



## Putting Theory into Practice: A PGCPs Case Study

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Brandon was a highly creative student. He had amazing verbal abilities and problem-solving skills. Yet, his PGCPs teachers were perplexed. While they knew intuitively that he was a bright boy, his written responses in all academic areas were problematic. Brandon struggled miserably with writing, attention, and executive functioning skills. As a result, his teachers consistently focused on his struggles and regarded Brandon as a student who likely had learning disabilities.

### Identification

After attending a GSLN training where they learned about how disabilities can mask areas of high potential, Brandon's teachers experienced a paradigm shift. Newly enlightened, the teachers now saw Brandon not only as a struggling learner, but also as a child with high potential. They gathered after school to try to find enough clues in his records to be able to refer him to the IEP team for an evaluative meeting.

Using a systematic approach to comb through Brandon's existing records, the team of general educators found plenty of evidence of his struggles with executive functioning skills and writing, particularly in the areas of written expression and precision of language mechanics. On the other hand, they also found evidence of the boy's high ability. When the teachers saw that Brandon's records contained no formal assessments, they moved forward with a complete battery of cognitive and academic testing. These findings were part of the referral packet assembled for the purpose of having the IEP school team consider providing gifted education and special education services.

During the meeting to review the assessments, the IEP team members seemed unaware of Brandon's high potential, in particular his amazing facility with scientific concepts. The general educator at the meeting highlighted for the IEP team the child's strengths, especially his advanced knowledge and excellent performance in science class. As a result, the special educator then looked more closely at the quantitative data. There she found superior scores in the areas of science and math problem-solving tasks. Through this process, the IEP team was able to use multi-confirming data to identify Brandon's strengths as well as his areas of deficit. Subsequently, the team determined that he was, indeed, a very bright student with a learning disability, one who qualified for an IEP.

### Services

Fortunately for Brandon, his local elementary school was a GSLN site school. Therefore, it was easy for the school team to transfer Brandon from a comprehensive classroom to a TAG magnet classroom. There he was exposed to accelerated learning and also received GSLN support services by attending Bi-weekly Forum sessions.

Once Brandon's potential was recognized, and his teachers began providing specialized services, he made steady progress at his elementary school's TAG center. With the support of his IEP and Bi-weekly Forum sessions, Brandon came to better understand both his areas of strength and his challenges. He soon learned to rely on his strengths to both demonstrate academic mastery and develop compensatory strategies. For example, once Brandon was recognized as

the visual-spatial and mathematical-logical thinker he was, his teachers were able to build on those abilities, teaching Brandon to associate visual images with scientific concepts. With this approach, Brandon was able to create personalized scientific symbols that helped him develop organization and time-management strategies. In addition, Brandon's teachers gave him opportunities to express his answers by building or drawing. For one assignment, the student created a model of a Lego vacuum cleaner using fuzzy sticks, which he later built and entered in a contest for elementary school inventors. Brandon won the competition!

### The Outcome

While Brandon continued to struggle with written output, his writing skills steadily improved with the support he received. He attended a TAG magnet middle school where he took accelerated mathematics courses and accessed available academic resource support services. He was admitted to a prestigious science and technology magnet high school where he excelled in technology and graphic arts courses.

Having the ability to access advanced courses in his area of strength gave Brandon the background he needed to go on to a small college with supports for students with disabilities. There he continued to build on his strengths in science and math, focusing on coursework related to engineering. 