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Review of Cultural Capital: the Promises and Pitfalls in Educational Research. ASHE Higher Education Report, Vol.36 (1)

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Title: Cultural Capital: the promises and pitfalls in educational research. ASHE Higher Education Report: Volume 36, Number 1

Author: Rachelle Winkle-Wagner

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Key words: Cultural capital, Bourdieu, educational research, inequality.

Rachelle Winkle-Wagner's monograph is published as part of the ASHE Higher Education Report Series, which is designed to "help busy individuals" keep up to date with higher education research literature" (135). As its title indicates, Winkle-Wagner's publication critically examines cultural capital, an "often misunderstood" (xi) theoretical construct formulated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu frequently used to "explain inequities in access to and success in U.S. higher education" (xi). The author, an assistant professor of Higher Education at the University of Nebraska, is well placed to produce a study of this kind. The structure of the book, in consisting of an executive summary and four densely argued chapters, follows the prescribed ASHE Higher Education Report format.

The author clearly states in the executive summary that she intends her book to be used by scholars and practitioners (viii), so for people who are unfamiliar with Bourdieu's oeuvre or with educational research (as is the case with this reviewer), this well researched book might be too-complex a place to begin as it presupposes a certain familiarity with the work of Bourdieu and with educational research. Although she focuses predominately on the American education system, and how Bourdieu's cultural capital theories should be used therein - especially in the context of racial and gender inequality - she does investigate the use of Bourdieu's concepts by scholars in other countries, including the UK, but not Ireland, in the second chapter.

The stated aim of each ASHE Higher Education Report is to present a definitive analysis (135) "of a higher education problem or issue". This reviewer is not qualified to judge whether or not the author has indeed presented a definitive analysis of cultural capital though one may wonder whether any analysis can be truly definitive at least in the realm of educational research. Thus it will be the task of future readers/scholars/practitioners in the field to ask themselves whether or not the author has indeed produced a definitive analysis of cultural capital. Ultimately, Winkle-Wagner does succeed in making a strong case for continuing to use the cultural capitalism construct in educational research



albeit with qualifications (110). Though she does, admittedly, dwell too little on the practical limitations, outlined in the final chapter (104).

Reviewer: Ms Catherine Moran, Dublin Institute of Technology, Library Assistant, Kevin Street library.