Interprofessional (IPP) Middle School Literacy/Language

Case Example

Audrey is a 12-year-old girl who was diagnosed with a moderate language disorder in 2nd grade and a moderate-severe reading-based learning disability in 3rd grade. Previous cognitive assessments indicated skills within the average range. Audrey received an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) in 2nd grade and has continued as a special education student since that time. Audrey is completing her sixth grade year and will be transitioning to middle school in the fall. Audrey currently receives resource services 30 minutes per day, focusing on reading fluency and comprehension. She also receives 40 minutes of speech/language services per week, focusing on language processing deficits. Her parents report continued difficulties with completing homework, including poor initiation and organization. Her parents also describe Audrey as easily frustrated with homework in most subject areas. The school team met to discuss the progress and continued academic deficits for Audrey, as she continues to struggle to complete classroom work successfully.

Audrey’s current grades are below average in all areas that require reading. Audrey demonstrates continued reading comprehension difficulties. According to classroom work and input from the resource teacher, Audrey’s decoding and reading comprehension skills are at the fifth grade level. The speech-language pathologist (SLP) notes poor auditory short-term memory and word-finding difficulties. Audrey also has difficulty remembering what she has read and identifying key elements in text/stories. The teachers also noted concerns with Audrey’s ability to attend to details in directions and within texts. Her written work lacks cohesion and detail. The family, current teachers, and service providers expressed concerns about implementing the accommodations and modifications from her elementary-school IEP in the middle school environment, and its potential effect on Audrey’s learning success.

The initial team of the SLP, classroom teacher, resource teacher, family, school psychologist, OT and administrator met. Upon review of the history and family concerns, the team decided to invite the private reading tutor to join the team. Together, the team developed an assessment plan, with areas assigned:

SLP: social communication skills/pragmatics, verbal/nonverbal higher-level language skills including inferencing, problem solving, spoken and written discourse, executive functioning, and reading comprehension (in consultation with the reading tutor)

Classroom Teacher: evaluation of functional classroom performance

Resource Teacher: reading decoding, comprehension, and fluency

Audiologist: hearing screening

Psychologist: sustained attention, executive function, self-regulation, and academic testing

OT: sensory and visual processing

Reading tutor: reading decoding and fluency, and other observations
Toward the end of the meeting, the classroom teacher shared her reflections about the benefits of adding another element to the assessment plan: a subgroup consisting of the SLP and the teachers to make recommendations for classroom placement in middle school, including the elements of the IEP and required accommodations/modifications for success, including support for test taking and note taking. Some team members expressed other opinions (e.g., implement the original assessment protocol and analyze the results to determine the need for a subgroup). The team actively and respectfully deliberated the different viewpoints, and, at the end, the entire team agreed to include the subgroup as part of the initial assessment plan.

Results of a language evaluation indicated continued difficulties with higher-level language processing and problem solving, including difficulty describing cause/effect relationships and deficits in descriptive and specific language to describe and answer questions both orally and in writing. Audrey’s narrative discourse skills also were delayed, with difficulty retelling a story age-appropriately and concerns with coherence in a spontaneous narrative. Significant receptive deficits were found for figurative language with moderate expressive deficits, most notably with word-finding difficulties. Executive function skills also were below grade-level expectations—specifically, planning, sequencing, and shifting in both structured and unstructured tasks.

The classroom teacher reported that Audrey is well behaved and wants to please but continues to require higher levels of assistance in beginning her work and completing her assignments involving reading. Audrey requires significantly more time than her classmates to complete assignments. The classroom teacher also noted concerns with Audrey’s ability to develop peer relationships, impacted by deficits in language skills.

The audiologist reported that Audrey passed a pure-tone hearing screening with normal middle ear function bilaterally.

The school psychologist confirmed previous assessment results of average cognitive abilities. Attentional deficits were not found to be at a clinically significant level, but measures of executive function abilities confirmed the SLP’s findings regarding difficulty with planning, sequencing, organizing, prioritizing, pacing, shifting, and completing during classroom work, especially independent work. Audrey also continued to show deficits consistent with a reading-based learning disability, including decoding/encoding and comprehension. The school psychologist also noted inconsistent visual-perceptual errors during assessment and a significant short-term memory deficit.

The OT confirmed difficulties with efficiently processing stimuli in the visual modality and simultaneously integrating visual and auditory information, such as is required to copy notes off a board or shift gaze between the teacher and her work. No other hyper- or hypo-sensory modality concerns were noted, but a recommendation for visual acuity assessment was recommended.

The resource teacher (in consultation with the reading tutor) indicated that Audrey makes errors when answering questions in math (story problems) and reading that are indicative of overlooking key words.

Evaluation results were shared and discussed by the IPP team at a group meeting, who together agreed upon the following set of recommendations:
1. SLP to provide additional language intervention services focused on higher-level language, narrative discourse comprehension, word retrieval, auditory short-term memory, and comprehension with key words in both math and general education.

2. Resource teachers to provide continued resource services focusing on age-appropriate decoding/encoding and reading comprehension strategies.

3. Audrey to enroll in the homework help course as one of her electives. This classroom teacher keeps track of all assignments in every class and teaches students how to organize work, how to identify when more information is needed, and how to complete assignments in a timely manner.

4. Family to follow up on vision testing.

5. OT to address visual-motor and processing skills related to reading.

Over a 7-month period, data and performance indicated that Audrey was completing and turning in 80% of her homework assignments on time. This performance level was adequate compared with that of her peers. She understood key elements in reading and math with 30% prompting and was able to independently identify when she needed to know more information. Audrey made significant gains in word retrieval and short-term memory skills, but figurative language and inferencing continue to be moderately delayed. She showed continued improvement in visual-motor skills, as documented by a 30% improvement in reading fluency and a 20% gain in speed. Audrey did require glasses for vision acuity.

The IPP team communicates weekly to check Audrey’s response to treatment, and the team holds scheduled meetings every 4–6 weeks during the school year. SLP and OT intervention services will be ongoing and coordinated with the team, including Audrey’s family. Audrey will begin receiving push-in reading resource services (available at the junior high) for language arts and math. Carryover activities will be provided to the family.