



LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY
CARNEGIE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



A GUIDE TO ATTUNED AUTHENTIC COACHING FOR TEACHERS: AACT

COLLECTIVED

INTRODUCTION

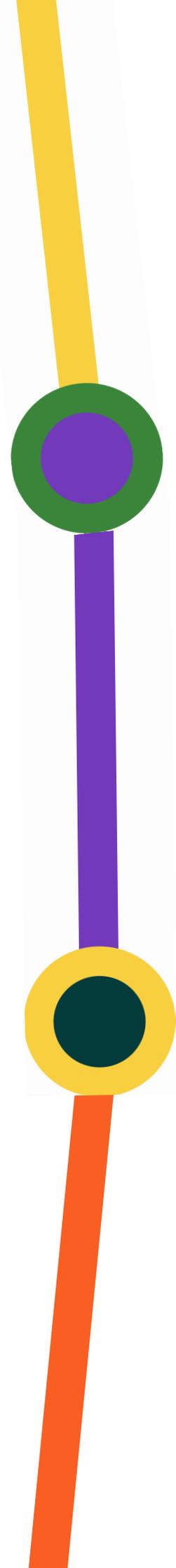
Welcome to this CollectivED guide to Attuned Authentic Coaching for Teachers (AACT).

AACT was co-created by a group of teachers, teacher educators and coaches as a response to the surge in teacher coaching. The co-creation group was made up of Rachel Lofthouse, Cathy Gunning, Asif Lorgat, Lucy Wood, Sue Webb, Neil Mullen, Emily Ray, Ann Litchfield, Tracy Edwards, Jess Mahdavi-Gladwell. AACT is based on cycles of engagement and participation enabling co-enquiry between the coach and the teacher. It is an emergent model. As the initial work of the co-creation group ended, we invited colleagues working in and with schools to play with the approach, to deduce its potential, and to adapt it to suit their contexts. This guide is written by Rachel Lofthouse and based on that collective and combined work.

As a reader of this guide, we invite you to engage with the guidance and insights so that you can experiment with the AACT approach, applying it to your own contexts and roles. It is not a 'definitive' guide, because it is not a 'definitive' coaching approach, but one that is likely to continue to be adopted and adapted over time.

There are four parts to this guide:

- Core Ideas of AACT
- Practical guidance for AACT
- Reflections on AACT in context
- Further information and resources



CORE IDEAS OF ATTUNED AUTHENTIC COACHING FOR TEACHERS

What is coaching in education?

Coaching is used in education for a number of purposes. These include developing good classroom practice, developing leadership capacity, and fostering wellbeing. Teacher coaching is an overarching and personalised approach. It is based on sustained dialogue and enhanced support from a coach, providing the teacher with an opportunity to reflect, gain clarity, make decisions and to respond in the context of their own teaching and aligned with their professional purpose.

AACT is a form of relatively non-directive coaching which means it has the following core characteristics:

- an intentional conversation, through which the values that educators hold about their work, their students, wider communities, and future society can form part of the personal and professional sense-making;
- different from mentoring or training being an inside-out process, which means that it is led by the coachee and facilitated by the coach;
- non-directive coaches know that their role is to support and enable the coaches, not to judge or instruct them;
- the dialogue creates opportunities for reflection and effective decision-making, leading to more considered and confident actions in the context of the coachee's own personal and professional circumstances, challenges, and dilemmas;
- the coach creates a situation in which the coachee can think and talk without fear of unhelpful interruption or judgement, requiring the coach to deploy good listening skills and have the ability to pose valuable questions, show appreciation and offer insightful reflections. In this context coaching can lead to co-construction of ideas and opening up of possibilities;
- usually based on a sequence of conversations, to allow relationships to develop, progress to be supported and challenges to be addressed without unwarranted urgency

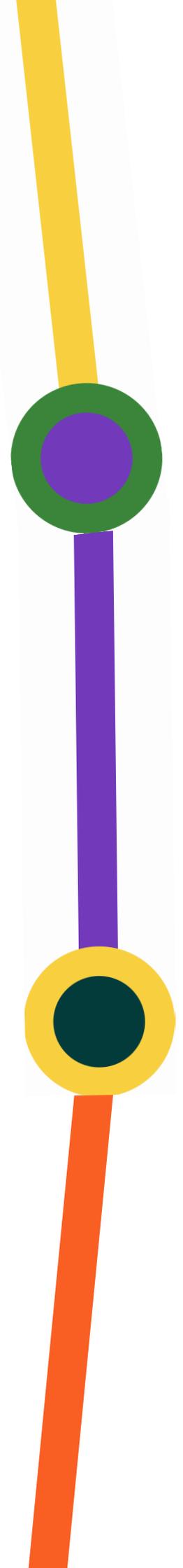
WHAT IS ATTUNED AUTHENTIC COACHING FOR TEACHERS (AACT)?

