Chapter 8
Hispanic LEP, MOOCs, and Meetups

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ABSTRACT

The 21st Century demands the transformation of education into a more collaborative system. School stakeholders should strengthen the sharing of educational resources to make them more attainable for students. Hispanic LEP Meetups as MOOC communities of practice hubs explores the challenges of one of the minority groups living in the United States that has been affected by school segregation practices: the Hispanic Limited English Proficient (HLEP) community—and proposes an alternative for them to continue their education by using Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and by taking advantage of meetups to develop local communities of practice.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) might be implemented as an educational alternative for the Hispanic Limited English Proficient (HLEP) community, and how meetup.com can promote communities of practice where HLEP students can learn from each other, receive support from Spanish-speaking tutors, and reduce the sense of isolation that characterizes online learning.

BACKGROUND

According to LEP.gov (n.d.), Limited English Proficient refers to “individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.” With regard to this population, the Migration Policy Institute (2013) reports:

In 2011, there were 25.3 million Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals, both foreign-born and U.S.-born, residing in the United States. Over the past 20 years, the LEP share of the total U.S. population has grown from close to 6 percent in 1990 to about 9 percent in 2011. The total number of LEP individuals

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has grown by 81 percent since 1990, and has established a relatively large presence in California, Texas, and New York [...] Of the total immigrant population in 2011, about half were LEP. Although most LEP individuals are foreign born, a sizable share (about 19 percent, or 4.8 million) of this population is native born. (Wathely & Batalova, 2013)

About 63 percent of the LEP population is considered Hispanic; 12.7 million are foreign-born and 16.4 million (63%) speak Spanish (Wathely, & Batalova, 2013); followed by Chinese (6.4%), Vietnamese (3.4%) and Korean (2.5%). According to this report, the LEP population whose first language is Spanish outweighs any other group of language speakers in the United States. Moreover, it is expected that by 2050 the Hispanic population will grow to 132.8 million (30% of the total U.S. population) (Beaudrier, & Ducar, 2012), and the Hispanic school age population is projected, by that same year, to be 28 million (Fry, & Gonzalez, 2008). Hence the U.S. education system, at all levels, needs to be prepared to provide the Hispanic population in general, and the Hispanic LEP (HLEP) population in particular, the necessary tools—in English and in Spanish—to be competitive in the workforce and in life.

HLEPs and Education

About 63 percent of the LEP population is considered Hispanic (Wathely, & Batalova, 2013); and the Hispanic population growth expectation is almost 133 million by 2050 (Beaudrier, & Ducar, 2012). However, the current public school system has not implemented robust systems to help them achieve their educational goals. At a high school level, the Hispanic dropout rate is the largest in the country (44 percent) (NCES, 2010). At the university level, the yearly-average college tuition is $30,000 (Selingo, 2013), which, along with the high cost of student loans, makes college attendance challenging for Hispanic students in general and for Hispanic Limited English Proficiency students in particular.

Wathely, & Batalova (2013) argue:

As a group, the LEP population in the United States is less educated and more likely to live below the federal poverty line than the overall U.S. population. LEP individuals are slightly more concentrated in the working ages and are comprised of a relatively small share of children. Employed LEP men in 2011 were more likely to work in construction, extraction, and transportation occupation than English-proficient men, while employed LEP women were more likely to work in service and personal care occupations than English-proficient women (np.)

Closing the job achievement gap for the LEP community would represent a change in a paradigm that has affected their lives for years. In order to help the LEP community fulfill the American dream, the nation needs to invest in social capital and educational programs designed to retain or bring back minority groups to school. For example, creating a robust K-16 schooling infrastructure and policies, fostering the collaboration of non-profit and for-profit organizations in the development of educational programs, and adapting post-secondary, innovative initiatives such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are critical and necessary steps. These and other K-16 programs will allow LEP groups to gain access to better educational services, and the possibility to scale in the social and economical ladder.