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FROM DISLOCATION TO DISENGAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCES OF LOW-INCOME
AND FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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BA, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2015

Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in Sociology
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2017

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From Dislocation to Disengagement: The Experiences of Low-income and First Generation College Students

Chairperson: Daisy Rooks

In this thesis, I examine the experiences of low-income and first generation college students who are enrolled members of the TRiO Student Support Program at the University of Montana. This program is designed to cater to the specific academic struggles of low-income and first generation college students. There is a wealth of scholarly literature concerning this population of students and their risk of dropping out of college. Researchers have found these students are susceptible to habitus dislocation, which causes many of these students to feel torn between acclimating to college and forfeiting their membership in the working-class. One of the main contributors to habitus dislocation is campus authority figures' use of the hidden curriculum. This type of unconscious instruction teaches disadvantaged students how to "fit in" at college by adopting middle-class values and habits. Much of the research on the hidden curriculum is focused on the K-12 experience. In this study, I use qualitative data to assess how the TRiO program imparts the hidden curriculum to low-income and first generation college students. How does the program help low-income and first generation college students succeed in college? In what ways does the TRiO staff help TRiO students overcome habitus dislocation? Can the hidden curriculum actually benefit these students? The findings of this study indicate that some components of the TRiO program cause students to experience habitus dislocation, which in turn causes students to academically disengage from their instructors. Even though TRiO is designed to help low-income and first generation college students throughout their academic careers, the TRiO instructors' use of the hidden curriculum exacerbates some of their students' habitus dislocation.

Acknowledgements

Daisy Rooks thoroughly combed through every draft of this thesis, and ensured that both this document and I were the best versions of ourselves by the end of my graduate career. Her support through the various stages of this thesis was invaluable, and neither this document nor I would be half as informed without her guidance.

Kathy Kuipers encouraged me throughout the writing process, and patiently answered every logistical question I had along the way.

Adrea Lawrence directed me towards much of the educational literature that helped shaped this thesis. She also taught me the importance of viewing education through a historical lens.

Jake Hansen of the Writing Center at the University of Montana ultimately helped me turn my writing into vodka. His dedication to helping me wordsmith and finding just the right metaphor to explain the flaws and triumphs of this document was pivotal in finishing this project.

The faculty and staff at the TRiO Student Support Services program at the University of Montana generously allowed me to conduct my research in their classrooms and offices. Their willingness to answer my questions throughout my research made this project possible.

Finally, Westen Young supported me through the highs and especially through the lows of this project. His encouragement and keen proofreading skills were instrumental in helping me complete this project.

Introduction

Low-income and first generation college students are a minority in higher education. In 2008, approximately 24 percent of undergraduate students enrolled in college were low-income or first generation college students (Engle and Tinto 2008). This is a troubling statistic, as a bachelor's degree is becoming increasingly vital for individuals to compete in the labor market. Compared to their peers who do not go on to college, "today's four-year college graduates will earn nearly \$1 million more over their working lives than will those who only receive a high school diploma and nearly \$500,000 more than those who attend some college and/or earn a two-year degree" (College Board in Engle and Tinto 2008:5).

While the number of low-income and first generation college students enrolling in institutions of higher education "has increased by over 60 percent since 1970, with nearly 1.6 million enrolling for the first time in 2005" (Mortenson in Engle and Tinto 2008:5), these students are marginalized within higher education. A combination of unfamiliarity with college, uncertainty about their academic abilities, and lack of family guidance puts low-income and first generation college students at a distinct disadvantage in higher education. Middle-class students start their college careers already possessing the middle-class values, norms, and behaviors that college promotes. Low-income and first generation college students must adopt these middle-class methods of learning, communicating, and interacting with authority figures in order to be successful in college.

In order to help disadvantaged students "catch up" to their peers and adopt these methods, most authority figures in college unintentionally use the "hidden curriculum" to teach students how to think, behave, and communicate in middle-class ways. Low-income and first generation college students typically experience habitus dislocation when they are forced to give

up their working-class habits in exchange for the middle-class skills and traits they need to be successful in college. This often leads to students dropping out of college.

How do low-income and first generation college students cope with the expectation that they must adopt new styles of speech, study habits, and learning in order to be successful in college? How do these students respond to the “hidden curriculum?” Can the hidden curriculum actually benefit them? Understanding low-income and first generation college students’ college experiences is critical in order to retain them.

Literature Review

Low-income and first generation college students must acclimate to the middle-class social environment of college, or they risk dropping out. The kind of habitus one occupies and the kind of cultural capital one possesses matters greatly in how one interacts with middle-class institutions, such as higher education. For low-income and first generation college students, there are distinct consequences of arriving at college with the “wrong” cultural capital. Most TRiO authority figures attempt to bridge the disadvantages low-income and first generation college students arrive at college with by unconsciously using the hidden curriculum, but they further alienate these students. In order to cope with the hidden curriculum, low-income and first generation students turn to their peers or on-campus formal frameworks for support.

Cultural Capital

Many low-income and first generation college students face the daunting task of acclimating to college. This process is made even harder when students lack the cultural capital to make their transition into college easier. Cultural capital is the embodiment of one’s social

background (Bourdieu 1986). For example, cultural capital may take the form of embodied capital (accents in speech or dialect), objectified capital (material objects such as paintings), or institutionalized capital (academic credentials legally conferred upon an individual) (Bourdieu 1986).

Navigating this middle-class institution is difficult, and in some cases impossible, for students who lack middle-class cultural capital. I will focus on Bourdieu's concept of institutionalized cultural capital because low-income and first generation college students must learn some aspects of middle-class cultural capital in order to do well in college. A college degree is a "certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value" (Bourdieu 1986:88). A bachelor's degree is, therefore, a certificate that guarantees that an individual has middle-class cultural capital.

Low-income and first generation college students with the "wrong" cultural capital arrive at college with little or none of the middle-class cultural capital necessary to be successful at college. Compared to their middle-class peers, these students feel less confident when interacting with authority figures (Jehangir 2010), have less experience building social networks with their middle-class peers, and are less able to rely on their families for support and guidance (Birani and Lehmann 2013).

Typically, students are comfortable negotiating the social landscape of college when their parents have some experience with middle-class institutions. Students are more likely to have an easy transition into college if their parents attained a college degree (London 1992). Social class determines the advantages and skills that children inherit from their parents, and hugely impacts their ability to "negotiate their own life paths" (Lareau 2002:326). As Bourdieu explains, "the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested

by the family” (1986:92). When parents do not have much cultural capital, they do not pass on much cultural capital to their children, and the children thus inherit none of the middle-class skills needed to do well in college (Bourdieu 1986). Simply put, without the “right” type of cultural capital, individuals struggle in college and therefore are resigned to the social positions of their parents.