AACT is a form of non-directive coaching which has specific foundations in pedagogical knowledge and practice.

The reference to 'authentic' in AACT comes from the five principles of Authentic Instruction (Newmann and Wehlage, 1993). These research-based principles are orientated to learning which has meaning beyond the classroom:

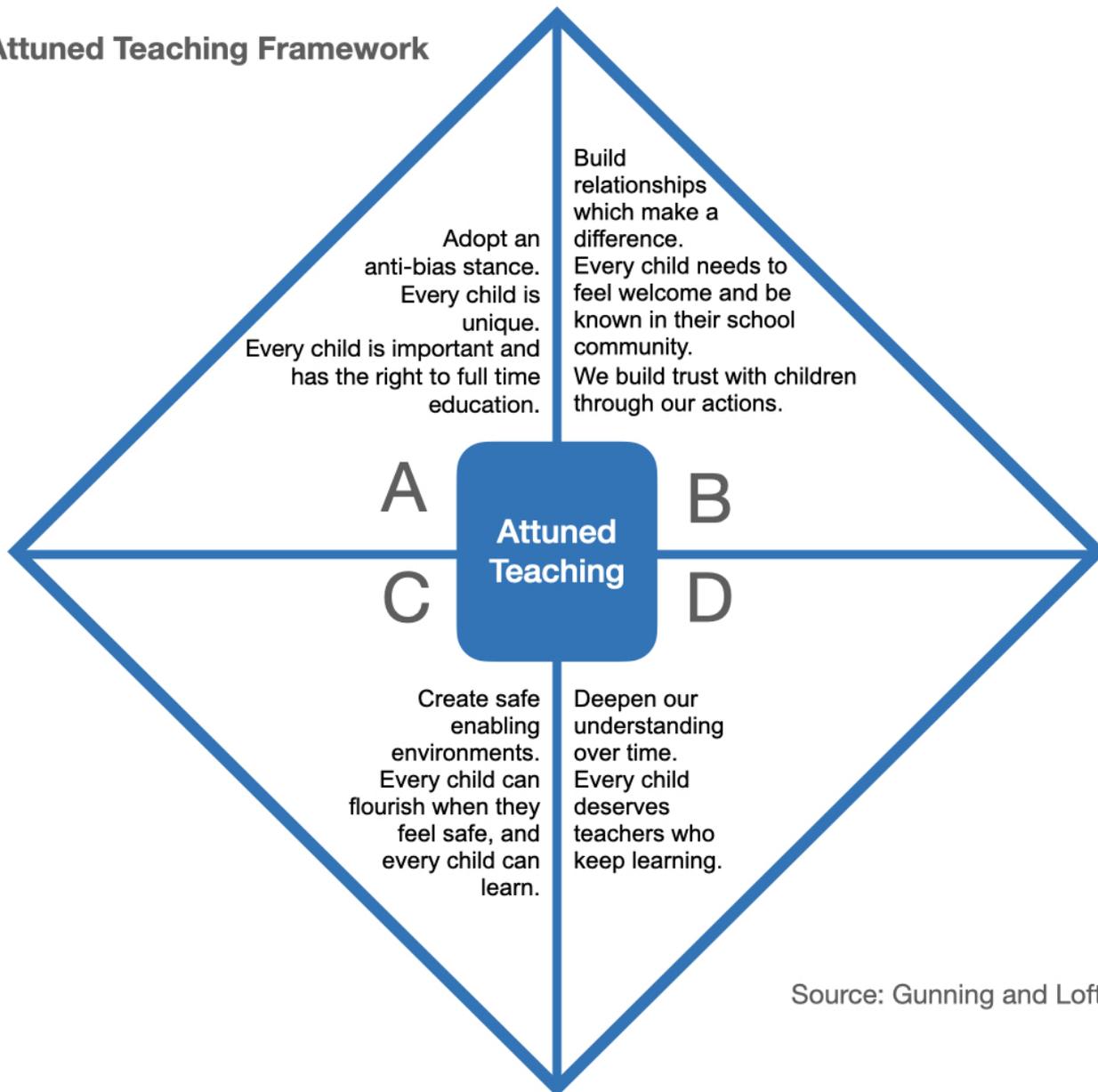
- Learning activities which develop higher order thinking
- Depth of knowledge (rather than a shallow, surface coverage of content)
- Connectedness to the world beyond the classroom
- Substantive conversation allowing students to talk meaningfully about their learning
- Social support for learning based on mutual respect and high expectations

