this competence to be part of local and global communities” (W-RSLL 2015). This work addresses the ‘communities’ goal area, which is to prepare language learners to communicate and interact with cultural competence to participate in multilingual local and global multilingual communities (Table 1).

Table 1. Communities Goal Area (W-RSLL 2015).

Communities Goal Area 5	Communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world
School and Global Communities Standard 5.1	Learners use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world
Lifelong Learning Standard 5.2	Learners set goals and reflect on their progress in using languages for enjoyment, enrichment, and advancement

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on ACTFL’s new goal area of communities. This may be due to the difficulty in assessing learning goals and outcomes when language is acquired collaboratively and outside of the traditional classroom setting. As Lisa Ferrante Perrone (2015) notes, despite its importance, language teachers find the communities goal area not assessable, nebulous, and out of their control. Another problem is the broad definition of the communities goal area and the difficulty in measuring it, either quantitatively or qualitatively. Yet, it is an essential part of the ACTFL standards, of equal weight to, and inseparable from the other goal areas. All five goal areas “intertwine, support, and depend on one another”, and attention to all goal areas is essential to create a cohesive language curriculum (Perrone 2015, p. 466).

Particularly for future faith leaders and those who work in professions of care, including education, it is critical to emphasize the importance of building communication skills by interacting with and establishing bonds with members of the communities they wish to serve. Hence, this work focuses on cultural sensitivity as a main component of cultural competence. The American Psychological Association defines cultural sensitivity as an “awareness and appreciation of the values, norms, and beliefs characteristic of a cultural, ethnic, racial, or other group that is not one’s own, accompanied by a willingness to adapt one’s behavior accordingly” (American Psychological Association 2023). Following Matthew Maruggi (2012), it is argued that “individuals first develop a sense of solidarity, of common humanity or interconnection with others, and then enlarge and refine that notion with an understanding of difference” (310). Thus, the acquisition of cultural sensitivity, of a sense of a shared community with others of a different culture, begins in solidarity.

3. Benedictine Hospitality through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching

In his article titled, “Hospitality in the Benedictine monastic tradition”, [Raverty \(2012\)](#) argues that Benedictine hospitality goes beyond a mere tolerance of difference; it is an active welcoming of others, the ability “to think of all people as our guests” (p. 252). The idea of cultivating community through Benedictine hospitality can be understood through the lens of the Catholic social teaching of solidarity, including the theme of option for the poor and vulnerable ([USCCB 2023](#)). As Elena [Foulis \(2020\)](#) notes in her work on the Latino experience in the state of Ohio, one of the main priorities of Latina/o faith leaders is “a commitment to solidarity as a component of ethical faith practices rooted in the protection of the most vulnerable” (p. 29). As a radical welcoming of others, Benedictine hospitality necessarily presupposes a commitment to solidarity that includes a sense of responsibility for the disadvantaged other. In their work on Benedictine leadership, [Hisker and Urick \(2019\)](#) argue that St. Benedict’s Rule serves as an ethical structure to educational theories of corporate leadership, for Benedictine hospitality may instill “a welcoming and collaborative pattern of behavior . . . [breaking] down barriers between individuals and groups” (p. 261). This radical welcoming of guests underscores the culture of encounter that characterizes Benedictine communities. By actively welcoming others, Benedictine learning contexts consistently generate opportunities to engage in lived experiences with others from different cultures. Benedictine monasteries are ideal sites for the creation of spaces of active collaboration across the curriculum.