In addition to the family, individuals can glean middle-class cultural capital from experiences such as tours of art museums, conversations with professionals in their field, and activities centered on skill development such as playing the piano or making pottery (Bourdieu 1986). These activities build middle-class cultural capital and make middle-class young people comfortable in middle-class institutions (Bourdieu 1986).

The acclimation of middle-class cultural capital is predicated upon economic capital. Economic capital is converted into middle-class cultural capital through the purchase of experiences such as private tutoring, vacations that expose children to different cultures, and attending opera concerts (Bourdieu 1986). Because low-income and first generation college students typically come from families with little economic capital and are unable to afford these experiences, they accrue very little or no middle-class cultural capital during their childhoods.

Middle-class parents also pass on their middle-class cultural capital by aiding their children in almost every step of the college process. They are able to teach their children how to navigate college life, such as registering for classes and applying for loans and grants, due to their familiarity with higher education. While working-class parents value higher education and emphasize its merits, they are unable to guide their children in the same way middle-class parents do for their children. As a result, low-income and first generation college students are at a disadvantage by default when entering college.

When low-income children who lack middle-class cultural capital arrive at college, they learn quickly that their ways of dealing with authority, speaking with instructors, and methods of learning must be altered in order for them to be successful in college. To be successful in higher education, and eventually in a professional position, students must possess interpersonal skills such as open communication with professionals, time management skills, and the ability to self-advocate (Jehangir 2010). Why do low-income and first generation college students not have these skills that institutions of higher education value so highly?

Habitus

Cultural capital is the product of habitus location. While cultural capital makes individuals comfortable in middle-class institutions, it is habitus that teaches individuals how to interact in society, gives them certain tastes and preferences, and ultimately provides a framework for individuals to understand the world (Bourdieu 1977). Habitus, or the cultural mannerisms that are distinct to each social class (Reay 2004), shapes our dispositions within a “commonsense world endowed with objectivity” (Bourdieu 1977:80). A habitus is essentially a matrix that spans the cognitive, linguistic, moral, and physical dimensions of our personality (Silva 2017). Our habitus determines how we perceive the world and how we interact with others. Essentially, individuals learn how to speak, think, and behave from the habitus they are born into.

Members of a social group share a distinct habitus, one that is based in socioeconomic status (Silva 2017). The habits, preferences, and the tastes that we glean from our habitus inform our personal aesthetics, gestures, and methods of speaking, among other social behaviors (Reay 2004). In essence, “the habitus as the social is inscribed in the body of the biological individual”

(Bourdieu in Reay 2004:433).

Habitus often determines if low-income and first generation college students go on to college, and ultimately determines whether or not they will achieve social mobility (Karen 2002). Students sometimes interpret their cultural capital, or lack thereof, as a proxy for how well they will perform in college (Karen 2002). Students who lack the “right” kind of middle-class cultural capital may feel that they are not equipped to attend college. If low-income and first generation college students attend college at all, their negative evaluations of their academic abilities limit the type of colleges they attend. Low-income and first generation college students are less likely to attend top-tier institutions because their assessment of their economic, cultural, and social capital leads them to believe that they will not be successful in these institutions (Karen 2002).

Most middle-class students do not share these concerns, as they typically understand early on in their lives that their parents expect them to go on to college, and their parents will provide them with the resources needed to do well there. Middle-class students can rely on their parents for guidance throughout their academic careers. For example, middle-class parents are able to edit their students’ papers, where working-class parents are unable to offer the same level of guidance due to their lack of experience with higher education (Aeries and Seider 2005). Middle-class families tend to have favorable views about higher education, and therefore encourage their children to attain college degrees (Davis 2010, Aeries and Seider 2005). Although family support is a critical factor for middle-class students’ success, low-income and first generation college students often cannot turn to their families for guidance or help in their academic careers (Davis 2010, Aeries and Seider 2005). The inverse is also true: working-class families that do not advocate for their children to attend college will typically pass on that

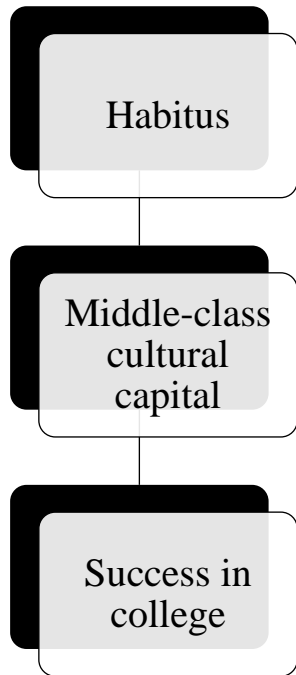
indifferent perspective on education to their children (Davis 2010, Aeries and Seider 2005).

While low-income families certainly value higher education, they are unable to give their children the necessary skills to earn their degrees.

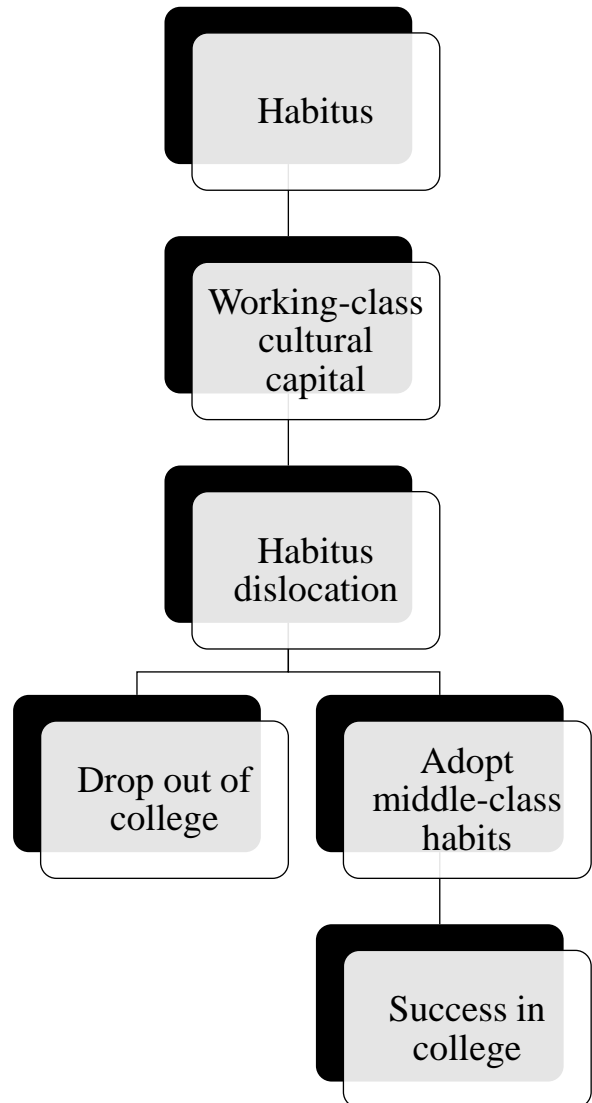
Low-income and first generation students who attend college often experience “habitus dislocation” (Birani and Lehmann 2013:283). That is, they are: uncertain about their academic abilities, uncomfortable about their status as low-income or first generation, and aware that familial support is not as available to them as their middle-class peers (Birani and Lehmann 2013). Habitus dislocation manifests in different ways for low-income and first generation college students. These students often feel like they must change their identities by forfeiting their working-class habits in exchange for the middle-class habits that are necessary for success in college. Some low-income and first generation college students attempt to make social connections with authority figures, only to realize that they do not understand how to forge social bonds with their superiors (Jehangir 2010). Consequently, these students feel “left out” or like they “don’t belong” in the campus community (Jehangir 2010:536). As illustrated in Figure 1, the path to college success is not as straightforward for low-income and first generation college students, as it is for their middle-class peers.

