

# Making math fun: Teacher of Singapore method visits Wilkes school

Frances Hayes | Posted: Wednesday, February 19, 2014 2:27 pm

“We don’t need children to be fast in math, calculators are fast.

We need children to be thinkers.”

That quote, by Dr. Yeap Ban Har, was on the back of T-shirts worn by North Wilkesboro Elementary School, on Monday during an all day staff development session. It was led by Dr. Yeap, a specialist in the teaching of the Singapore Math method and was held at the Stone Center.

“With the Singapore math program, all students needs are met because there are activities built in for struggling, average and above average learners,” said Sharon Shoupe, principal at North Wilkesboro School.

Singapore math is a teaching method based on the national math curriculum used in Singapore at all grade levels. It is also used worldwide. The concepts learned in K-6 are foundational for harder math concepts.

“We would describe the program as the CPA approach. That means concrete or manipulatives, to pictorial to abstract. Students are not taught procedures. They are not made to memorize. They truly learn the math before moving on to a new concept,” said Ms. Shoupe and Kim Bell, instructional specialist, who planned and invited Dr. Yeap to visit.

In the concrete step, students engage in hands-on learning experiences using concrete objects such as chips, dice, or paper clips. This is followed by drawing pictorial representations of mathematical concepts. Students then solve mathematical problems in an abstract way by using numbers and symbols.

“We use a lot of manipulatives and model drawing to solve word problems. This program has



Dr. Yeap Ban Har.jpg

DR. YEAP BAN HAR, a specialist in the teaching of the Singapore Math method, led an all day staff development session for North Wilkesboro School teachers on Monday. The school is the only one in Wilkes to use the method, which is funded by a \$214,000 grant from Burroughs Wellcome.

afforded our students with strategies to solve math problems that have frustrated students in the past,” said Ms. Shoupe.

During the session, Dr. Yeap cautioned teachers against isolating the smart and the slower learners from the class.

“Children learn in social groups, don’t isolate them. Independent learning comes at another time. Let them use their ability to learn in groups. If they are taken out they miss out on the social learning,” said Dr. Yeap, a native of Singapore and international speaker.

He has taught Singapore math at primary and secondary schools and is the author of several books for primary and pre-school children. The lively workshop included strategies for teaching and problem solving by the teachers.

The teachers enjoyed the presentation on Monday. “It has rejuvenated our teachers and are eager to implement his suggestions,” said Mrs. Shoupe.

“We actually had teachers leave the training and go to the school to change their lesson plans.

“We absolutely love this method of teaching math,” said Mrs. Shoupe. “Many of our students come in lacking some of the skills needed for math, but they are showing great growth with this program.”

Teacher Leann Lassiter said that Singapore Math requires students to communicate what they are thinking. It creates critical thinkers. Another teacher at North Wilkesboro, Amber Faw, says she likes this method because, “students are in control of their own learning.”

Students and parents also love the Singapore method.

“Our students love math. Often you will hear it is their favorite subject. Their parents also love the program.

“We have had several parent nights to introduce and train our parents and their reactions are priceless,” said Ms. Shoupe.

“We have heard many times, this makes sense. I wish I had been taught math this way.”

North Wilkesboro Elementary School is the only Wilkes school using the method. The school received a \$214,000 grant from Burroughs Wellcome three years ago for the implementation of the method. The grant is to be used over a six-year period.

“We started with kindergarten and first grade during the first year and each year we have added the next grade level.”

Schools across the state were chosen to apply for the grant and North Wilkesboro was one of six schools chosen from the applicants for the grant.