The idea of cultivating community is associated with Pope Francis’ understanding of solidarity as the development of “a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all” ([Francis 2013](#), p. 188). Pope John Paul II recognizes that solidarity entails the interdependence of all nations, communities, and peoples “as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world . . . and accepted as a moral category . . . the correlative response as a moral and social attitude . . . is solidarity” ([John Paul II 1987](#), p. 38). Pope John Paul II further defines solidarity as a moral obligation that “helps us to see the ‘other’ . . . not just as some kind of instrument . . . but as our ‘neighbor,’ a ‘helper’” (cf. Gen 2:18–20, SRS 39). Thus, the first step in entering solidarity is to “see” the Other. This seeing must be devoid of self-centered interest, an instance in which we become “visible” to the Other. As Corey [Beals \(2007\)](#) argues, following Emmanuel Levinas, “the human begins in original responsibility for the Other” (p. 27). Thus, solidarity is an unavoidable responsibility, a Christian duty, that binds us all regardless of our disposition toward others. Therefore, disavowing the moral duty of solidarity does not exempt us from our obligation to others. Pope John Paul II calls on us to act on this moral obligation to others, “to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” ([John Paul II 1987](#), p. 38). Recognizing our responsibility for the wellbeing of others, particularly the poor and vulnerable, is to acknowledge the face of the Other, who, in the words of Emmanuel Levinas, demands that I say, “Here I am!”

Therefore, for the Benedictine tradition, hospitality becomes a guest apostolate in the service of others, a call to embrace difference. As R.D.G. [Irvine \(2011\)](#) notes, the centrality of the guesthouse in all Benedictine monasteries is evidence of how faithfully the tradition of hospitality has been upheld through history (p. 41). The table is an essential feature of the Benedictine community, as the Rule states, “the abbot’s table must always be with guests and travelers” ([Raverty 2012](#), p. 252). In addition, guests are invited to stay until well rested, “adequate bedding should be available there” ([Raverty 2012](#), p. 252). Further evidence of the importance of hospitality is the fact that St. Benedict designated a porter to actively welcome guests as they arrive ([Raverty 2012](#), p. 252). Chapter 66 of St. Benedict’s Rule is entirely dedicated to the porter, describing the required protocol to be followed as guests arrive at the monastery, “As soon as anyone knocks, or a poor man calls out, he [the porter] replies, ‘Thanks be to God’ or ‘Your blessing, please’; then, with all the gentleness that comes from the fear of God, he provides a prompt answer with the warmth of love”

(Raverty 2012, p. 252). It is noteworthy that the Rule specifically instructs that the poor should be welcomed in the same manner as all other guests.

But the recognition of our responsibility for others can become a challenge in today's modern world, as Pope Francis (2019) asserts, "among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and the prevailing individualism . . . that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles" (DHF). In contrast to the modern world, Benedictine monasteries display an architecture of stability that is timeless, as represented by the Abbey's tower, "with its bell ringing out, [that] not only announces the monastery's presence and its continuity with the past; it also asserts the perpetuity of a cycle of prayer which transcends the here and now" (Irvine 2011, p. 37). This ambience of stability also permeates monastic life, given by "a timetable of prayer . . . which emerges through the coordination of times for prayer, meals, work, and so on" (Irvine 2011, p. 36). Benedictine monasteries contrast with the unstable modern world outside the monastery's walls, with their timeless presence and vow to stability amidst the instability and fragmentation of the modern world.

Benedictine monasteries can also be thought of as "way stations of hospitality", sacred sites of healing, places where the marginalized and all the pilgrims who have suffered from conflicts, wars, violence, and intolerance "can find some remedy in the healing balm of monastic hospitality" (Raverty 2012, p. 254). Chapter 53 of the Rule of St. Benedict states, "Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received" (Raverty 2012, p. 252). St. Benedict's particular mention of the poor and the stranger, the pilgrim, transforms Benedictine monasteries into spaces of safety, where the marginal other and the pilgrim can find refuge, even if temporary.

Despite its radical openness to others, the Rule teaches discernment through prayer in the treatment of guests (Raverty 2012, p. 253). Rev. Timothy Fry OSB notes that fundamental to the Benedictine tradition is the guidance of disciples through the discernment of spirits "along the path of self-renunciation" (RB 1980 2016). Discernment is also evident in its architecture, as Benedictine monasteries provide separate spaces for guests, including a separate quarter for visitors, seminarians, and monks. A guest is "invited to participate in the life of the community, yet he is spatially separated from the monastic community in the Abbey church, in the refectory and in his sleeping quarters" (Irvine 2011, p. 43). This separation and the practice of discernment has enabled Benedictine communities to preserve their way of life through history, and they continue to be places of prayer and healing in today's modern world.