Figure 1: Paths to success for middle-class students and low-income/first generation college students.

Middle-class Students



Low-income and First Generation Students



Low-income and first generation college students experience habitus dislocation because they must deny the working-class values they were raised with in order to adhere to the middle-class environment of college. In other words, low-income and first generation college students are aware that they cannot be members of two social groups. Denying middle-class values means they will not succeed in college, and denying working-class values means they must distance themselves from their family and friends. This is because “moving up...requires a ‘leaving off’ and a ‘taking on,’ the shedding of one social identity and the acquisition of another” (London 1992:8).

Habitus dislocation also occurs because students realize that they must abandon their old ways of thinking, communicating, and learning if they want to be successful in college (London 1992). For some students, the realization that they must abandon their working-class habits causes “disidentification and isolation [to] emerge because the cultural milieu does not hold the senses of disconnection of living/being between two worlds” (Silva 2017:78). That is, many low-income and first generation college students become disengaged from college when they realize that they cannot hold on to their working-class habits and norms if they want to do well in college. How do low-income and first generation college students adapt to higher education with behaviors, skills, and mannerisms that are incompatible in a middle-class setting?

The Hidden Curriculum

The “hidden curriculum” is a method of teaching that instructors unintentionally use to reproduce middle-class traits and skills in underprepared students (Apple 1971). The literature concerning the hidden curriculum is largely focused on the K-12 experience, but scholars recently identified the phenomenon in higher education as well. The hidden curriculum has many

negative unintended consequences for low-income and first generation college students, including habitus dislocation and the risk of dropping out. In higher education, the hidden curriculum is perpetuated by professors, administrators, and other authority figures (Apple 1971). Authority figures unintentionally use the hidden curriculum by not explicitly communicating goals for students and rewarding students who possess middle-class characteristics.

Authority figures do this because they assume that low-income and first generation college students arrive at college with certain deficits such as “limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior” (Valencia 2010:7). This “deficit thinking” suggests that students who come from working-class backgrounds are more likely to fail in school because of “internal deficits or deficiencies” (Valencia 2010:6). For low-income and first generation college students, this means that they must sacrifice some of their working-class habits and skills for the middle-class skills and traits they need to do well in college, as “success in institutions—schools, workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those in power” (Delpit 2006:25). Because college is a middle-class institution, the “culture of power” here is middle-class culture. Authority figures unconsciously use the hidden curriculum to teach disadvantaged students how to be successful in order to overcome these deficits, but in doing so cause some students to experience habitus dislocation.

Through seemingly innocuous lectures or comments about writing style, authority figures disseminate middle-class ideals of professional mannerisms, professional responses to authority, and professional relationships with colleagues to their students (Jehangir 2010). Many authority figures also “reward assertiveness, confidence, and independence because they perceive these personality traits as indicators of a ‘good’ student” (Margolis and Romero 1998:10). These traits

are inherently middle-class, though, so low-income and first generation college students rarely possess them. When some students notice this differential treatment they sometimes become frustrated, but are unable to express their frustrations as they “have much to risk by openly differing with educators and...they have little clout with which to force educators to consider their concerns seriously” (Jamieson and Thomas 1974:323).

Authority figures unconsciously use the hidden curriculum to teach low-income and first generation college students how to be “good” students. However, few authority figures explicitly communicate their expectations and goals for students. This hinders many low-income and first generation college students’ ability to adapt to the middle-class environment of college. Because low-income and first generation college students typically have a different habitus than their instructors, they have different approaches to communicating, learning, and understanding. Most of these students “expect the teacher to initiate conversation and outline the specific paths to pursue [for success]” (Rosen 1993:31). These students, therefore, expect to be taught in “structured learning situations: precise objectives, detailed assignments and strict timetables” (Rosen 1993:322). When authority figures are not explicit about their expectations and goals, many low-income and first generation students do not see the correlation between what they are learning and how they will be successful in college.

Students who find that their methods of learning, studying, and communicating are insufficient to successfully navigate college “question their place in academia” (Rendon in Jehangir 2010:536), and some even drop out. The hidden curriculum is also perpetuated by students themselves (Apple 1971). Many low-income and first generation college students internalize the hidden curriculum by reproducing middle-class values and norms in their everyday lives by adopting middle-class styles of clothing, speech patterns, and economic

consumption (Apple 1971). This often results in estrangement from their families, high school friends, and the working-class communities where they grew up (London 1992).

The hidden curriculum forces low-income and first generation college students to choose between the working-class habitus of their family and the middle-class cultural capital they must adopt in order to succeed in college. Low-income and first generation college students have few strategies to cope with the hidden curriculum, other than dropping out. How can these students cope with the stress of occupying a middle-class institution when they have little or no middle-class cultural capital?

Informal Support Groups and Formal Frameworks

Because low-income and first generation college students are unable to rely on their families for support and guidance, they must turn to their peers in order to “bridge” the gap between their working-class habitus and the middle-class traits they need to be successful in higher education (Birani and Lehmann 2013). Some attempt to “bridge cultural capital” (or lack thereof) by joining support groups for low-income and/or first generation college students on campus (Birani and Lehmann 2013:292). Support groups help these students build the middle-class cultural capital they lack, and also provide these students with a sense of belonging on campus.

Support groups are often informal, and are created and run by the students themselves (Birani and Lehmann 2013). In these support groups, low-income and first generation college students often share their frustrations with the hidden curriculum. When they do this, they realize that they are not the only ones frustrated with acclimation to college and thus band together for solidarity (Birani and Lehmann 2013). These peer support groups are essential in “bridging” the

middle-class cultural capital that low-income and first generation college students cannot get from their families.

In addition to peer support groups, low-income and first generation college students can also rely on formal frameworks. Established and run by the college, and not by students, these formal frameworks also help these students “bridge” their cultural capital. These frameworks allow low-income and first generation college students to build cultural capital with their peers. They also provide students with connections to other students who have similar academic struggles. Formal frameworks provide low-income and first generation college students with a space to express their frustrations and fears, and talk about the difficulties that they are having. Frameworks that are organized by colleges encourage low-income and first generation college students to handle their frustrations in college with their peers (Jehangir 2010).

