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Connecting Cultures to the Classrooms: A Look at a Way to Help Fill Language Gaps

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As a part of the early childhood curriculum at Purdue University North Central, students are required to take the course EDCI 276, “Child, Family, School, & Community Partnerships.” This class involves developing a service-learning project over the course of the semester. The goal is to develop new skills and relationships that will be valued as a future teacher, while also giving back to our community. My group’s project was completed through the Compass International Family Center. Compass is an after school program designed to provide tutoring and language classes for international families with children of all ages in northwest Indiana. Their mission is to provide these families with the resources they need to succeed. These families have come to the United States from around the world. Most are beginners in learning the English language. For our project, we created backpacks of educational resources for these families, which can be checked out weekly. The backpacks contain multi-language books, games, and other resources. The goal of this project is to reinforce learning and promote progress in their homes.

In order to discover the needs at Compass, my partner and I volunteered at the site weekly during the spring 2015 semester. We assisted students with their homework. In the preschool room, we helped teach students skills such as taking turns, standing in line, and recognizing the letters of the alphabet to help prepare them for kindergarten the following year. In the kindergarten room, we helped develop their handwriting skills and foundations for basic math and reading. By diligently recording observations at the site, and working closely and discussing needs with the program director, we identified a project that would serve this com-

munity. Currently, we are in the process of applying for a grant that will help fund materials needed to make enough backpacks for those speaking a variety of languages and dialects, such as Kurdish, Arabic, and Spanish.

Our project is impacting the community by strengthening the English language skills of international students, helping them succeed in school, and assisting with other aspects of their lives. These backpacks also will help families bond together in ways that otherwise may not have been possible. In the long run, I believe our project will open doors for future generations.

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Children at the Compass International Family Center.