4. Of Liminal and Liminoid Learning Encounters

4.1. Engaging with Others in the Dialogue of Life

Raverty (2012) notes that at Benedictine monastic communities, people are invited to engage in the "dialogue of life"; we invite the Other "to share stories of struggles, hardships, and joys", engaging in an exchange where we get "caught up in the movement of the Holy Spirit as an invitation to learn about the Other" (p. 123). This dialogue of life is the foundation of the language and international learning collaborations in the Benedictine educational setting. The students consistently engage in dialogues of life with natives through conversations, which are structured but also spontaneous, by engaging in pilgrimages and retreats, participating in the presentations of Latina/o leaders, exchanging personal stories, and attending immersion programs abroad. However, as Rachel Gilmour (2016) notes, "many educators report the resistance of students to the concept of multiple voices and interpretations of these voices", (p. 117). Creating dialogic spaces, asserts Laura Leming (2016), "will almost inevitably reveal difference and the need to grow in skills for negotiating difference" (p. 9). Leming suggests that because these "places of constructive resistance" can grow into social critique, they must be accompanied by deep reflection and be motivated by a search for wisdom (p. 9). The Vatican's document on *Dialogue*

and Proclamation (1991) also states that there are many obstacles to dialogue that impede reciprocity, “intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors . . . can lead to frustration” ([Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and Proclamation n.d.](#), p. 52). This complicates dialogical theories of pedagogy that assume ideal conditions—symmetrical relationships. Following Dean Brackley SJ, Matthew [Maruggi](#) (2012) argues that decentering the privileged position is crucial to level these asymmetric power relations and achieve solidarity (p. 309). The concept of liminality is useful in attempting to level asymmetric power dynamics.

4.2. On Social Solidarity and the Liminal/Liminoid

Victor [Turner](#) (1974) explains that liminal and liminoid phenomena must be understood in the context of Durkheimian solidarity. As Emile [Durkheim](#) (2019) argues, mechanical solidarity, which existed in pre-modern societies, would turn into organic solidarity with the advent of individualism in modern societies. Historically, liminal phenomena were generated cyclically in tribal and “primitive” societies whose members related through similarities and were tied by obligations (p. 85). Following Slavoj Žižek, Dan Krier et al. ([Krier and Swart 2012](#)) argue that like Durkheim, Bakhtin also recognized that the rotary motion characteristic of pre-modern societies allowed for “a cyclical reproduction of relatively stable culture over time” (p. 145). In contrast, modern societies, which are characterized by specialization and innovation, thrive on the mainstream idea of progress at the cost of the loss of the sacred and stories of the past. In the early twentieth century, Durkheim saw the loss of sacred and traditional stories as contributing to the moral crisis of modernity; he writes, “What constitutes the strength of the collective states of consciousness is not only that they are common to the present generation, but particularly that they are for the most part a legacy of generations that have gone before . . . it is almost entirely a product of the past . . . The authority of the collective consciousness is therefore made up in large part of the authority of tradition” (p. 233). Following Durkheim, the sociologist Stjepan [Meštrović](#) (1993) sees the secularization of education as a form of sacrilege, given the religious origin of schools, a process that contributed to the ‘moral crises’ of a modern society dominated by the cult of the individual person (p. 95).

Benedictine educational contexts have been able to reproduce mechanical solidarity, recreating spaces where members still bond through similarities instead of differences and individual characteristics. This is key to Catholic education, for as Durkheim explains, “this particular structure enables society to hold the individual more tightly in its grip, making him more strongly attached to his domestic environment, and consequently to tradition” (p. 242). In the case of Benedictine communities, explains Eviatar [Zerubavel](#) (1980), St. Benedict introduced a “unique sociotemporal order” that has allowed Benedictine communities to survive through history by balancing mechanical and organic solidarity (p. 167). Because in Benedictine monastic communities individuals share a strong collective consciousness, the community’s interests are placed above those of the individual ([Mishra and Rath 2020](#), p. 4). This collective consciousness constitutes shared beliefs and ideas represented by emblems and tied to a common higher moral authority that creates a binding force to ensure solidarity and stability within the group. Thus, monastic communities, like pre-modern societies, are bonded by a collective system of representations that carry a much deeper significance than those of its individual members.