Scholars have assumed that formal frameworks use explicit curriculum to help low-income and first generation college students “bridge” cultural capital. But do these frameworks ever employ a hidden curriculum to serve disadvantaged students? When this happens, does this hidden curriculum benefit low-income and first generation college students, or does it convince them that they need to abandon their working-class cultural capital and values? In order to answer these questions, this project explores low-income and first generation college students’ experience with formal frameworks that employ the hidden curriculum.

Data and Methods

I collected data in two stages: one involving observation, and the other involving in-depth interviews and focus groups. I observed TRiO’s learning strategies course, C&I 160L Learning Strategies for Higher Education, for a total of 30 hours. In addition, I conducted two focus

groups with TRiO students and two interviews with the instructors of TRiO's learning strategies course.

I chose to observe TRiO's learning strategies course because all students who take the course are low-income, first generation, or both. The TRiO program specifically targets low-income and first generation college students who begin their college careers with little or none of the "right" type of cultural capital to succeed in college. I chose to observe TRiO's learning strategies course and conduct focus groups with TRiO students to assess how the hidden curriculum is imparted to low-income and first generation college students.

TRiO Program Overview

TRiO provides services to college students throughout their academic careers, especially those at risk of dropping out of college. They offer services including "academic advising, tutoring, career information, help with financial aid concerns, workshops, and help understanding academic policies and procedures" (TRiO Student Support Services 2016), among others. TRiO even offers a free book loan to eligible students in order to defray the cost of purchasing books each semester.

TRiO-Eligibility

The Department of Education sets eligibility guidelines for all federal TRiO programs. Students are eligible for TRiO services if they are low-income, first generation, or have a documented disability. The Department of Education defines low-income as "an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount" (Department of Education 2017). The Department of Education considers students

first generation college students if “neither parent (or [*sic*] guardian) completed a four-year degree” (TRiO Student Support Services 2017) by the time the student turned 18.

Stage One

First, I observed 30 class sessions of TRiO’s learning strategies course. The class session that I observed emphasized time management skills, academic planning, note-taking strategies, formal letter writing, etc. I asked the director of the TRiO program, as well as the instructors themselves, for permission to observe these classes. I wrote a total of 60 hand-written pages of field notes describing my time observing two sections of TRiO’s learning strategies course. I omitted any information that could identify individual students, instructors and university staff members while writing ethnographic field notes. I was an unobtrusive observer during class sessions, sitting in the back of the class during most class sessions and not interacting with students or instructors.

Stage Two

I conducted two focus groups with TRiO students and two interviews with the instructors of TRiO’s learning strategies course. The first focus group I conducted had eight participants, three of whom had taken TRiO’s learning strategies course. The director of the TRiO program recruited these students from a database of currently enrolled students. Of the 25 students that she sent emails to, 12 responded, and eight attended my focus group. The second focus group had 18 participants, all of whom were enrolled in the same section of the learning strategies course. I asked one of the TRiO instructors for permission to conduct a focus group during one of her regularly scheduled class sessions and she agreed. This focus group was not mandatory for

students; I informed them that they could leave at any time during the focus group. Before each focus group began, participants signed a consent form, as well as a statement of consent to be audio recorded. Both focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes.

I used a set interview schedule for both focus groups; the schedule consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix A). I asked probing questions when necessary, and therefore gleaned additional and sometimes different information based on the participants in each focus group. While transcribing the focus groups, I omitted any identifying information about the participants.

I also interviewed the two instructors for TRiO's learning strategies course. I used a set interview schedule for the interviews (see Appendix B). Before beginning each interview, I asked interviewees to give their written consent to be interviewed and audio recorded. While transcribing each interview, I omitted any information that could identify the interviewees. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. After I transcribed the interviews and the focus groups in their entirety, I deleted the recordings and assigned each participant a pseudonym.

Coding and Analysis

After I transcribed both student focus groups and the two staff interviews, I had 27 single-spaced, typewritten pages of data. My final dataset included these 27 typewritten pages of transcripts and 60 hand-written pages of field notes. Once I had collected and transcribed all my data, I analyzed the entire dataset for patterns and themes. Some of the themes that I identified included: how TRiO instructors emphasized remedial skills, student disconnect, and redundancy in the learning strategies curriculum. Most of these themes emerged from the focus group transcripts. I then cross-referenced those themes with my field notes and staff interviews to see

how prevalent each theme was in my dataset.

I picked excerpts from my field notes, focus groups, and staff interviews that supported each theme I identified, and then I wrote a descriptive memo about each theme. On average, memos were four double-spaced pages long. When I had multiple field note excerpts for each theme, which was common, I chose the most important field note excerpt for each theme, and then I chose a quote that supported that excerpt. This helped me further organize my data and eliminate redundancy in my memos.

For example, when I wrote the memo titled “Remedial Skills,” I combined my excerpts from my field notes and students’ quotes from the focus groups to demonstrate how learning remedial skills was impacting students. Finally, I analyzed each memo to determine whether the scholarly literature had addressed that theme or if it was a unique finding. Using field notes, focus groups, and interview excerpts to craft the memos helped me to develop my findings section and identify how my research filled the gaps in the research on low-income and first generation college students.

Research Qualifications

My extensive training in qualitative data collection and analysis enabled me to complete this project. In the spring of 2015 I was enrolled in the Inequality and Social Justice Service Learning: Hunger and Homelessness class where I took extensive field notes on my time spent volunteering at the Poverello Center, and wrote two papers analyzing my field notes. In the spring of 2016 I was enrolled in a graduate-level course in qualitative methods. This course prepared me to conduct interviews, focus groups, analyze ethnographic observations, and analyze field notes.

In addition to my academic qualifications, I am also a low-income and first generation college student. This background helped me understand the unique experiences of my target population, and also helped me build rapport with students during observations and focus groups.

Benefits of a Qualitative Inquiry

Ethnographic observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews allowed me to understand how low-income and first generation college students navigate college. While a survey would have certainly provided insights about low-income and first generation college students' attitudes and opinions, the observations, focus groups, and interviews that I conducted enabled me to explore how the hidden curriculum unfolds through interactions between students and TRiO staff.

My observations helped me built rapport with the participants of my focus groups. As I attended their class sessions weekly, they began to see me as an integral member of the classroom, and began to trust me. This allowed me to collect rich, detailed data in the focus groups, data that would have been inaccessible to me if I had not conducted the observations.

