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## BUILDING CONNECTIONS...

is the organizing idea for this issue of *CFG Coach Quarterly*. Building connections by reducing isolation between students, teachers, schools, and districts has always been a hallmark of the many reform efforts supported by the Houston A+ Challenge.

In this issue, you will find:

- The questions in “**Reflection Corner**” on Page 1 can help foster discussions about strengthening connections in our schools.
- The “**Multiple Perspectives Protocol**” on Page 2 was designed to help participants build respectful connections with people who hold different points of view.
- The **Spotlight** article on Page 3 highlights how technology—specifically blogging—can build connections in a CFG, and
- Finally, the **Calendar** on Page 4 features professional development opportunities offered by The Houston A+ Challenge that can help participants build connections with other reform-minded educators in the Houston region.



### Supporting Professional Learning Communities



--Photo by Donna Reid  
The participants of the April 9 CFG Coach Clinic “Teambuilders and Icebreakers” connected physically and mentally as they navigated through obstacles in the Mine Walk Protocol.

## Reflection Corner

Providing the time and space to reflect on our practice is one of the distinct features of a Critical Friends Group or Professional Learning Community. Set aside some time to consider the following questions:

- Do the students I work for have opportunities to build strong connections with each other, with adults in their school, with community members, and with the content?
- Have I built strong connections with all the constituents of my school—students, teachers, administrators, parents, business partners, community members?
- With whom do I need to build stronger connections?
- What skills do I need to develop stronger connections? Do I need to learn another language? Do I need to ratchet up my leadership or facilitation skills?

Consider sharing your experience and wisdom by making your reflections public. Email them to [CFGCoach@robreid.com](mailto:CFGCoach@robreid.com). They may be posted online or shared in a future issue of *CFG Coach Quarterly*.

# Protocol of the Month

## The Multiple Perspectives Protocol

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*Used for problem-solving—can be adapted for other uses.*

**Rationale:** Knowing that protocols help us to develop the habits we wish we had to begin with, this protocol was designed to help make the process of using multiple perspectives to enrich our conversations transparent and to make our learning more powerful. This means more than bringing various voices together. It also means purposefully seeing what each voice contributes to the whole.

**Time:** 50 minutes

**Procedure:**

1. Participants introduce themselves—name, point of view. Facilitator points out that point of view can be broadly defined—“woman” or “African American” or, more narrowly, “first-year teacher” or “second-year teacher.” Participants are encouraged (and helped) to select their identifying perspectives according to the group’s purpose. Clearly this involves judgment, but no one’s self-selected perspective should be argued with; however, all should be willing to negotiate. It must be stressed that we all have multiple ways we could describe ourselves and, for the purposes of this protocol, we will settle on one or two, e.g., “I am a principal who is committed to the 10 Common Principles.” (7 minutes)
2. Facilitator presents a question that has emerged from the work of the group or that has emerged as an important one to the group, e.g., “What is rigor, actually?” (3 minutes)
3. All write their first thoughts. (5 minutes)
4. Each participant, in turn, gives his or her preliminary thinking on the question, prefaced with his or her point of view:  

“From the point of view of a student, I think...” (10 minutes)
5. Then there is a second round, with each person giving his or her thinking *based upon what the participant heard from the others*:  

“Having heard all of the other points of view, I now think...” (10 minutes)
6. A final round to reflect on the quality of the responses:  

“I noticed that my/our responses...” (15 minutes)

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Source: National School Reform Faculty (January 2003)

# Spotlight On...

## Using Blogs to Build Connections

Blogs, or web logs, are journals that are posted on the World Wide Web. Currently, there are millions of blogs on the Internet, and thousands more are added each day. Ordinary people, not professional writers or journalists, author the vast majority of blogs, yet blogs have become so influential that ABC News named Bloggers as "People of the Year" for 2004.

My personal journey with blogging began in October 2003, when I took on the role of consultant for CFG support for the Houston A+ Challenge. At the time, I wondered how I could best encourage myself to continuously reflect, make my work public, and document my own learning. To model these habits, I started authoring the blog "Donna's Reflections." (See address at end of article).



Although my motivation for starting the blog was simply to have a public journal of my work-life, a surprising benefit soon emerged: the blog became a tool for building community and encouraging reflection in my current CFG. For example,

after every CFG meeting, I post a summary of our activities and every member's written reflections. Members are encouraged to add comments that express their own thinking and learning.

Besides text, the entries may include photographs, document files, and links to other websites. Because they allow readers to add their own comments to an entry, blogs are more interactive than a paper and pencil journal. They are also far more public since blogs are accessible anytime, anywhere, from any computer with web access.

Interestingly, the blog strengthened our CFG in several ways. First, through regular postings and comments from group members, it provided a way to sustain conversation in between meetings. Second, it produced an ongoing record of our work together, and importantly, that record is public. Third, it provided a mechanism for group members who had missed a meeting to still feel connected to the group's work.

Here are some links to get you started on your own blogging adventure: <http://awd.ci.uh.edu/blog/> provides resources for getting started to use blogs for yourself or with your students.

<http://bloggingineducation.blogspot.com/> highlights articles related to using blogs in a variety of education-related ways.

<http://donna.robreid.com/weblog/> my own web log shares the activities and reflections of a CFG Coach.

*--Donna Reid*

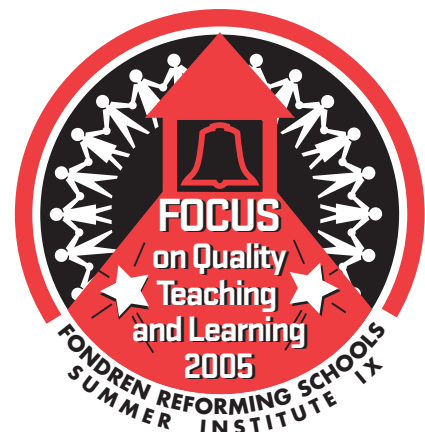
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### Forge New Connections at Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute IX

Save the dates July 26-28, 2005, for the ninth annual Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute at the University of Houston Hilton.

Join colleagues for in-depth seminars and "Learning Community" time that models the power of being in a CFG.

Registration information can be found at [www.houstonaplus.org](http://www.houstonaplus.org).



# Mission Statement

Established in 1997 with funding from the Annenberg Foundation and local matching contributions, The Houston A+ Challenge is an independent, public, private partnership that develops and funds school programs, professional development and leadership institutes to promote higher academic achievement by all students.



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## Looking Ahead

**May 14, 2005, 8:30 a.m.—3:00 p.m.**  
*Next Steps Seminar*  
*“Literacy Lessons”*

**July 11-15, 2005**  
*New CFG Coach Training Seminar*

**July 26-28, 2005**  
*Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute*  
*“Focus on Quality Teaching and Learning: Partnerships*  
*in Learning Communities”*  
*University of Houston Hilton*

Have you changed your workplace, your e-mail address, or even your name? Do you know a trained CFG coach who did not receive this issue of *CFG Coach Quarterly*? Contact Imelda Cardoza at 713-658-1881 or [icardoza@houstonaplus.org](mailto:icardoza@houstonaplus.org) to update your contact information.

Send feedback for *CFG Coach Quarterly* to Donna Reid at [CFGCoach@robreid.com](mailto:CFGCoach@robreid.com).

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