Liminality becomes liminoid in capitalist societies, where people bond through differences and solidarity becomes organic. Turner’s distinction between the liminal and the liminoid is constructive, for it helps explain how encounters function in the context of monastic communities today. Turner deduced that “in liminality is secreted the seed of the liminoid”. (p. 86). Whereas the liminal arises in societies that are bonded by similarities and obligations, the liminoid is characterized by ludic interplay and optionality, as Turner notes, “One works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid” (p. 86). Members of a church feel an obligation to participate in the sacraments, a liminal experience “whereas one queues up at the boxoffice to see a play by Beckett, a performance by Mort Sahl, a Superbowl

Game, a symphony concert, or an art exhibition” (p.86). As Savova-Grigorova (2016) explains in her work on community engagement through bread-making in Bulgaria, liminoid experiences define “ritual re-enactments that are framed as leisure and are open to choice and re-structuring” (p. 9). Savova-Grigorova’s successful project consists of community networks of bread-making for the disadvantaged, (former prisoners, gang members, orphans, people with various physical and mental needs, etc.), where people connect to each other through “rich meaning-making processes out of the memories, associations, and stories” (p. 2). Moreover, bread-making has led to the creation and development of local art, music, painting, pottery, theatre, etc., uniting people from all ways of life in today’s divided Bulgaria (p. 2). Because liminoid phenomena stems from and resembles the liminal, they intertwine with the liminal and intensify in religious contexts.

4.3. On the Recreation of Self-Narratives

In his study of how counselors recreate their self-narratives, MacKay (2008) explains that during the disintegrating phase of liminality, a broader, deeper narrative, such as a sacred or sacramental tale, is needed to hold the fractured parts of a person together (p. 197). MacKay likens Winnicott’s transitional space to Turner’s liminal space, claiming that in these spaces the undoing of structures has the potential for creativity and transformation. Symbols may be rearranged, and new narratives can connect with larger stories, accessing deep layers in a person’s self-narrative. In the context of a monastic community, liminal and liminoid experiences can break down asymmetric power structures. The disruption of power structures, is critical for accessing deep layers in a person’s self-narrative through a process of rearranging and conjoining of symbols, shaping a persons’ emotions, especially when these symbols are lived by the members of the group (MacKay 2008, p. 197; LaMothe 2010, p. 59). In monastic communities, liminal encounters with others from different cultures are lived through mechanical solidarity, allowing students to acquire cultural sensitivity through a variety of activities, such as casual or formal conversations, alternative narratives, including poetry, participation in rituals, pilgrimages, playing games, and participation in sports or educational field trips. Because these learning experiences share traces of both liminal and liminoid phenomena, in this work they will be referred to as liminal/liminoid encounters.

5. Language and International Learning Collaborations in Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology

It is argued in this work that cultivating community, as stated by the ACTFL communities goal area, within a Benedictine context, is critical to developing students’ capacity to become empathetic leaders who appreciate diverse communities. One way to awaken students’ desire to serve the disadvantaged is to create liminal/liminoid encounters with others as part of the language experience. In their practical theology of liminality, Carson et al. (2021) argue that when liminal thresholds are added to the Catholic curriculum, students’ imagination “can be fostered by experimentation and asking, ‘what if’ questions or inviting artistic renditions of the text or activity at hand” (p. 148). These liminal/liminoid encounters should be authentic and meaningful learning experiences, lived within a learning community in a Catholic educational context.

Particularly for faith leaders who wish to serve in diverse congregations, it is not enough to acquire communication skills in the target language; the community experience must awaken a sense of bonding, or camaraderie, with the native members of the larger community and a sense of respect for its culture and history. Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has addressed this need by engaging in collaborations with educational and faith institutions locally and abroad.

