LITTLE LINGUISTS
TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLERS TO BE LANGUAGE SCIENTISTS

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www.sfu.ca/phono
WHAT

- One-day camps for elementary school children (ages 4-10)
- 10-20 children per camp
- Physical activities, games, crafts, and scavenger hunts centered around learning about language as a science
WHO

- Simon Fraser University Phonological Processing Lab, a research lab focused on understanding how we recognize and process words
- Director, grad student(s), postdoc, and a small army of undergraduate research assistants
- Extra volunteers for camp days
- Collaborate with other labs who do research on children of a similar age
WHY

- Teaching children about linguistics
- Community engagement (a university goal)
- Recruitment for research studies
HOW

- Organization and planning
- Activities
- Research
ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING

- Preparation
  - approval from the university (Office of Risk Management is a good contact!) and ethics board
  - background checks for staff and volunteers
  - camp course (Youth Camps Online, www.sportrisk.com)
  - first aid courses for regular staff
  - prepare permission sheets, medical info forms, behavior management plans, incident reports
  - reserve space for the camp

- Schedule a date
  - When are parents likely to send their children to a camp?
  - weekends? summer? spring break? inservice (professional development) days?
ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING

▪ Staff
  ▪ faculty members, post-docs, grad and undergrad research assistants
  ▪ additional volunteer staff for camp day
  ▪ look for students in speech pathology or education who might be interested in working with kids and need research experience on their resume

▪ Supplies
  ▪ craft supplies (local dollar store)
  ▪ balls, jump ropes, other P.E. equipment (the university gym might have these things)
  ▪ thank-you gifts for the campers (bookoutlet.com for inexpensive books)

▪ Activities
  ▪ 30-45 minutes per activity
  ▪ alternate high energy and quiet activities
ACTIVITIES

- **Planning**
  - 30-45 minutes per activity
  - alternate high energy and quiet activities
  - each activity needs a leader from among the staff—alternate activities among leaders
  - consider activities that work with a range of ages and can be adapted on the fly

- A sample schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>Drop off/Welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:00</td>
<td>Made-Up Languages (pt 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00-11:00</td>
<td>Gym-time</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00-11:30</td>
<td>Made-Up Languages (pt 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30-12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:45</td>
<td>Non-verbal/animal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45-1:30</td>
<td>Wug Craft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-2:00</td>
<td>Movie and popcorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-2:45</td>
<td>Scavenger Hunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>Pickup</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACTIVITIES

▪ Wug craft
  ▪ start with a quick replication of the wug test
  ▪ “How did you know what to call more than one wug?” leads to a discussion and some metalinguistic examination.
  ▪ children decorate pre-cut foam wugs and name them with a made-up word, and then they discuss what they’d call multiple of their creatures

▪ Goals
  ▪ exposure to linguistic research
  ▪ thinking about the structure of language and implicit knowledge
  ▪ phonology/morphology
  ▪ extension to new forms
  ▪ hands-on activity with a take-home craft
ACTIVITIES

- Made-up languages (Harry Potter spells)
  - Discussion of constructed languages like Klingon, Elvish, Naavi
  - Mention that sometimes made-up languages use parts of real languages (Pig Latin)
  - Talk about Harry Potter spells and their basis in Latin
  - Give kids a list of Latin words/meanings and ask them to come up with their own spells
  - Craft: wand-making with chopsticks and pipe cleaners

- Goals
  - Thinking about conlangs and language structure
  - Discussion of dead languages (Latin)
  - Making connections between linguistics and pop culture
  - Creative play with words
  - Hands-on activity with a take-home craft

Accio= Latin for “I summon”
Expelliarmus
  - Expellere (Latin)= to drive out/ to force out
  - Armua (Latin)= weapon
Lumos
  - Lumen (Latin)= light
Reparo
  - Mending charm
  - To “repair”
ACTIVITIES

▪ Scavenger hunt
  ▪ Last event of the day, meant as a wrap-up
  ▪ Children are divided into teams and get a campus map and clues that lead them to different parts of campus
  ▪ Clues reference things learned from other activities

▪ Goals
  ▪ Summarizing the days’ lessons
  ▪ Problem solving and teamwork
  ▪ Physical activity and fresh air
OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Diverse orthographies
- Animal communication
- Non-verbal communication
- How we communicate
- Trivia games
RESEARCH

- Must be independent of camp activities; kids can participate in camp without agreeing to research, and they can refuse research even if their parents have given permission

- Requires special consent forms and assent scripts

- Consider teaming up with other research groups who focus on kids in the same age range

- How many participants you can run in a day may limit the size of your camp
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

▪ Parents learn about our lab and our research
▪ Children get to spend time on campus, have a short experience with science and the university
▪ Students have the tools to engage with the community and other labs
▪ (To be fair, many of our participants already come from the university community; expanding to additional communities is a goal)

https://www.sfu.ca/engage/strategy.html
WHAT DO PARENTS SAY?

T told us he had a great time playing games and I believe him, because whenever he does not like something he is not afraid of saying it.

S was super excited about camp and kept talking about language she created and all other activities, she even made new friends! She really liked all the staff who helped during the day and can't wait to participate in the future camps.

J had wonderful times with you and your team, and strongly asked me to register him for the camps again.

The girls had a blast and were telling me all about the scavenger hunt. They would love to participate again, so if there is something in the spring, let me know!

N greatly enjoyed the day camp! He told us that he liked it more than his school.

She did mention she had learned some heiroglyphics and showed me how she could write her name and several other things. Very impressive! I am glad she had so much fun and contributed positively to the lab's research.
SUMMING UP

- Linguistic day camps require planning and coordination
- But provide researchers with a great way to connect with the community, engage with young minds, and recruit research participants