Limitations of a Qualitative Inquiry

While focusing exclusively on TRiO students had some limitations, it was the best approach for my research. Restricting my sample to TRiO students meant that I was not able to capture the complete picture of low-income and first generation college students' experiences at the University of Montana. However, the TRiO-eligible students in my sample differed in class standing (first-year students, juniors, etc.) major, level of involvement with TRiO, and personal

assessment of TRiO's services. This ensured that I captured a range of experiences with my focus groups and observations.

While it would have certainly been interesting to focus on informal peer groups, doing so would not have helped me understand how these students are impacted by the hidden curriculum within formalized frameworks. Focusing on formalized frameworks, such as TRiO, allowed me to understand how low-income and first generation college students navigate college with overt help from the hidden curriculum.

Findings

Most middle-class students arrive at college with the traits and skills that are necessary to do well. Low-income and first generation college students are typically at a disadvantage because they are underprepared academically and do not have the cultural capital necessary to be successful in college. Cultural capital is derived from one's socioeconomic background (Bourdieu 1986). Cultural capital is directly linked to one's upbringing within a social class, and is accrued over a lifetime. People in different social class standings develop different cultural capital because our life experiences are often shaped by our socioeconomic class (Bourdieu 1986). Someone who was raised in a working-class home might be more deferential to authority figures than someone who was raised in a middle-class home. This is because people who possess middle-class cultural capital learn how to be comfortable negotiating with others regardless of their standing in the social hierarchy (Jamieson and Thomas 1974). Because college is a middle-class institution, students must possess middle-class cultural capital in order to do well. Students who do not have the "right" kind of cultural capital are automatically at a disadvantage in college.

In an attempt to prepare students for the demands of college, TRiO instructors attempt to pass along middle-class cultural capital to their students through a learning strategies course. This course is “designed to guide a student toward a successful, manageable college experience” (TRiO Student Support Services 2016). According to the Department of Education, students are eligible for TRiO services if they are low-income, first generation, or have a documented disability (Department of Education 2017). These students are the target group for TRiO’s C&I 160L learning strategies course.

TRiO instructors attempt to pass on certain middle-class skills to underprepared students in order to help them graduate. Middle-class skills are things such as self-advocacy, negotiation, time management, and professional communication. These skills are promoted by the TRiO website as “a strong foundation for academic success” (TRiO Student Support Services 2017). The TRiO staff believe that middle-class skills will ensure academic success for their students, and therefore they attempt to churn out students with middle-class norms, values, and academic standards. Professors, administrators, and authority figures use the hidden curriculum to implicitly teach disadvantaged students how to behave, think, and communicate in a middle-class fashion (Apple 1971). Because middle-class professionalism is highly valued in higher education, authority figures expect students to reflect middle-class mannerisms. When they do not, authority figures “provide negative sanctions for the violation” of the middle-class social environment of college (Jackson in Margolis and Romero 1998:2). The hidden curriculum is not explicit to students. No class exists that lays out the parameters of how to achieve middle-class status over the course of a semester. Accepting the hidden curriculum and adopting middle-class values separates low-income and first generation college students from their working-class habitus.

Habitus arises from socioeconomic class status. As children are socialized, they learn the distinct habits, aesthetics, norms, and behaviors of their particular class (Reay 2004). They learn personal grooming habits, how to communicate with authority figures, and even how to gesture in conversation. Students with middle-class habitus are comfortable adhering to these standards, where students with working-class habitus are not prepared for the academic and social demands of college (Birani and Lehmann 2013). A person born into a middle-class family will have different tastes, preferences, and habits than a person born into a working-class family. These class-based attitudes and behaviors are transferred from parent to child, and determine how each of us interact with the world.

One habitus is not superior over another, but college is a middle-class institution that requires students to possess middle-class skills and behaviors in order to be successful. Because low-income and first generation college students usually occupy a working-class habitus, their ways of learning and communicating are often antithetical to the standards of college. Students experience habitus dislocation when they become aware that the skills, habits, and tastes they possess are not compatible with the skills needed to be successful in the college setting (Birani and Lehmann 2013). These students thus realize that they must abandon their working-class habitus in order to do well in college.

In the following paragraphs, I will argue that habitus dislocation causes TRiO students to become disengaged from their instructors, guest presenters, and the skills that TRiO instructors attempt to pass on to them. I will also argue that TRiO instructors unintentionally cause their students to disengage from the learning strategies course through their implicit delivery of the curriculum. While TRiO instructors are motivated by a desire to help their students “catch up” to their middle-class peers, the implementation of their curriculum is problematic in three ways.

First, the middle-class approach to teaching that the TRiO instructors use is not compatible with the way some TRiO students learn. TRiO instructors use an implicit approach to teach middle-class skills, while many TRiO students are accustomed to straightforward, explicit teaching practices (Margolis and Romero 1998). Students disengage from the curriculum and their instructors because they are unaccustomed to learning from a middle-class perspective. This is in large part due to the TRiO instructors' use of the hidden curriculum.

Secondly, TRiO instructors construct and deliver a generic curriculum that does not differentiate between the needs of TRiO students and all incoming first-year students. If the TRiO program is designed to deliver services to low-income and first generation college students, it must be able to provide learning strategies that no other department or class can offer. There are also inconsistencies in the personal beliefs of the TRiO instructors and the attitude and behaviors they want their students to adopt.

Lastly, many students become so disengaged from the learning strategies curriculum that they overlook the explicit resources and skills that TRiO instructors are offering them. Some students who are enrolled in a different first-year student seminar even consider this class to be more useful than TRiO's learning strategies course. This seminar, which is offered by the Office of the Provost, is designed for any incoming first-year students, yet its curriculum is almost identical to TRiO's learning strategies course. If students are not convinced that TRiO will help them to be successful in college, TRiO may further disadvantage its students by perpetuating academic disengagement and habitus dislocation.

Implicit vs. Explicit Instruction

In order to understand why many TRiO students become disengaged from TRiO's learning strategies curriculum, we must first examine the disparity between TRiO instructors' teaching style and students' communication and learning habits. I differentiate between the types of "skills" that TRiO instructors attempt to pass on to their students in the following two ways: intangible internal characteristics and tangible skills. Intangible internal characteristics are things like motivation, passion, and persistence. Although not technically skills, they are things that can be practiced and learned. The TRiO instructors believe that students must learn these things in order for them to be successful, yet they communicate these skills to students implicitly through the hidden curriculum. Tangible skills are things such as accessing student e-mail, registering for classes, and understanding how to navigate the course supplement used on campus, Moodle. TRiO students want to learn these skills, and assume that their expectations are not being met when TRiO instructors do not explicitly cover these skills in class.

