Neuronauts has been continuing to grow over the last months, with many new members joining us through Sydney’s Child magazine. Welcome to all our new members! We currently have many studies your kids could take part in, so check our listings. Below we would like to share with you the results of one recent study that our members helped to make possible.

Children’s Negative Sentences

Our study investigated how children, both with and without language delay, produce negative sentences like ‘This doesn’t work’. Although this looks like a very ordinary English sentence, in fact, sentences that contain negative auxiliary verbs like ‘doesn’t’ are quite tricky for child language learners. This is because affirmative and negative sentences work quite differently. When we produce affirmative sentences, like “This pen works”, the ‘s’ goes on the end of the verb ‘work’, but in a negative sentence, it’s not so simple. We cannot keep the ‘s’ on the end of the verb. If we did, we would say “This pen not works.” But English doesn’t work this way. Instead, we use the helping verb ‘do’ and put the ‘s’ inside the word ‘doesn’t’, giving “This pen doesn’t work”. In our study, the children came up with lots of different strategies for producing negative sentences, all of which were logical. Children said things like “It not work”, “It not works” and “It’s not work.” Children’s negative statements show that they are working hard to figure out just where to put that pesky ‘s’. We found that both typically-developing children and children with language delay go through a stage of trying out different sentence forms before they settle on the adult-like sentences that contain ‘doesn’t’.

Many thanks to everyone who participated in our study, from A/Prof Rosalind Thornton, Kelly Rombough & team.

2013 Holiday Research Program for Kids!

Each day of the September-October school holidays, up to 12 kids visited The Australian Hearing Hub and completed a series of games and puzzles, all tied together with the theme of space exploration, as part of a project entitled ‘Cognitive and Social-Emotional Development in Learning Difficulties’.

Nic Badcock and a team of 30 researchers and assistants conducted this research programme involving a total of 117 kids aged 7 through 12. This included children with and without reading difficulties and resulted in well over 500 hours of data collection that will address questions from 12 different projects, involving over 30 different researchers. Activities included one-to-one “super puzzles”, helping and defending against Aliens in the “computing capsules”, and completing “Neuronaut” challenges and personnel profiles in the “Brain Busting Bungalow”. The project was popular with both kids and parents. One child reported whilst being picked up at the end of the session that it was “like a school day…only the BEST school day ever!”

The team is hoping to hold the program again this year, so keep an eye out for advertisements on our website if your kids would like to take part.