

Multiplication tables equal child's play, thanks to tutor's inventiveness

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AS any teacher will tell you, knowing your times tables is the basis of every other maths skill you will ever learn.

If you find learning tables difficult, then your ability to progress with arithmetic will be seriously hampered.

Now maths tutor Simon Deacon, of Cookridge, Leeds, has designed and made an inter-active aid to improve children's learning of multiplication tables, and will soon be going into production of the iPod-sized device here in Yorkshire.

The Maths Wrap is meant to be used alongside conventional teaching but reinforce the traditional ways of learning tables by providing a challenging and enjoyable activity that feels more like play.

After very positive feedback from local teachers and pupils and with support from the Mathematics Association, Mr Deacon will be marketing the Wrap from November.

Formerly a marine engineer with the Merchant Navy, he came up with the idea of the Maths Wrap after changing careers and opening two centres in Leeds to teach the Japanese Kumon method of maths learning.

The method advocates individualised learning at each child's own pace, and emphasises kinesthetic techniques – learning by doing – rather than learning by rote. Research has shown that about 80 per cent of children respond well to kinesthetics, particularly boys.

The patent on the Maths Wrap is pending and he hopes to sell it for £4.99. He applied to the BBC entrepreneurial talent show Dragons' Den hoping for funding for the invention. He didn't get past the initial stages but says he's now rather glad, as he has full control of the product.

He is self-funding production with £30,000. The casing will be made in China before the Wrap is assembled in Harrogate by people who have suffered brain injury through illness or injury.

"I made the prototype in a little shed in the back garden," said Mr Deacon, whose eight-year-old daughter Lauren loves playing with the Maths Wrap. "It's aimed at the seven-to-14-year-old group, and I think one of the beauties of it is that it looks like a toy. A child can sit on the bus playing with it without looking or feeling like a geek."

The hard plastic casing has notches around its edges and cards inside it which can be changed to test different tables.

The numbers are visible through small windows, and the child relates "3x4=12", for example, by wrapping an attached string around the casing through the appropriate notches to show they know the answer.

As the child becomes more used to using the device, they do the "wrap" more quickly, demonstrating that their understanding and ability to calculate mentally are improving.

Once a table has been finished, the child can tell if the answers are correct by looking at the back of the Maths Wrap, which will show the pattern of crossed-over cord and whether they mirror the correct pattern, as displayed in the window.



The Maths Wrap, an aid to learning multiplication tables, devised by Simon Deacon, of Leeds, being used by his daughter Lauren, eight.

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