5.1. Local Language Learning Collaborations

Locally, Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has incorporated three language learning collaborations into its Spanish program as part of its Catholic curriculum (Table 2).

Table 2. Language Learning Collaborations.

Name	Description
TalkAbroad: Online conversations with natives	Students communicate (in Spanish) with natives from all countries of Latin America through an online platform called TalkAbroad.
Latino/a Presentation Series	Students learn about the culture and history of Latin America through the testimony of Latina/o faith leaders and educators.
Spanish Tables	Native Latina/o students and guests are intentionally included at designated “Spanish tables” during lunch on specific days of the week for all community members who wish to interact in Spanish and learn about Latino culture in a more informal fashion.

5.2. International Learning Collaborations

Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has also created spaces for global citizenship education by organizing international learning collaborations in the form of pilgrimages and retreats. Students who participate in these international learning collaborations interact and bond with others through authentic religious experiences abroad. These collaborations are learning communities that immerse students in both pre-planned and spontaneous liminal/liminoid encounters as well as a dialogic pedagogy based on multiple narratives and reflection. Table 3 shows three international learning collaborations that currently form part of the Saint Meinrad’s curriculum.

Table 3. International Learning Collaborations.

Name	Description
El Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage and Retreat	As students become pilgrims, they deepen their faith and sense of community with their peers and other pilgrims, on the route to Santiago de Compostela. Moreover, non-Latina/o students may realize that there exist many layers of socio-economic and cultural diversity among Hispanics in the world.
Holy Week in Seville, Spain	Students who participate in the Holy Week in the Seville trip learn firsthand about this profoundly religious experience through encounters with others, talks with members of brotherhoods, the <i>nazarenos</i> , and visiting local churches and national buildings.
Central American Martyrs Pilgrimage and Retreat	Students on the pilgrimage and retreat to Guatemala experience and learn comparatively about the life of two saints: Blessed Father Stanley Rother and Peter of Saint Joseph de Betancur y Gonzáles, OFB (1626–1667), Hermano Pedro. In addition, students on this trip engage in encounters with locals by visiting churches, schools, and national buildings.

6. Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angeles: A Language Learning Community Abroad

6.1. Toward a Benedictine Pedagogy of Community

This last section focuses on the creation of a summer immersion program at a sister Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. This language learning collaboration has been co-organized by Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of

Theology, this Benedictine Mexican community, and local educators. Even though this immersion program is in Cuernavaca, Mexico, its diverse monastic body is composed of Latin American monks from many countries, and one monk from Spain. The students who attend this Spanish immersion program for eight weeks participate in a variety of learning liminal/liminoid encounters with native locals and members of this diverse monastic community. In line with the ACTFL communities goal area and the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), standards 3.3 and 3.4, the main goal of the language learning community at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels in Cuernavaca, Mexico, is to increase students' cultural sensitivity, global awareness, and engagement in diverse communities by offering opportunities for learning in international contexts.

One advantage of immersion programs over service-learning abroad is the opportunity for reflection embedded in language immersions. As Haynes (2011) argues, "students learn more deeply by coupling concrete experiences with reflective thought" (p. 21). Reflection allows learners to "examine their beliefs and enter into the threshold of discovery"; this brings about an increased knowledge and reinforced dialogue that creates a lifelong learning posture (Carson et al. 2021, p. 148). For as Carson et al. (2021) argue, the idea of discipleship is based on this engaged dialogic pedagogy, "the disciples themselves, including the women, could not have carried on to build the Early Church without this formative practice of learning from Jesus in the years before his death and resurrection" (p. 148). Students in this immersion program learn through daily encounters with locals, native monks or priests, workshops, field trips, pilgrimages, masses, and the Liturgy of the Hour—all in Spanish and locally organized in collaboration with local Latin American teachers and faith leaders. They also have the opportunity to reflect on these encounters and connect these multiple voices to the culture and history of Mexico during classroom instruction. It is also expected that students develop affective ties with and within this language learning community, increasing their willingness to continue to participate and serve in diverse communities.

