**Background**
Traditionally, educators have focused on teaching content. When teachers and students experienced struggles with learning, educators typically identified the problem as the learner’s. Today, more educators are embracing an ecological perspective that pays attention to the multiple variables which influence teaching and learning. This point of view recognizes that students are part of a system that includes many components: different environments, different people, different content and task demands, and different types of support offered in different levels of intensity. Knowing the learner in all this complexity is a critical aspect of responsive teaching.
Purpose
This key assignment provides you with an opportunity for in-depth study of an individual student within a particular school. You will be observing and working with a student who either has an identified disability or is a student considered at-risk for school success. The case study asks you to adopt a “teacher as researcher” perspective as you gather data about your learner. By drawing on information from your own observations as well as from a variety of formal and informal sources, you will get to know your student well enough to begin to understand how developmental and contextual factors are influencing this student’s learning. Additionally, you will synthesize class readings, discussions, and experiences in an effort to understand the impacts of various contextual factors on your case study student. You will summarize your findings about your case study student in order to demonstrate your ability to analyze data and to evaluate the impact of various factors that influence student learning, including your own biases and assumptions.

Field Notes and Analysis
We suggest that when you are at your service-learning site or as soon as possible afterward – like in the parking lot - you jot down notes on significant things you see or hear. These should be factual descriptions of events or quotes of things people said that you want to preserve. Later, you should enter these observations on the appropriate sheet in the formal Field Notes, adding to them after each visit to your service-learning setting. We encourage you to do this electronically and to color-code your entries by date. Each set of Field Notes you turn in for my review will support your growth in understanding the variables that we are studying in the course. While you hand in your Field Notes at specific times, with special attention given to a subset or cluster of variables, they are considered a “running record”, which means that you are expected to revisit areas multiple times. Each time you address a content area, date your entry. Field Note sheets which are provided will help you clarify what you should be noting and analyzing.

Synthesis Assignments
These two assignments provide a way for you to synthesize some of what you have been learning in the course and in your service-learning experience. Each Synthesis Assignment clusters several course topic areas (see below) in which you can discuss the connections you are making and voice the enduring questions you have. The point of the assignments is to deepen your thinking and provide opportunity for me to support and challenge your thinking before the final case summary is due. While the assignments are intended as “draft” thinking space, the expectation is that your synthesis will be reasoned, supported by data in your Field Notes, and demonstrate good writing quality. I encourage you to try out a variety of thinking/presentation formats (e.g., narrative writing, graphic images, paintings, sculpture, mobiles, word maps & webs, songs & poems); however, at least the first of your synthesis assignments must be a 3-4 page, typewritten, double-spaced paper.

- **Cluster 1:** The Learner in Context (Settings/Environments, Culture and Language, Race and Ethnicity, Class, Gender)
- **Cluster 2:** The Learner and connections to Cognitive and Academic Development (Attention, Memory, Language, Motor/Sensory, Sequential & Spatial Ordering, Higher Order Thinking)
Cluster 3: The Spirit and Soul of a Learner (Family Systems, Social-Emotional as well as Moral/Spiritual Development, and Religion)
(This third cluster, along with supporting Field Notes, must be included as part of your Final Case Study Research Summary, rather than be turned in as a separate synthesis assignment.)

*Note: Each time you turn in a Synthesis Assignment, attach a hard copy of the most current version of your Field Notes, along with all previous sets of Field Notes and any comments I may have written on them. When you turn in your final Case Study Research Summary, all material must be assembled in a binder. It may be helpful to collect material in a binder as you go.

Outside Research
A natural outgrowth of your service-learning experience is that questions will arise. Some of your questions may be very learner specific, such as “What is this student’s family like?” Others may be more generalized, e.g., “What is the difference between a learning disability and ADHD?” Such questions can and must be explored beyond our course readings through library and Internet research. You are required to answer some of your questions and support your thinking about your student and the surrounding variables by researching a minimum of five sources beyond required readings. Three of the sources you cite must be from academic journals. Two of your sources may be websites. Your outside research must be documented formally in your synthesis assignments and in your final Case Study Research Summary using the citation rules of the American Psychological Association (APA). The Calvin Library website has information about this style of citing references: http://www.calvin.edu/library/research/APAcitationStyle.stm

Case Study Research Summary
The final Case Study Research Summary integrates all of the research data you collected this semester. Data includes the following: (1) the observational data detailed in your field notes; (2) your notes from course readings, discussions, and lectures; and (3) your library and Internet research. As you prepare this summary, imagine you are going to be presenting your findings to a group of people who are closely associated with your learner (e.g., the teacher, parents or grandparents, other professionals, the learner herself). Write it as though you are telling a story or painting a portrait of the learner so that we may all get to know that learner better. Don’t be afraid to include enduring questions or to talk about areas where you feel tentative about your conclusions. A story of a learner created in just a few weeks without continued questions would be scary! The paper, while a story or a portrait, is still a formal “case research” document. It must be at least 8 pages long, include at least 5 sources as described above, and follow APA style for both “within paper” citations and the bibliography at the end.

The Case Study components will be graded individually and will contribute to your final course grade. In addition, the Case Study as a whole will be evaluated using a rubric. In order to successfully pass Education 202 and continue on in the Teacher Education Program, you must receive a rating of at least a “2” on each section of the rubric. A rating of “1” on any section will require that you and your instructor devise and implement a plan for correction in order for you to receive course credit.