Throughout the semester, both of TRiO's learning strategies instructors introduced presenters from different student affairs units in order to expose their students to different learning methods. One learning method that both instructors introduced early in the semester was reading comprehension. While this skill may appear to be remedial, it indicates the kinds of skills TRiO instructors think their students need to learn. On September 14th in week three of the semester, a guest lecturer from Athletic Academic Services discussed strategies for effectively absorbing the content of academic writing. As the guest lecturer moved through her presentation, a student

asked for suggestions about how to focus on doing the reading for a class, especially when he wasn't motivated to do so. Several students nodded in agreement. [The guest lecturer] suggested that breaking the reading up into manageable sections and then taking a small break would work best to motivate

you to stay focused on a reading task. [The guest lecturer] said that rewarding yourself with a quick social media break, or even a Netflix episode after a particularly long chapter, would help you to get the reading done.

Even though this student was engaging with the content of the lecture, the guest lecturer's presentation was supposed to be centered on reading comprehension, not motivation. Students were clearly more concerned about getting tips for motivating themselves to read for multiple classes, and less concerned about the reading comprehension strategies. In this example, TRiO instructors assumed that their students would not be aware of how they should be reading academic papers, and attempted to supplement their lack of knowledge with remedial reading strategies. Instead of being receptive to the strategies, students were concerned with an even more fundamental ability: motivation.

Some students in the focus group were also focused on tangible skills and abilities that they believed TRiO instructors were not teaching them. None of the students in my two focus groups had negative relationships with TRiO staff. But in the focus group that I conducted on November 16th, some students expressed frustration about the lack of guidance they received from TRiO in regards to tangible skills. When asked what would have made their transition into college easier, one first-year female student stated:

When I first came here, I didn't know how to use my e-mail or how to use my 790 [student ID]; I didn't know what the hell that was for. I still don't really know how to use my email. I literally just learned how to do the GrizTix thing. It was really hard for me. I wish I had an advisor... I wish someone would have helped me with that because I just now figured it out and it's almost the end of the semester.

This frustration stems from TRiO instructors' lack of explicit communication about how these skills translate into success in college. Because the hidden curriculum is predicated on implicit messages about middle-class attitudes, it is understandable that students believe that they are not learning essential tangible skills. Students who come from a working-class habitus are

accustomed to communicating explicitly (Margolis and Romero 1998, Rosen 1993). When TRiO instructors implicitly reinforce middle-class skills and internal characteristics, many students become unreceptive and disengage from the course material. To be clear, TRiO instructors believe they are explicitly teaching skills and characteristics that will guarantee their students' success in college, but students think that they are not being taught these skills because their instructors do not explicitly teach them. This renders TRiO instructors' implicit delivery of middle-class skills unsuccessful.

Even when TRiO instructors have explicit goals for their students, the implicit delivery of these goals is lost on students. The TRiO instructors' implicit communication of both goals and expectations doesn't match with how some TRiO students learn and communicate. I asked one TRiO instructor to explain what kind of skills she believed her students needed to learn in her course. In response, the TRiO instructor replied

I want them to gain confidence in their abilities. College isn't always fun. There can be highs, but there can also be some real lows. I want students to have the confidence and the insight to know that's part of the game.

Academic confidence is often derived from middle-class cultural capital. It can be an indicator of familiarity with middle-class institutions, and it is understandable why TRiO instructors would want their students to gain this valuable intangible internal characteristic. But for TRiO students, "the game" isn't necessarily about gaining confidence in their abilities, but understanding how these abilities will help them be successful in college. Many TRiO students do not intuitively understand that the skills that TRiO instructors teach lead to academic success. The TRiO instructors teach a section about time management, but students still have a difficult time applying this middle-class skill because they do not understand how managing time will make them successful in college. This is why many students disengage from the learning strategies

course. They want to be successful students, but they do not see the connection between the implicit middle-class skills that TRiO instructors attempt to teach them and success in college. In the focus group I conducted on November 16th, one first-year female student was frustrated by her inability to manage time, even though the TRiO instructors covered this topic in the second week of the semester. I asked the student to describe the most difficult part of adjusting to college and she had this to say:

I hate not having a set schedule, not being told when to study. I think I do better when people tell me to do things, not necessarily each assignment, but studying in bulk. I think I like having not enough time rather than having too much time. If I have free time I think “yeah, I could study or I could party, or I could sleep.” I don’t like that.

Several students in the focus group agreed with this student. This signifies that TRiO students are aware of the skills they do not possess but are unable to connect with the middle-class perspective of the curriculum.

Another of the TRiO instructors’ expectations is that TRiO students will discover what direction they want to take their academic career. During the interview I conducted on February 16th, one TRiO instructor explained that students’ main priority should be finding passion during college. I asked the TRiO instructor what she thought her students still need to learn when they leave her class, and she replied that

I don’t think they’re certain on what they want to do yet. There comes a point in college, that if you don’t have a burning passion or a career in mind, I think that can begin to corrode confidence and motivation. Sometimes students leave my class and they haven’t discovered their motivation or their passion.

Motivation, then, is an important internal characteristic that TRiO instructors want their students to develop. Not only does this intangible characteristic help students become successful in college, but it also increases the likelihood that they will persist and graduate. If the TRiO instructor believes that lack of passion can “corrode confidence and motivation,” her class must

incorporate topics that help students find that passion. But nowhere in the curriculum for the learning strategies course are motivation, passion, or confidence explicitly covered. There is no topic in the syllabus that helps students navigate their academic interests, and students are aware of this shortcoming. I asked the students in the focus group I conducted on November 16th what would have been most helpful during their transition to college. A first-year female student replied that she would have liked help deciding her major. As she explained,

One thing I think would be helpful is to develop something...like if you have a lot of interests, some kind of discernment process that helps you figure out what you actually want to do. I'm at this place where there are all these things I want to study, but if I do that I'll be in school for the rest of my life. So getting help with that would be nice.

By not explicitly covering personal motivation and passion in class, TRiO instructors miss out on opportunities to address their students' concerns about choosing a major. How are low-income and first generation college students supposed to learn academic motivation and passion when they are required to read between the lines of a curriculum that demands a middle-class lens?

I have established that particular middle-class attitudes and skills are important to both TRiO students and TRiO instructors. Why, then, are students still struggling to retain and apply these skills? The answer is twofold: students require explicit instruction to effectively learn middle-class skills, and TRiO instructors are not delivering a curriculum that is aimed at the specific needs of their students.

Inconsistencies within TRiO's Curriculum

TRiO instructors assume that their learning strategies course helps better prepare low-income and first generation college students for the middle-class environment of college. TRiO instructors organize their curriculum around the kinds of skills that their students lack when they

enter college. In their interviews, the TRiO instructors explained that they take academic research and student evaluations into account when deciding how to teach their class. This is a great approach to modifying a curriculum to reflect current academic trends and student responses, but TRiO instructors are still missing the mark when it comes to constructing a course that covers the specific needs of their students.

The TRiO instructors view their learning strategies course as not just for TRiO students, but for all incoming students. This wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing in other scenarios. But the TRiO program is dedicated to serving a specific kind of student, and if its instructors gear the curriculum to all students, how does the learning strategies course serve the unique needs of low-income and first generation college students?