Table 4 shows the different types of liminal/liminoid learning encounters at the Benedictine summer immersion program in Mexico, by which students are expected to acquire cultural sensitivity.

Table 4. Types of Liminal/Liminoid Learning Encounters.

Types of Liminal/Liminoid Learning Encounters at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, Cuernavaca, Mexico
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning of the local culture through classroom learning and extracurricular activities. • Singing and praying the Liturgy of the Hour (in Spanish). • Participating in the choir. • Having daily informal conversations with native monks, teachers, and lay members of the community. • Getting to know the locals after service and during their leisure time away from the monastery. • Participating in guided field trips and pilgrimage with monks, teachers, and their families. • Participating in candle-making workshops (taught by monks). • Harvesting coffee with the monks. • Picking and storing avocados with the monks. • Cooking and helping in the kitchen. • Playing games and participating in sports with the monks and lay members of the community.

As Langat and Addington (2018) argue, it is not enough simply to invite culturally and ethnically diverse students and resources into a classroom space to develop cultural competency (p. 9). Instead, they propose counterbalancing asymmetric power relations through practices of hospitality and submission to the other (p. 9). Because the lived experiences and reflective activities of students at this collaborative language immersion are imbued with the Benedictine value of hospitality, it is expected that the students develop affective bonds with the members of this community, transforming learners' self-representations and shaping their ways of being in the world.

Matthew Maruggi's (2015) theory of kaleidoscopic learning measures students' attitudes of solidarity toward members of underserved communities. Following anthropologist Diane M. Nelson, Maruggi (2015) has adopted the notion of "fluidarity" as a replacement of the more controversial notion of solidarity (p. 300). In the kaleidoscope, he argues, three types of narratives are interconnected through dialogue. The first narrative represents the students' own reflections "upon their own life stories in terms of social and spiritual identity development and sense of change agency" (Maruggi 2015, p. 313). The second narrative represents the alternative stories of others, multiple voices in the form of testimonies and through meaningful dialogue. The third narrative represents what Maruggi calls "narratives of liberatory religion and spirituality" (Maruggi 2015, p. 313). These are memoirs and biographies of minority leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Cesar Chavez, that decenter homogenizing historical narratives, creating "both personal and social transformation that is counterhegemonic as opposed to perpetuating systems of domination" (Maruggi 2015, p. 313). Maruggi's theory is based on Paulo Freire's idea of the narrative character of education and the importance of dialogue in learning (p. 312). This exploratory work departs from Maruggi's theoretical underpinnings by defining solidarity, or fluidarity, in terms of the ACTFL goal area of communities and placing all these learning collaborations within Benedictine contexts, thus imbuing these experiences with the Benedictine value of hospitality.

6.2. Findings and Results

Students who participated in this Spanish language immersion were asked to complete a post-immersion survey questionnaire to evaluate many aspects of their immersion experience. This section shows responses of a small sample of seven students to two critical questions from this post-immersion survey questionnaire. These two critical questions were designed to look into students' experiences and shed light on how this experimental pedagogy may lead to the forging of affective bonds, of solidarity, and ultimately of a sense of community with others from a different culture, in this case within a diverse Mexican community. Therefore, because this specific immersion program in Mexico is still in its experimental phase, this section provides an exposition of selected students' responses to two key questions: (1) Would you say that your immersion experience abroad affected the way you think/feel about other cultures? If so, how? (2) Do you feel that your immersion experience made you better equipped to lead Latino congregations in the future? Following Maruggi's theoretical structure, these two critical questions are based on three key narratives: the students' own experiences of transformation and self-reflection; the alternative stories and multiple voices experienced through liminal/liminoid encounters, including the meaningful dialogues with others; and historical accounts about the culture and history of Mexico, learned more formally during classroom instruction. Tables 5 and 6 contain the responses of this selected sample of seven students, who participated in the program either in 2021 or 2022. For privacy purposes the students' names have been omitted, and they will be known as student A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.

