Host: Materials also support children’s positive behavior when they are relevant to a child’s culture and family life. Let’s visit a classroom to see how one teacher added materials that were relevant to the culture of the children in her class.

Teacher: What’s this color? Anybody know what this color is?
Students: Blue!
Teacher: Blue. What is that color in Spanish Mia?
Student: Azul
Teacher: Azul

Narrator: Teachers can make the environment more relevant to all children by adding materials from the children’s home cultures.

Shari Danforth, Teacher: I have children in my room that are English as a second language. Making the children who are from other countries, and don’t speak the language, is a big focus of us trying to make them feel comfortable in our environment at school. The posters with the Spanish words and other posters that we do with other languages, I do involve the parents in making them. I don’t just make them, I involve them with making them, and it gives them a sense of belonging gives them part of their own culture to share in the classroom. It’s the parents that have felt more comfortable because we’re trying to accommodate and be interested in their culture and their lives.

Narrator: Shari’s collection of classroom books include several multicultural offerings. Teachers can also add dolls that represent diverse cultural backgrounds within the dramatic play area. Shari has also made a book of English and Spanish words that are often used in the classroom for the children to refer to.
Teacher: Nostros hablamos...I made the book for the children that speak Spanish to try to communicate with things that are familiar in the classroom in both languages so that I can understand them, and they can understand, you know, pointing to the pictures, as well as seeing the words.

Host: Culture also influences the types of activities children like to do or prefer to avoid.

Patricia Ramsey, Expert: Children’s play preferences reflect the values that they’re being raised in. Children from a more individualistic culture may prefer to spend time alone. They may prefer to spend time doing competitive activities. They may be more caught up in individual achievement and smaller groups, maybe more exclusionary activities, whereas children raised in a more collective, collaborative culture may emphasize inclusion and play in larger groups and be less concerned with a competitive aspect.

Patricia Ramsey, Expert: Another way that cultures differ is the level of expressiveness that’s allowed, that’s encouraged. That for some children, some cultures, that restraint is very important and learning to mask your feelings, is a priority. Other cultures it’s to be very expressive, what may appear to be so rambunctious or aggressive in one classroom may not be.

Patricia Ramsey, Expert: Another way that play would vary is the roles that children play. If your child is being raised in a rural area, they may be enacting farming roles, taking care of animals, driving tractors. In a city, children being raised in a city, may be driving taxis and buses and enacting those kinds of roles. Very often in suburban areas you see lots of children being the soccer moms, they’ll be driving cars and playing on their cell phones at the same time.

Patricia Ramsey, Expert: You can also bring in cultural differences with books and puzzles and songs, and learning words in different languages. If you have a book that represents another culture, don’t just read the story and drop it. You can build around it with doing stuff in the pretend area, you can do art projects along with it, you can do songs with it.

Patricia Ramsey, Expert: You should be sure to understand the cultures and not just the surfaces, as we mentioned before, not just the artifacts, not just the cooking, not just the clothing. But really try to understand the values of the culture because that underlies a lot of the things you might be bringing into the classroom.