In one TRiO instructor's interview on February 17th, it became clear to me that the learning strategies course is too generic to ensure TRiO students' success in college. When asked how she would change the learning strategies course if it were not a TRiO-specific class, the instructor responded that the class would not need much alteration:

I think I would retain a lot of the curriculum because most of it applies to any student. I think I would teach it the same. Even students who aren't first generation still need to know about campus resources and I think it's still important to share those things with them. I really wouldn't change much.

If the learning strategies curriculum does indeed apply to any student, what then are TRiO instructors giving low-income and first generation college students that they could not get from a different class? The TRiO learning strategies course must be aimed at only low-income and first generation college students so that these students are guaranteed to receive instruction that is specific to their needs. If TRiO's learning strategies course is not serving the academic needs of TRiO students, this may explain why many TRiO students disengage from their instructors and the middle-class curriculum.

There also appears to be a divide between TRiO instructors' classroom ideologies and their personal beliefs about student persistence. When asked how the learning strategies course reinforces TRiO's overall mission, the TRiO instructor responded that persistence is essential for students to graduate:

Our main goal is to help students who are vulnerable, for any number of reasons, to persist in college and go on to graduate. I think that class would help any student persist. I think it fully supports the idea that there are skills that you can learn that make [college] easier if you're a first generation college student. You can find out information about resources and the way campus works and the way classes work.

This TRiO instructor believes that low-income and first generation college students need to persist in order to graduate. This example also suggests that the TRiO instructor attempts to teach students how to persist in college in her learning strategies course. However, later on in the same interview, the TRiO instructor revealed that she thinks that if students are not understanding college, persistence isn't always the best option:

I love to see students gain confidence and passion and fire, and if they don't, I like students to take a break. I think it's just not wise to continue on in college if you don't get it. Maybe that'll take two semesters. I'm a proponent of taking a couple semesters off.

This is another example of the implicit messages that TRiO instructors use to teach their students: low-income and first generation college students can be successful in college if they persist, but sometimes persistence isn't enough. These conflicting messages are another reason why some students disengage from TRiO instructors.

Student Disengagement

When some students experience habitus dislocation in TRiO's learning strategies course, they ultimately disengage from the curriculum and the skills that the TRiO instructors want them

to learn. When this happens, students withdraw during class time and have a hard time recognizing when TRiO instructors adjust their instruction in order to be more explicit. Take, for example, academic advising. This is a topic that is explicitly covered in the learning strategies course; the TRiO instructors set aside time in their syllabus to help students with their course schedules.

However, some students in the learning strategies course were still convinced that the TRiO instructors were not helping them with class registration even after the TRiO instructors took two full class sessions to explain the process of preparing for next semester. While the participants of the focus group I conducted on November 16th stated that they were frustrated with their academic advisors, the TRiO instructors helped students work through registration and credit guidelines during class.

Still, in response to a question about what would help them navigate the registration process, several students suggested services that already exist on campus. A male non-traditional student suggested a supplemental course to guide students through the registration process:

There could be something they could do with a course. I know there's a course that freshmen have to do on Moodle, but just to kind of help people go through it, maybe some videos.

This example is somewhat ironic, as this student was enrolled in a course where the instructors set aside time to specifically address that issue. The TRiO instructors made an attempt to be more explicit by having students walk through class registration step-by-step during class time. However, some students in my focus group failed to notice this because they were so disengaged from the curriculum. When TRiO instructors attempted to be more explicit, many TRiO students did not recognize this, as they were accustomed to their instructors' implicit teaching styles.

TRiO students disengage from the middle-class learning styles their instructors present them with because it further exacerbates the habitus dislocation they experience. When students are disengaged from the learning strategies course, they do not develop the necessary middle-class cultural skills to perform well in college. And when students are both experiencing habitus dislocation and they are disengaged from the curriculum, they believe that the TRiO instructors are not providing them with the skills that they need to be successful in college.

During the focus group I conducted on April 16th, a first-year female student mentioned that she received the same presentations in another first-year student seminar course that she was enrolled in. Initially, I was confused about her comment, as I was unaware that the University of Montana offered a class similar to TRiO's learning strategies course. After consulting the course website and speaking with one of the instructors (who is also a former TRiO staff member), I discovered that the learning goals of the first-year student seminar are almost identical to TRiO's mission statement.

According to its website, the other first-year student seminar is designed to help incoming students “learn about campus life and resources, develop key academic skills, and transition to college successfully” (Office of the Provost 2017), among other things. This class was established by the Office of the Provost in an effort to improve retention rates at the University of Montana. The class is designed for any incoming students in the hopes that connecting them with student affairs units, providing a sense of belonging, and introducing them to successful study habits would compel students to return the following semester (informal conversation with a former TRiO staff member, 3/27/17). While it is not a required class, many incoming first-year students are pre-registered for the course by their advisors. Anyone on campus who has a master's degree is eligible to instruct this first-year student seminar course.

The female student who noted the similarities between the two courses was frustrated by them:

We have [the other] freshmen seminar which teaches us everything. It's dumb taking this class and [the other] freshmen seminar because I feel like it's pretty much the same thing and we get the same presentations. But if I wasn't taking this class it would be nice because [the other freshmen seminar] teaches you how to use Moodle at the beginning of the year and has the Writing Center presentations and Financial Aid [presentations].

If it is true that the other first-year student seminar course offers identical course material to TRiO's learning strategies course, how can TRiO instructors be sure they are meeting the needs of low-income and first generation college students? Formal frameworks are designed to aid specific demographics of students with their unique struggles (Jehangir 2010). As a formal framework that is designed to help low-income and first generation college students, the TRiO program must offer services that are tailored exclusively to those students. TRiO instructors need to create a curriculum that aids this student demographic in a way that no other class can. Instead, TRiO instructors are not tailoring their curriculum to the specific needs of low-income and first generation college students. This is problematic for these students, because they tend to be underprepared when they arrive at college. They need to learn the specific skills that will help them "catch up" to their middle-class peers, and they need to be taught in a way that does not cause them to experience habitus dislocation. If TRiO instructors do not teach these middle-class skills in a way that low-income and first generation college students understand, the program is not fulfilling its mission statement, and students are not learning skills that will guarantee their academic success.

Discussion

The two focus groups that I conducted with TRiO students and my observations of TRiO's learning strategies course revealed that many students were disengaged from their TRiO instructors and the course curriculum. Student disengagement was caused by a number of factors, including TRiO instructors' use of the hidden curriculum, students' habitus dislocation, and TRiO instructors' lack of explicit communication techniques. When observing TRiO's learning strategies course, I discovered that TRiO instructors focused their curriculum on skills they assumed that their students lacked when they arrived at college. The TRiO instructors attempted to teach their students remedial skills, such as time management and reading comprehension, but did so by using the hidden curriculum. This proved to be ineffective, as many students had difficulty making the connection between academic success and the middle-class skills and traits that the TRiO instructors were teaching them.

