

whole body learning

By Mary Ashby-Green*

Kinesthetic learning is the key to remembering and retaining words, sounds and letters, and unlocking your child's reading potential.

"I try to help my child at home, but I actually don't know what to do!" is a complaint I have commonly heard from parents throughout my years as a reading specialist. Sometimes all you need are a few helpful tips; but if your child is really struggling, then you need a plan and steps to follow, otherwise it can be quite overwhelming.

As a teacher for over 25 years, I have found that one of the main challenges for my students was their difficulty remembering and retaining what they had been taught. This lack of retention is very disheartening. These children can spend a lot of effort and concentration on what they are learning, only to make the same error time and time again.

How many parents (and teachers!) have found themselves saying in exasperation: "But you already know that word, you've just said it three times on the last page!"

20 years ago, I began studying Learning Styles and how that could be applied to reading. It opened the doors for me - and my students. I now had a way to help them retain what they had learned, and it was very simple. I had to turn the lessons into carefully structured activities that did the teaching for me. It's these activities that form the basis of my programme.

the lettermat

The most powerful activity of all is what I call a Lettermat. It measures around 1m x 650mm. You can purchase one from my website, or you can copy the one illustrated on this page onto plastic tablecloth material. However you choose to do it, I would just like you and your child to have fun with it.

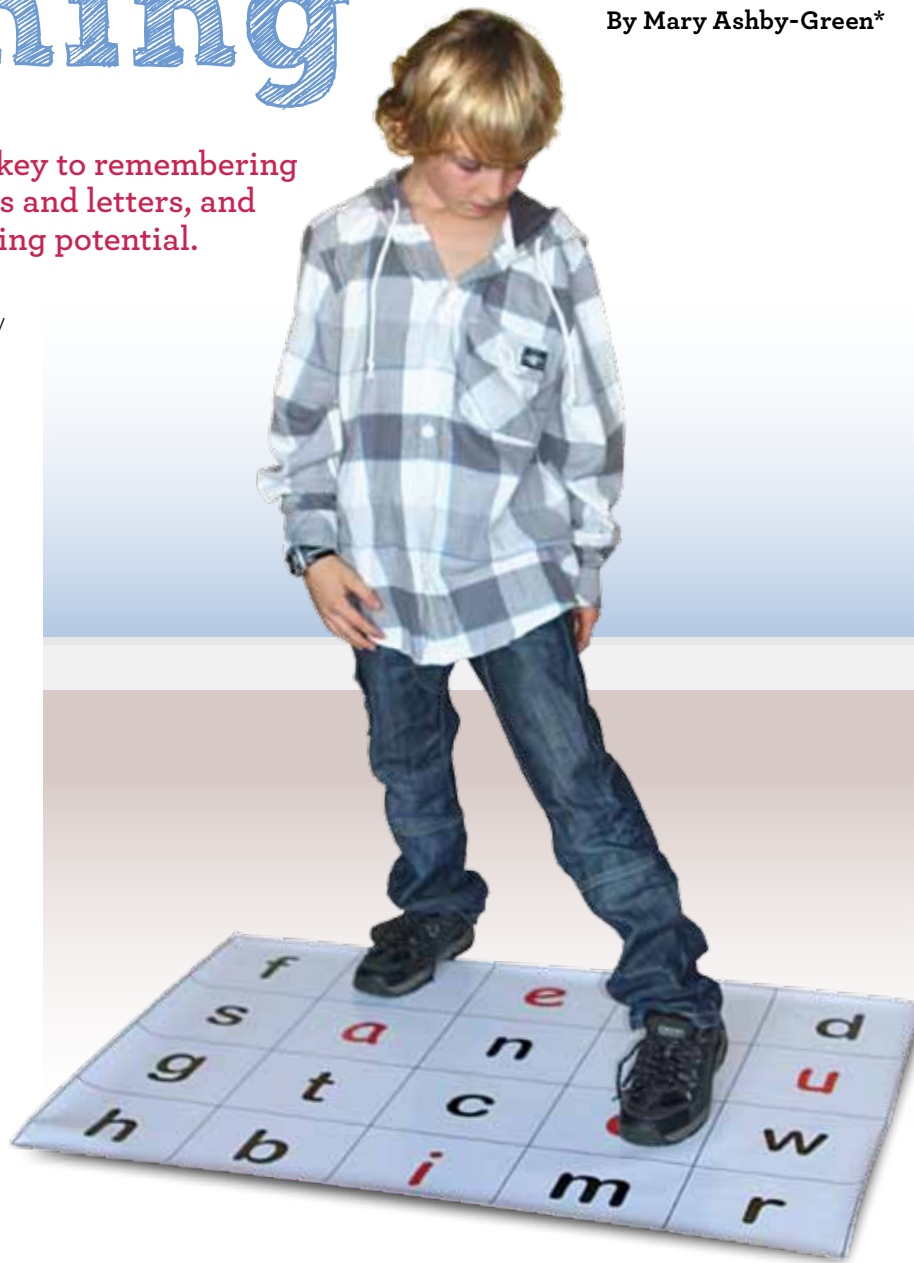
I know it works; not just in New Zealand, but in every country where I have trained teachers. In Namibia, this Lettermat was the pivotal activity that made the breakthrough for the students there; and they were so keen to learn, they made them from old sheets of cardboard.

