Singapore Meeting of Education Research Associations Sets the Stage for Establishing a World Education Research Association

Education research associations from around the world achieved a major goal toward establishing a World Education Research Association (WERA) in Singapore on November 24–25, 2008. At the meeting, representatives reaffirmed a commitment to establish WERA and finalized several key documents for its formation, including a constitution and financial, program, and transition plans. This meeting paved the way for official establishment of a WERA in 2009 and marked a major success in the initiative to internationalize education research.

Attended by 32 representatives from 24 education research associations, the Singapore meeting was the fourth and final one in a planned sequence leading to formation of the WERA. Hosted by the Educational Research Association of Singapore, the 2-day session was held directly preceding the Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association (APERA) 2008 Conference. AERA Executive Director Felice Levine, who has been serving as “Facilitator of WERA in Formation” since the inaugural meeting in April 2007, was Co-Chair of the recent meeting. Representatives from education research associations in Japan and Pakistan joined the proceedings for the first time.

The first three meetings of this international group of education research associations were held in Chicago in April 2007, in London in September 2007, and in New York in March 2008. At the first meeting a statement in principle regarding education research and its advancement worldwide was endorsed, and at the second meeting a resolution to work toward the establishment of a world education research association was unanimously approved. At the third meeting representatives of the 28 participating associations advanced a mission statement and a draft of the constitution that was finalized in Singapore.
The Singapore meeting focused on finalizing four documents key to the formal establishment of WERA, titled as follows: (a) Constitution, (b) Three-Year Plan for WERA Finances and Financing, (c) Three-Year Program Plan, and (d) Transition Plan From WERA in Formation to WERA. These documents are intended to guide the new association in its early years and also to provide representatives of associations with basic information about WERA which they can present to the governance bodies within their own organizations as each association decides whether to become a founding member of WERA. Ongoing working groups were responsible for preparing the first three of these documents.

The four documents present a basic and straightforward structure and plan for launching WERA. The constitution, which had been discussed previously and made available for comment by association representatives through October 2008, was finalized with some minor clarifications and adjustments. It sets forth the mission, purposes, and objectives of WERA as a nonprofit education research organization, defines membership and representation, and specifies an executive committee and council responsible for its governance. Associations constitute the unit for full membership in WERA. Jeremy Hoad (British Educational Research Association) and Felice Levine (AERA) served as Co-Chairs of the governance working group that prepared the constitution.

Over the past several months, working groups also explored various strategies for launching WERA. The working group on finances, led by Wim Jochems (European Educational Research Association) and Rudolf Tippelt (German Educational Research Association), prepared a plan for financing the new organization over the next 3 years. Representatives agreed that the new WERA should be launched on a modest scale, that larger associations will contribute more funds than smaller ones (amounts will be based on the World Bank classification of developed and developing nations), and that to limit costs and expenditures, WERA activities initially will be planned to coincide with larger existing conferences. The plan emphasizes that lack of financial resources should not become a threshold for active membership by any association, because WERA is committed to outreach and inclusion of education research associations around the globe.

Similarly, the working group on a 3-year program plan, led by Ong Kim Lee (Educational Research Association of Singapore), articulated an initial set of ideas feasible for WERA to pursue. Representatives thought activities should be straightforward but sufficiently meaningful and useful for advancing education research and communicating the value of WERA worldwide. Suggested activities include developing a WERA website as an interactive, dynamic, global home and node for information and communication; holding substantive research sessions aligned especially with member association meetings; and sponsoring capacity-building research workshops for advanced graduate students and emerging scholars.

Considerable attention was devoted to discussions of the logistics of formally establishing WERA. A detailed transition plan prepared by Felice Levine outlined the steps needed to (a) allow for the formation of WERA and the establishment of the inaugural Executive Committee, Council, and officers; and (b) permit WERA to establish itself and put in place an interim WERA governance structure.

The 31 national, regional, and international education research associations that have attended at least one of the four meetings held in 2007 and 2008 were designated as the potential founding members. According to the transition plan, associations that decide to become founding members by April 10, 2009, will constitute the body to establish WERA and elect an interim president and interim secretary general. These associations will meet directly after the AERA Annual Meeting in San Diego on April 18–19, 2009. To allow
for the possibility that some of the 31 associations may need more time to make a decision to join WERA, these associations are designated eligible to become founding members of WERA through April 10, 2010. Associations that are not yet founding members may attend the April 2009 meeting as observers.

The transition plan also envisions holding the inaugural meeting of the WERA Council in September 2009 in Vienna, either before or after the European Conference on Education Research. The goal is for as many as possible of the 31 associations that have been working together on the establishment of WERA to join between now and April 10, 2009, and to continue outreach to still unaffiliated education research associations around the world in advance of the first organizational meeting of the founding members of WERA in April 2009. Outreach to new associations and to groups of education research scholars in
countries or regions without associations is one of the primary ongoing commitments of WERA.

In Singapore, WERA also made its debut at the APERA meetings in a keynote symposium titled “What Counts as Quality Research and Building Research Capacity for Education Research Worldwide.” Representatives at the WERA meeting resolved to continue to develop symposium sessions at 2009 education research association meetings around the world. The enormous substantive progress made toward advancing education research worldwide in activities such as these, as well as the sentiments of colleagueship and goodwill demonstrated in all four meetings culminating in Singapore, underscored and reaffirmed the value of what is possible through a WERA.