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The Educational Research Association in Singapore

Agnes Chang Shook Cheong, President, The Educational Research Association

The Educational Research Association (ERA) has just chalked up an **eventful** 15 years of existence. The Association has just over **200** members, small by comparison to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) but it has played a significant role in the development and dissemination of educational research **in** Singapore. Educational research began to develop robustly in the late 80s and the ERA through **its** annual conferences and the ERA Bulletin provided the local platform for researchers in Singapore and the region to share **their** research findings. The ERA was established in 1986 under the leadership of Dr **Sim Wong Kooi**, the then Director of the Institute of Education. The main objective of the Association was "to **promote** the practice and **utilisation** of educational research, particularly **in** the schools with the view to enhancing the quality of **education** in Singapore!" The first year of ERA was very productive with the publication of **two** issues of the ERA Bulletin, seven talks, four school-based workshops and the launch of two research projects

It has always been the policy of ERA to unify research, policy and practice by electing Ministry of Education **officials** and school principals to **its** executive committees. **In** 1993, ERA introduced **two** School-Based Research Awards to promote school and teacher involvement in research.

In charting the direction for ERA, the first three executive committees worked hard at developing a number of services for members, **organising** talks and annual conferences, setting up training workshops with the services of overseas **educational** experts like Dr John Izard of ACER, Barry **Fraser**, Warick **Elley** and many others.

ERA's annual conferences constitute its flagship activity. Since 1987, the annual conference has provided a forum for local, regional and international academics and practitioners to share their research findings and experiences, interact with and learn from each other. One of ERA's aims is to have better collaboration with local as well as international educational organisations and institutions. In 1996, ERA then led by Prof. S. Gopinathan was able to stage its first joint conference in collaboration with the Australian Association for Research in Education in Singapore. The joint conference was befittingly entitled "Educational Research: Building New Partnerships". It had an attendance of over 500 participants. Associate Professor Toh Kok Aun took over the leadership of ERA from Prof. **Gopinathan** in 1997 and was responsible for negotiating the very successful joint conference in 1999 with the Malaysian Educational Research Association. It was held in Malacca and attended also by over 500 participants. **In**

addition, through the publication of proceedings, the ERA has contributed to building a readily accessible knowledge base on educational research in Singapore, and through the invitation to many distinguished education scholars to keynote at **the** various conferences. ERA has helped to strengthen expertise about educational research trends globally.

In the new millennium, we began with a new partnership with the Association of Mathematics Educators and the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre to host a joint conference in Singapore. This was part of our new attempt to network with the other local professional organisations in Singapore. The 2000 ERA-AME-AMIC Conference was part of the Singapore's First Learning **Festival**.

As a result of the Joint Conference with AARE in 1996, we started the **ERA-AARE Trainee** Award for a recent successful postgraduate from Singapore to attend the AARE Annual Conference in Australia and another from Australia to attend the ERA Annual Conference in Singapore. Since **the** award's inception, five ERA members have won the **ERA-AARE Travel** Award on the strength of their **MEd dissertation/PhD** thesis.

The 2001 Conference will be held in **Perth** in collaboration with the Australian Association for Research in Education. A change of conference site is always stimulating for members and provides more opportunities to meet with a different set of participants. This would also create an opening for ERA to attract international members. The future prospects for ERA seem bright. The Association has a healthy surplus of funds and energetic young members have been recruited into the new Executive Committee. Also, the Association is attempting to attract young teacher trainees who are interested in research to apply for **student-membership**.

We **also** have plans to organise more training seminars and workshops for teachers and postgraduate candidates in the next five years.

In the **1980s**, there were Special Interest Groups set up within ERA but time constraints had **not** allowed the groups to meet, maintain interest and carry out research studies. The present Executive Committee hopes to revive these Special Interest Groups and initiate some Action Research Studies in schools.

ERA has a small but highly capable group of members. We **need** to harness these talents within the Association to strengthen and expand educational research for learning.