Table 5. Question #1.

Question #1: Would You Say that Your Immersion Experience Abroad Affected the Way You Think/Feel about other Cultures? If So, How?	
Student A	<p>If anything, I have a deeper love and respect for my Hispanic brothers and sisters in America, and especially, Alabama.</p> <p>The classes increased my desire to know the Hispanic community and all communities in my area. I attribute this to the teachers and their families. They treated us with love and patience and even a part of their own family.</p>
Student B	<p>Yes. What was best was when the professors decided to meet with us in the afternoons for a conversation hour. This forced us to use our Spanish for a prolonged period of time more than anything else we did in Mexico. The professors would mostly ask us about ourselves and that's what we talked about, ourselves. They were patient, understanding, engaging, y simpáticos.</p>
Student C	<p>Immersion absolutely affected the way I think about other cultures. Interacting with people in the community, taxi drivers, shop owners, families, and the like, helped me understand the importance of relationships within the culture, especially familial relationships.</p>
Student D	<p>Yes, I think I have a greater appreciation for the Latino culture and the connections they have through emotion and family. I saw that at work many times in Mexico. I love different cultures and I respect them greatly but I am also more thankful for my own culture now and the comfort I feel when I am able to enjoy interacting and being in my culture.</p>
Student E	<p>This was my first time traveling outside of the United States, Canada, or Western Europe. There are many opportunities that we take for granted that are not extended to individuals from outside the developed West. Aside from this, there really are a lot of cultural similarities between the United States and Latin America.</p>
Student F	<p>The conversation. We would often wander into different topics that required increasingly esoteric vocabulary. Found it to be incredibly effective.</p> <p>It did clear up some of the realities of the current immigration crisis we are having in the united states. I can say that I have a new empathy for the immigrant now. The many interactions I had with locals would often circle back to discussions dealing with this matter.</p>
Student G	<p>My favorite part about the program were the excursions we did with the teachers and the afternoon one-on-one conversations. Having time outside of the classroom with them was really fruitful and helped build vocabulary associated with actions/contexts that helped solidify them. I absolutely loved the program that we attended and was happy to do so with my fellow seminarians. Having a communal context already established while coming into the program helped ease the transition.</p>

Table 6. Question #2.

Question #2: Do you Feel that Your Immersion Experience Made You Better Equipped to Lead Latino Congregations in the Future?	
Student A	Yes. I am more confident in speaking Spanish with those who do not speak English well or at all. We were not only taught the language, but we learned about their history and culture. It helped me learn Spanish, fueled a desire to know Spanish in order to communicate with more of God's people, and I built relationships that I feel will last a lifetime all while being in a beautiful country that offers so much
Student B	Just by comparing the differences between America and Mexico did the good and bad things about them. I certainly have more respect and sympathy for Mexican culture than I did before.
Student C	Respect: I wish Americans were more family and community oriented like Mexicans are. Furthermore, the people in Mexico were all very patient when speaking with me, and they were willing to help me.
Student D	I know that everyone is different, but for me, at my age, I do not believe that I would have had any level of success without being in community with my fellow seminarians. Having that encouragement and help made all the difference. My goal is to know enough Spanish to communicate, and to understand the Latino culture as well as I can so that I can minister to those in my Archdiocese effectively. I am happy that Saint Meinrad is offering a Spanish Mass practicum and being proactive in its approach to helping those of us who desire to minister to immigrants from Latin America.
Student E	I am happy to say that I now try to understand and be sensitive to those emotions from all cultures.
Student F	On the whole I was very pleased with my immersion experience. For me personally, I think I am at a level where I need to continue finding opportunities to practice conversation, which can be hard to find in the Midwest. I also hope that I can be placed in a parish that offers the sacraments in Spanish when I am assigned somewhere in theology III next year.
Student G	Yes, it has made me much more aware of the different mindsets and context that people bring with them into interactions with others. Meaning that cultural norms and expectations need to be accounted for when trying to convey an idea to someone. I already had some knowledge about this, but to exercise it over so long a period was really fruitful.