You will notice that it is big enough for the child to step on, and this is very important. Think of it as 'whole body spelling'. This is the kinesthetic learning style in action: using the body to strengthen the auditory and visual memory - and it's fun!

how do you use it?

Introduce your child to the mat by getting them to stand on the sounds (not the letters).

- Make simple words like 'dog' and 'cat' by stepping on the sounds in the correct order.
- Stand on the sounds as you call them



out and ask them to blend as they go - for example: c, l, (cl), a, (cla) p (clap).

The simple trick of asking "what have you got so far?" stimulates their memory skills and is exactly what they need when they are writing independently - and if they can write it, they can read it.

Sometimes children want to bend down and place their hands and feet on it at the same time, but it's important that they step from one sound to the other. The aim of the Lettermat is to retrain the way they are processing the information. We want them to retain the sounds in the correct order, and this activity is using muscle memory to strengthen mental memory.

Why are the vowels (a, e, i, o, u) written in red? Being able to spell and read the short vowels correctly is a major cornerstone skill (I wrote about their importance in the April/May issue). Seeing it in red creates visual impact and helps focus and memory.

Encourage your child to learn their spelling words for the week using the Lettermat. It creates different pathways to strengthen memory skills.

You'll notice that this looks a lot like spelling rather than reading. What I found was that if the children could learn these phonological skills so that they were

automatic, their reading also automatically improved. It means they can retain the meaning of what they are reading because they are not stopping to struggle over decoding a word. They are also more confident in spelling the words they want to use in their story writing, rather than limiting themselves to simpler words that they know they can spell, which is vital because being able to express themselves is as important as being able to understand what they read.

next issue I will answer a selection of any questions you may have about helping your children to learn to read. So if there is something you would like to know, please email editor@totstoteens.co.nz.

* Mary is a former Acting Principal, who specialised in teaching children with learning and behavioural difficulties.

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win

one of ten copies of the 7 steps to success in reading writing and spelling programme.

In the last 25 years, I have loved my opportunity to teach children with reading difficulties. I have also trained nearly 3000 teachers and parents in my teacher training seminars and, along the way, I have gathered lots of tested and proven methods. I have created a programme that I used in my classroom and now also in my one-on-one work with clients. It's called 7 Steps to Success in Reading, Writing and Spelling, and this month there are 10 copies to give away.

Is your child:

- losing confidence?
- lacking motivation to read?

Having difficulties:

- knowing how to work out new words?
- with reading and spelling?
- forgetting what they have learned?

Designed for teachers and parents, the 7 Steps programme is carefully structured to make it easy for your child to master each level. Each step has activities to help you teach the new concept and, rather than making them yourself, you simply print off the ones you want to use. The games are not played on the computer - they are designed to use the kinesthetic learning style, so that the child is physically 'doing' the activity.

To find out more about the programme, go to www.phonics.co.nz

how to enter:

Simply email win@totstoteens.co.nz stating '7 steps' in the subject line and your address and telephone number in the body of the email.

FOR FULL TERMS AND CONDITIONS, PLEASE REFER TO PAGE 3

7 Steps to Success
RRP \$49

