Cultural differences in child rearing among American and French preschoolers: Toward a better understanding of how preschools fail to level the playing field

At the interface of sociology, cultural psychology and social psychology, this project aims to investigate the cultural differences and similarities between the United States and France in the way children are socialized in preschools. I expect cultural differences in educational practices (e.g., encouraging children to express interests and think outside the box vs. following the rules and staying at their own place), but also similarities in the cultural standards prevalent in preschool: I predict that both educational contexts value independence (e.g., children are expected to be autonomous and able to influence their environment according their preferences). Finally, I also want to examine how these standards are more or less in tune with children’s socioeconomic status. Objectifying these cultural differences and similarities should lead to a better understanding of how preschools fail to reduce the initial academic disparities related to socioeconomic status, even though it is the goal of these institutions to reduce them. Indeed, despite very different contexts in terms of how ubiquitous preschool is, the early childhood education systems in both America and France fail to level the playing field: low SES children enter first grade lagging behind high SES children in terms of counting, writing and reading skills.