The response portions that appear in Tables 5 and 6 above underscore students' willingness to participate in language learning collaborations beyond their immersion experience. Responses to both questions reveal an increase in students' interest in continuing to interact and collaborate in multicultural communities and the globalized world. The responses indicate that standard 5.1 of the ACTFL communities goal area, school and global communities, as outlined in Table 1, has been met. This is evident in expressions such as the following:

- *"Increased my desire to know the Hispanic community"*
- *"I certainly have more respect and sympathy for Mexican culture"*
- *"Helped me understand the importance of relationships within the culture, especially familial relationships"*
- *"I have a greater appreciation for the Latino culture and the connections they have through emotion and family"*
- *"There really are a lot of cultural similarities between the United States and Latin America"*
- *"I have a new empathy for the immigrant now [because of] the many interactions I had with locals"*
- *"Having a communal context already established while coming into the program helped ease the transition"*

Likewise, standard 5.2 of the ACTFL communities goal area, lifelong learning, as outlined in Table 1, is also evident in students' responses to these two critical questions.

The following expressions, taken from Tables 5 and 6, highlight students' willingness to continue to learn the target language, Spanish:

- *"fueled a desire to know Spanish in order to communicate with more of God's people, and I built relationships"*
- *"I wish Americans were more family and community oriented like Mexicans are"*
- *"My goal is to know enough Spanish to communicate, and to understand the Latino culture as well as I can so that I can minister to those in my Archdiocese effectively"*
- *"I need to continue finding opportunities to practice conversation"*
- *"it has made me much more aware of the different mindsets and context that people bring with them into interactions with others"*

7. Conclusions

This work outlines a Benedictine pedagogy of community that underscores the importance of language learning collaborations in the development of students' cultural sensitivity within a Benedictine network. It focuses on one specific institution of learning, St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, a seminary located in southern Indiana, which was founded in 1857 by monks of the Benedictine order of Einsiedeln in Switzerland.

In this work 'communities' is defined in accordance with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), as the ability to interact and collaborate in multilingual local and global communities. The cultivation of community becomes critical for future faith leaders who aspire to serve in underserved congregations in the Midwest region of the United States.

This work defines Benedictine hospitality as an active welcoming of others and discusses its relevance for Catholic education today through the lens of the Catholic social teaching of solidarity, including the theme of option for the poor, two necessary values for the formation of culturally sensitive faith leaders. Following Matthew Maruggi, it is argued that the first step in the acquisition of cultural sensitivity is a sense of solidarity.

However, dialogical theories of pedagogy that assume ideal conditions, or symmetrical relationships, fail to consider the asymmetrical power relations between non-Latina/o students and the Latina/o members of underserved communities. The creation of liminal/liminoid encounters as part of the Catholic curriculum can disrupt asymmetric power relations and lead to meaningful dialogue. Together with a dialogic pedagogy that includes multiple alternative voices and reflection, liminal/liminoid encounters may lead to the cultivation of community in students.

The final section sheds light on how this Benedictine pedagogy of community is applied to one specific language learning collaboration. This is an experimental Spanish language learning immersion that takes place at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Based on a small sample of seven students' responses to two critical questions from a survey questionnaire, it is suggested that students who participated in this program developed a sense of solidarity and a willingness to interact and collaborate with and within multicultural communities locally and abroad. Despite these encouraging findings, this small sample is not generalizable, and it only represents the experiences of these seven students in this specific Benedictine setting. Due to the preliminary nature of these results and the small student sample, it is suggested that further research is needed to draw generalizations and shed light on the relevance of the ACTFL's goal area of communities, particularly in the context of Catholic education.

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Notes

- ¹ Although common usage of the term Midwest may add or subtract various states, the US Census Bureau defines the region as the states of Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri to the west and Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio to the east (Dieterlen 2015, p. 8).
- ² Either in the form of verbal messages, such as “Go back to Mexico”, or “getting beaten up by Anglo gangs”.

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