

Date: August 31, 2007
For Immediate Release
Contact: Patricia Hammer, Director, Communications and Marketing
patricia.hammer@edvantia.org; 800.624.9120 ext. 5437

Edvantia's School Appraisal System Discussed at UK's Oxford Round Table

Think Tank Explores Merits of the Instruction and Learning Appraisal at Invitation-Only Event

CHARLESTON, WV—Three veteran educators from West Virginia took part in the United Kingdom's Oxford Round Table this summer to discuss Edvantia's school observation and appraisal system with a diverse group of scholars and education leaders. By invitation, the developers of the Instruction and Learning Appraisal—Drs. Sandra Angius, Teddi Cox, and Sharon Harsh—joined about 30 other presenters and discussants to form a weeklong collegial think tank. The theme was "Poverty and Deprivation: Politics of Redistribution."

One issue explored during the Round Table was how schools, especially those in low-income areas, decide how to invest limited educational resources. According to Dr. Angius, Vice President of Programs at Edvantia, "The Instruction and Learning Appraisal system was relevant to the discussion because the purpose of the appraisal is to help K-12 schools and districts get honest, customized feedback about their strengths and weaknesses. They can then use this information to pinpoint major priority areas and designate interventions that reflect the research on how to improve student achievement."

Unlike top-down evaluations of schools and districts, the Instruction and Learning Appraisal, or ILA, is usually initiated by invitation from a school or district. "This is a proactive, nonpunitive way for schools to get real data about what's happening right now in their offices, hallways, and classrooms," says Dr. Cox. During an ILA, trained data collectors spend a day or two in each school conducting structured interviews, observations, and document reviews. Specifically, the ILA team looks at factors identified by research as important to high-performing schools. After the data are collected, the ILA team creates a baseline report of findings and recommendations that can guide improvement planning. Edvantia also holds a debriefing session with school or district leaders to discuss the findings and how they can be used to plan for effective classroom instruction, professional development, and school improvement.

Economists as well as educators participated in the Oxford Round Table. After hearing the Edvantia team explain the ILA process and the research on which ILA rubrics are based, one economist exclaimed, "I had no idea that assessing educational instruction was that complex!" One participant expressed interest in conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the ILA. Others were impressed by the variety of data sources consulted during an ILA, as well as the amount of data generated within a short timeframe. Of special interest were Edvantia's comparisons of data collected from high- and low-poverty schools.

“Hearing the participants’ questions and comments about the ILA gave us a new perspective on the work we do,” noted Dr. Angius. “But equally important was the opportunity to learn about and discuss the work others are doing. What made the Round Table so valuable were its international and multidimensional aspects. It gave us an opportunity to approach the topic of school improvement from a variety of perspectives, and to network with people who have a wide range of experience and expertise.”

Dr. Harsh concurred. “In education, we don’t always have opportunities to connect with people outside our own circles. At Oxford, we had the privilege of becoming part of a diverse intellectual community, brought together by a common theme and by shared experiences—staying in the college dorms, surrounded by a wealth of history and architecture, eating our meals together in a traditional university dining room, and having informal discussions in the library each evening. Each of us returned from Oxford with a renewed excitement about our work and its potential for helping schools increase student engagement and achievement.”

The recent use of the ILA in West Virginia will be the topic of a presentation by Dr. Sharon Harsh of Edvantia and Ms. Betty Jo Jordan of the West Virginia Department of Education at the Council of Chief State School Officers’ Education Leaders Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 12-14.

For more about the Instruction and Learning Appraisal system, visit the Edvantia Web site at www.edvantia.org and type “Instruction and Learning Appraisal” in the search box.

About the Oxford Round Table: The Oxford Round Table is a not-for-profit organization that promotes human advancement and understanding through the improvement of education. Since 1989, the organization has convened invitation-only meetings of selected education leaders to study and consider major issues in contemporary education policy in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. Past participants have included Ministers of Education, governors from the United States, members of Parliament, executive officers of international corporations, education administrators, attorneys, and academicians from major universities. More information about the Oxford Round Table is available at www.oxfordroundtable.co.uk.

About Edvantia: Edvantia is a nonprofit education research and development corporation, founded in 1966, that partners with practitioners, education agencies, publishers, and service providers to improve learning and advance student success. Edvantia provides clients with a range of services, including research, evaluation, professional development, and consulting.

