



Navigating through the hoops without touching them is more tricky than it might first appear.

More than a Hula Hoop

Every morning our young scholars take an obstacle course. They love it, it's fun—and it helps their development. The course changes daily but often incorporates the HANDLE® 'Hoop Maze'.

The Hoop Maze strengthens the vestibular system (the sensory system governing balance, spatial orientation and movement). All that's needed are one or two hula hoops and a pair of hands to hold them; also cushions or a padded mat for the advanced variations. Here's how it works:

- ✓ Hold the hoop so that moving through it is challenging but possible. Start with the hoop almost vertical and the lower edge at knee height.
- ✓ Have the child move through the hoop without touching it with any part of their body. The aim is to move slowly, smoothly and with control. Crawling is fine and even to be encouraged. Once through, have the child pass back through the hoop in the opposite direction. Four or five passes, with several seconds of recovery between passes, is enough for one day.

When it becomes easy for the child to move through the hoop, increase the difficulty:

- ✓ Use two hoops about 2 feet apart.
- ✓ Tilt the hoops at different angles.
- ✓ Do the exercise on an uneven surface such as cushions or an air mattress.



There are many uses for hula hoops once you have them in hand.



Since our last newsletter, our Grade R Remedial & Enhancement class visited our local library. The next day, one of the boys said "I was so happy to go to the library." Another agreed, noting that his favourite moment was "choosing a book" for himself. This comment highlights the key role of personal choice in motivating children to read. I expand further on the importance of reading during early development in the article on page 3.

I hope you enjoy our newsletter, and I thank Michael Bloch for his contribution on page 2.

Regards, Jennifer (Mindstretch Founder, Preschool Principal)

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Homoeopathy: Myth or Reality?

By Dr Michael Bloch

Homoeopathy is a system of medicine that was developed over 200 years ago. It's practised internationally and in some countries it's integrated into public healthcare. Homoeopathy is based on the law of similars; what a substance can create in a healthy person it can cure in an unhealthy person. Homoeopathic remedies are made through a process of ultra dilution to exacting pharmaceutical specifications. A homoeopath selects a remedy specific for the patient taking into account their illness, symptoms, personality and history. Thus, not all people with the same diagnosis receive the same remedy. See www.hsa.org.za for further explanation on homoeopathy.

Myth: 'Unscientific'. Homoeopathy is well researched, with numerous studies and much supporting evidence available.

Myth: 'Practitioners are neither regulated nor trained'. In South Africa, the minimum training is a 5-year degree. Practitioners are required to be registered with the Allied Health Professionals Council. Homoeopaths are legal primary contact practitioners trained to diagnose and treat illness.

Myth: 'It's the use of natural substances, herbs or various machines'. The main function of a homoeopath is to prescribe a homoeopathic remedy based on sound principals fitting the patient. Supplements or herbs may be suggested but don't form the basis of treatment.



Dr Michael Bloch runs a general homoeopathic practice in Green Point. He has a specific interest in ASD children and is a registered CEASE Therapist as well as a PresentChild® Translator.



Myth: 'It takes long to work'. Illnesses that are long-standing or chronic will take longer to resolve, but acute illness such as an ear infection can respond quickly.

Myth: 'Homoeopathic remedies contain nothing and rely on a placebo effect'. Homoeopathic remedies are ultra-diluted; science has however proven that even in extreme dilution substances can affect the human body. It's highly unlikely that homoeopathy would survive for 250 years based on only a placebo effect. There's significant research supporting the system.

Myth: 'Things get worse before they get better'. In some instances a patient can experience a mild, temporary reaction to their treatment. This is not always the case nor is it a sought after outcome. This is different to a side effect, which homoeopathic remedies don't have. They're safe to use in pregnancy, infants and children.

Can Homoeopathy Help Autism?

