

Lesson Plan: Making Family & Community Connections

by [Sarah Sahr](#)

Teachers are always looking for ways to connect with their students' families and the surrounding community (Cowdery, Levi, Wells, & Blauvelt, 2010). In best practice, once solid connections are made, teachers are able to utilize these connections as resources and make a better classroom experience for all in attendance. But how do you make that first connection? Based on information gathered from TESOL's 2014 W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant, this lesson plan is designed to help teachers reach out to student family members and the surrounding community.

Materials: A satellite or Earth map of the area surrounding your school; a way to project a neighborhood map (a screen and a digital or overhead projector); a large neighborhood map for the final blueprint.
Audience: This activity is developed to meet the needs and proficiency levels of all adult learners.
Objective: Students will be able to <ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop a short questionnaire for family and community members.• conduct a short interview with a variety of family and community members.• create a blueprint of their neighboring school community.
Outcome: The class will create a blueprint of information from the school's surroundings that could be useful with future classroom projects, programs, and activities.
Duration: Times vary based on proficiency levels. Approximately 90 minutes for planning questionnaire, 1 week for collecting data, and 90 minutes for creating a neighborhood blueprint.

Initial Classroom Work

Preclass Preparation

Go to an online mapping webpage such as [Google Maps](#) or [MapQuest](#) and find your school's location without entering an address. Click on the feature that shows the actual tops of buildings, usually Satellite or Earth feature. Save this image as a PDF or JPEG for projecting the map to your students. You may want to print a few copies of the map as backup, in the case of technical problems.

Introduction

Present the map to your class on the projector of your choice. Ask students where they think the map might be showing (hopefully they will see some landmarks and be able to tell you the location. I tried this in my office with three people, and they needed some prompts). Lead a conversation with your class:

- What is this a map of?

- Can you point out any landmarks?
- What are some places you visit on this map? Why do you go there?
- Is your home on this map? You don't have to share the exact location with the class. A simple "yes" or "no" will do.
- (if appropriate) Is your place of work on this map?

Take note to help with assigning interview tasks (see below).

Information

Let students know that they will be making a comprehensive blueprint of the surrounding school community. This will include taking an inventory of neighborhood shops and soliciting information from those same shops. If the homes of students are in the surrounding neighborhood and they think their families would like to participate, students may talk with family members to see what they think of the community, what shops they patronize, and so on.

With student input, make a list of shops that should be interviewed, and another list of family members that should be interviewed.

Planning the Questionnaire

Two questionnaires need to be developed: one for shop owners and one for family members. These could be done with the class as a whole or in small groups. If you are going with small groups, make sure each group comes up with at least five questions for each questionnaire. Questions could include:

For shop owners:

- How long have you been a part of the community?
- What makes this community unique?
- Are you willing to give time and/or services to your neighborhood school?

For family members:

- What do you like best about this community?
- What shops do you frequent? Why?
- Are you willing to give time and/or services to your neighborhood school?

After some time, consolidate the groups' questions into one list. Ask for comments and edits.

Conducting Interviews

Practice the Questionnaire Process

Make groups of three for questionnaire practice. This practice will be in English, even though some of the interview could be in other languages. Students will rotate roles: interviewer,

interviewee, and observer. The interviewer will ask the questions. The interviewee will answer the questions as best as possible. The observer will monitor the conversation and give feedback to the interviewer. Allow for enough time so each student can role-play each role.

Assign Tasks

From the list of shops and family members, assign students to the proper match: If possible, make sure the students interviewing the proprietors of the shops and/or family members already have an established relationship.

Collecting Data

Encourage students to travel in pairs to interview their respective community or family members. Let students know that interviews can be conducted in any language students and interviewees deem appropriate. The purpose is to gather information, not necessarily practice English. Give students at least 1 week to complete their interviews.

Concluding Classroom Work

Summarize and Share Information

Allow students to debrief. Was it fun talking with community and family members in this way? Did they learn anything new? Make sure each student in your class contributes to this conversation. It is important that everyone reports back to the class.

Building the Blueprint

If possible, create a large-scale satellite/Earth map of the school's surrounding community. From shops, include on the map information regarding the point of contact at the shop, services offered, preferred language to communicate in, and availability, both time and place (e.g., if they are willing to come to the school). From families, include a point of contact (personal information should be kept off the map and in a safe location, possibly with the instructor), services offered, preferred language to communicate in, and availability, both time and place (e.g., if they are willing to come to the school).

Reaching out to community and family members simply strengthens classroom instruction (Cowdery, et al., 2010). This activity is a first step in getting to know community and family members better. As classroom instruction deepens over the course of the semester, refer back to this blueprint as often as possible for resources outside the school that could help with projects, programs, and activities. In addition, look to the community and family members as a practical resource for lessons by inviting community and family members to your classroom to enrich instruction. I promise you, you'll be glad you did.

Reference

Cowdery, J., Levi, K., Wells, D., & Blauvelt, S. (2010). Family projects: Empowering students, parents, and teachers. *TESOL Journal*, 1, 500–508.

You can find past *TESOL Connections* lesson plans and activities in the [TESOL Connections archives](#), or you can visit the [TESOL Resource Center](#). From there, search Keyword “Sahr” and you will find about 20 resources with my name on it.

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