The TRiO instructors' use of the hidden curriculum unintentionally caused some of their students to experience habitus dislocation. When students realized that they were not explicitly learning how to be successful in college, some believed that they were not being taught the skills they needed to be successful in college. This resulted in their academic disengagement throughout the semester. Many of these students were uncomfortable advocating for themselves in the TRiO class. Their decision not to "overtly register their dissatisfaction with events or conditions thereby [reduced] the likelihood that those issues [would have been] addressed" in the course or the broader TRiO program (Jamieson and Thomas 1974:333). Some students were so frustrated with TRiO's learning strategies curriculum that they viewed a different first-year student seminar as more useful to them than the TRiO course. In my focus group, several students who were enrolled in both the TRiO course and the second first-year student seminar

explained that if they had known that the two courses covered the same topics, they would have elected to take only the first-year student seminar.

In my two focus groups, students also described struggling with the implicit communication style of the TRiO instructors. According to these students, most of their disengagement stemmed from the TRiO instructors' lack of explicit communication about their expectations and goals for students in the course. However, even when TRiO instructors explicitly tried to help students navigate certain aspects of the college experience, some students still believed they were not learning the necessary skills to be successful in college. Some students were so disengaged from their instructors and the TRiO curriculum that they failed to recognize when their instructors were being explicit.

Student disengagement indicates that TRiO's curriculum is not specific enough to adequately meet the needs of low-income and first generation college students. It also suggests that TRiO's learning strategies course might perpetuate habitus dislocation, especially among students who do not learn from implicit communication. This is not to say that the TRiO program is not beneficial in other ways. Many low-income and first generation college students respond positively to TRiO's other services. Many students in my focus groups stated that they appreciate the academic advising component of the TRiO program, as well as the tutoring services. The free book loan program is also popular with students who are grateful for the opportunity to defray the cost of textbooks. The purpose of this thesis was not to discount or ignore the valuable services that TRiO offers, but to recognize that flaws exist in the learning strategies course that cause some students to experience academic disengagement.

Future research should explore how college professors and staff can minimize or eliminate the negative consequences of the hidden curriculum for low-income and first

generation college students. Future research should also examine the experiences of students who have stopped using TRiO services, and former TRiO students who have dropped out of college altogether. Exploring these two topics would enable researchers to understand how TRiO could improve its services to better meet the academic needs of the student population that it serves.

Conclusions

These findings have important implications for the TRiO program at the University of Montana. My findings suggest that TRiO could do more to ensure that low-income and first generation college students have access to courses that explicitly and deliberately address their academic needs. One way that the TRiO instructors could do this is to be explicit about the kinds of disadvantages that low-income and first generation college students often arrive at college with. The TRiO instructors could explicitly and tactfully help students identify their own academic shortcomings at the beginning of the class, and work on improving them throughout the semester.

The TRiO instructors could also explicitly inform their students that they must adopt some middle-class skills in order to be successful in college. Not only could this limit the negative consequences of the hidden curriculum, but it could also convince students that they must develop new skills that will help them be successful in college. If instructors are explicit about the challenges that low-income and first generation college students face in middle-class institutions, they could help these students overcome habitus dislocation and increase their trust in their instructors. This could be pivotal in retaining these students, as “even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness

of those codes and about the power relationships they represent” (Valencia 2010:4). This would enable low-income and first generation college students to learn middle-class skills from the TRiO instructors without thinking that their working-class habits, skills, and traits are “wrong.”

In addition to being more explicit with students, TRiO staff must convince students that they are learning valuable skills and traits that will help them succeed in college. When this does not happen, these students experience habitus dislocation, become disengaged from the learning strategies courses, and risk dropping out of college altogether. If students are not invested in TRiO’s learning strategies course, they are unable to integrate into higher education, further disadvantaging them.

The TRiO staff must be aware of how their students are engaging with the learning strategies course curriculum in order to determine if they are helping these students or further alienating them. My interviews with TRiO instructors indicated that the TRiO staff have implicit goals and expectations for students that they do not explicitly inform students about. This is problematic since low-income and first generation college students are often unsure that they belong in academia, and often feel isolated by their professors’ middle-class approach to teaching (Jehangir 2010). It is crucial to teach low-income and first generation college students in a way that does not cause them to experience habitus dislocation. This can be achieved through teaching a middle-class curriculum explicitly, as “unless one has the leisure of a lifetime of ‘immersion’ to learn [the culture of power], explicit presentation makes learning immeasurably easier” (Delpit 2006:26).

I suggest that the TRiO program at the University of Montana continue to conduct qualitative research about the learning strategies course in order to determine if students continue to disengage from TRiO’s learning strategies curriculum. Without a thorough examination of

TRiO students' engagement with a curriculum that is meant to boost their cultural capital, "the potential for change...is not actualized, and classroom education continues to be divergent from student concerns" (Jamieson and Thomas 1974:333).

If the TRiO staff wants to make a positive impact on low-income and first generation college students' academic careers, they must offer services that meet the specific needs of these students. One way to do this would be for TRiO staff to limit or discontinue their use of the hidden curriculum in the learning strategies course. It is crucial that low-income and first generation college students understand that they have a place in institutions of higher education. Unless they are taught explicitly, and from a perspective that is sensitive to their working-class habitus, they will continue to experience habitus dislocation and be at risk of dropping out.

Appendix A: Schedule for Focus Group with TRiO Students

1. How were your parents involved in your college application process?
2. What was it like for you to apply to colleges?
3. What made you decide to attend UM?
4. What was your freshman year like at UM?
5. What would have made your freshman year easier for you?
6. Is there anything you wish you could tell your freshman-self about attending college?
7. How did you first hear about TRiO?
8. What services do you use at TRiO?
9. How has TRiO influenced your education at UM?
10. What is the most valuable service that TRiO offers?
11. What do you wish you could change about some of the services offered?
12. If you've ever thought about not using TRiO anymore, what influenced your decision?
13. If you've ever considered dropping TRiO services, what has influenced your decision?
14. What advice would you give to incoming sophomores next semester?
15. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience with TRiO?

Appendix B: Schedule for Interviews with Instructors of TRiO's Learning Strategies

Course

1. How do you think C&I 160 supports TRiO's mission statement?
2. How do you decide which topics to cover?
3. How have you changed your approach to teaching C&I 160 since you first started instructing the course?
4. How academically prepared do you think your students are before they take your course?
5. Where do you want your students to be by the end of the semester?
6. How do you think your course helps your students academically "catch up" to their peers?
7. What skills do you think your students still need to learn when they finish your class?
8. How do you think your students' social class background impacts their college experience?
9. How would you teach this class if it wasn't geared at TRiO students?

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