Homoeopathy, used alongside other therapies and approaches, can be helpful for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Treatment can enhance development, social connectivity and resolve specific health problems such as allergies, sleep problems, recurrent infection or behavioural issues. There are specialised branches of homoeopathy specific to ASD; see www.cease-therapy.com for further information.

Reading for Pleasure

At Mindstretch Preschool we encourage every learner to enjoy books: each day is story day. Such immersion in language and books is vital for children with verbal expressive delays.

For our 3-4 year olds we have books with eye-catching pictures in bright colours and interesting, repeated words.

Our older learners enjoy the Dr Seuss books especially. At break it's not unusual to see a child sitting on a bench and paging through one. Just recently Jennifer finished reading 'Green Eggs and Ham' to one of the children, only to have him look at her as if she were daft and say "Can't you see he wants chicken?"

Unfortunately, many children no longer read for pleasure. The reasons are diverse, including the breadth of other technologies available (such as the Internet and television) and the busy lives families lead. Yet evidences shows the importance of reading both for educational purposes and for personal development.

Having access to resources and books of their own impacts children's attainment. Children who have books of their own enjoy reading more and read more frequently"
(Research Evidence on Reading for Pleasure)



Recognising this, we recently visited Pinelands Public Library with our Grade Remedial & Enhancement class. During the visit, each learner got to select a book: our aim was to reinforce the positive relationship between personal choice and the motivation to read.

Research reports a link between library use and increased reading for pleasure: children who use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be reading outside of the classroom every day compared with those who do not. Other studies confirm the long-term impact that early reading can have, right into adulthood:

- ✓ Reading attainment and writing ability.
- ✓ Text comprehension.
- ✓ Improved vocabulary and grammar.
- ✓ Positive reading attitudes.
- ✓ Greater self-confidence as a reader.
- ✓ Pleasure in reading in later life.
- ✓ Advanced general knowledge.
- ✓ Understanding of different cultures and points of view.

Pinelands Public Library is a free resource available to all. To join simply visit then at the Howard Centre, Pinelands (Tel 021 531 4658). All you need is a document showing proof of residence and they'll order you a library card.

New Genes Linked to Autism

Major studies have linked dozens of genes to autism. One study published in the journal *Nature* in October 2014 identified approximately 60 genes that are over 90% likely to contribute to autism. Another study appearing in *JAMA Psychiatry* in March 2015 estimated genetic influences on autism to be between 74–98%.

Most of the gene mutations occur as new mutations in the autistic child: they do not appear in the unaffected parents' genetic material but rather occur spontaneously in a single sperm or egg cell just prior to conception.

Hundreds of different autism-linked genes does not mean we need hundreds of different treatments. Rather, the researchers point out that the different mutations tend to focus on a small number key biological functions. The aim would be to develop treatments that target these functions specifically.

One function involves irregular communication networks in the brain (Mindstretch Newsletter covered these findings in the previous article 'An Over-Wired Brain'). Others involve key biological functions that govern which genes will be activated.

In the words of one of the *Nature* study leaders, Dr Matthew State: **“These genes carry really large effects. That we now have a bounty of dozens of genes, and a clear path forward to find perhaps hundreds more, provides an incredible foundation for understanding the biology of autism and finding new treatments.”**

Overcoming Behavioural and Learning Challenges—a Tailored Programme



Jennifer has recently delivered a tailored training and assessment programme for The Academy for Adults with Autism, Cape Town. All responded well to the new ideas and techniques, such as the depicted drumming exercise (designed to promote bilateral movement and interhemispheric integration). So enthusiastic was the young participant that she added periodic 'High Fives' into the drumming sequence. Jennifer is an Educator, Trainer and HANDLE® Practitioner. Contact her at Mindstretch on 021 531 5899 for a tailored event for your school or organisation.



We Welcome Feedback and Subscriptions

- Email jen@mindstretch.co.za with comments or suggestions for the newsletter, and please follow us on Facebook to receive regular news updates (our page is titled 'Mindstretch Preschool, Training and Therapy').
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