In AACT we encourage teachers to look at teaching and learning through these five principles. We also suggest that when it is working well AACT should create opportunities for teachers' own professional learning to share the same characteristics; encouraging their own higher order thinking, allowing them to develop depth of knowledge and a sense of connection to contexts outside their own classroom. The coaching approach should allow this through substantive conversation and appropriate support.



The reference to 'attuned' in AACT is drawn from the framework for Attuned Teaching (Gunning and Lofthouse, 2022) which has a foothold in trauma-informed and attachment-aware teaching. There are four key components which we call the ABCD of Attuned Teaching and which relate to wellbeing and inclusion in learning. In summary these are: adopt an anti-bias stance, build relationships which make a difference, create safe enabling environments and deepen understanding over time. We encourage teachers to consider how their teaching becomes more attuned when using the AACT approach.

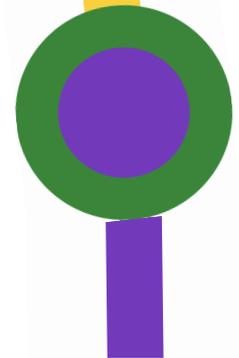
Attuned Teaching Framework



Source: Gunning and Lofthouse, 2022

To develop attuned teaching over time there is a need to 'deepen understanding' and this is a strong motivation for AACT. As such AACT is itself pedagogic (based on learning) and both the authentic and attuned principles above have helped to develop coaching guidance which respects teachers as unique individuals working in complex and diverse settings. We want coaching to support teachers to develop their own pedagogic practices grounded in meaningful learning and positive social relationships for their students.

The final key characteristic of AACT is that it is based on professional learning enquiry cycles, rather than one-off events. This allows for the generating, testing out and reviewing of ideas for teaching.



Core features of AACT

Attuned authentic coaching: relational support for professional learning

Adopt a non-hierarchical stance

Prioritise appreciative & affirming relationships

Ensure a safe & enabling environment

Attuned authentic coaching: professional challenge fostered by substantive conversation

Encourage, support & deepen professional knowledge & understanding

Engage in creative & critical thinking, facilitate hypothesising & evaluating

Forge connections between experience & wider professional context

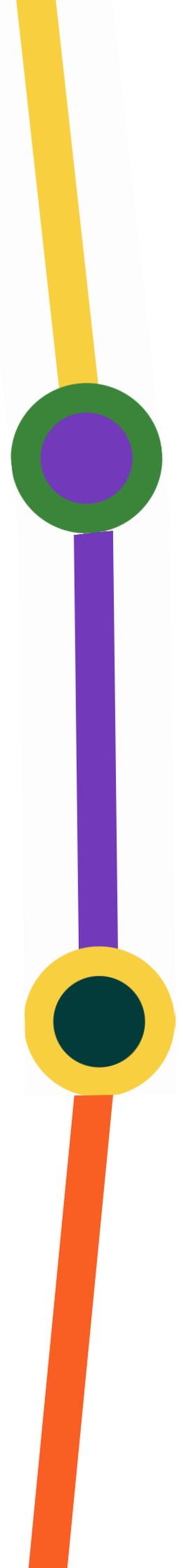


PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR AACT

Why is Contracting and Consent Important?

The first set of principles for AACT are based on relational support for professional learning. This means that AACT starts with consent and agreed purpose. While coaching may be offered as part of a wider school initiative (often related to teaching and learning) the choice to engage with it should rest with the teacher. The context might be whole-school, age phase or subject related, but the coaching focus should always be personalised.

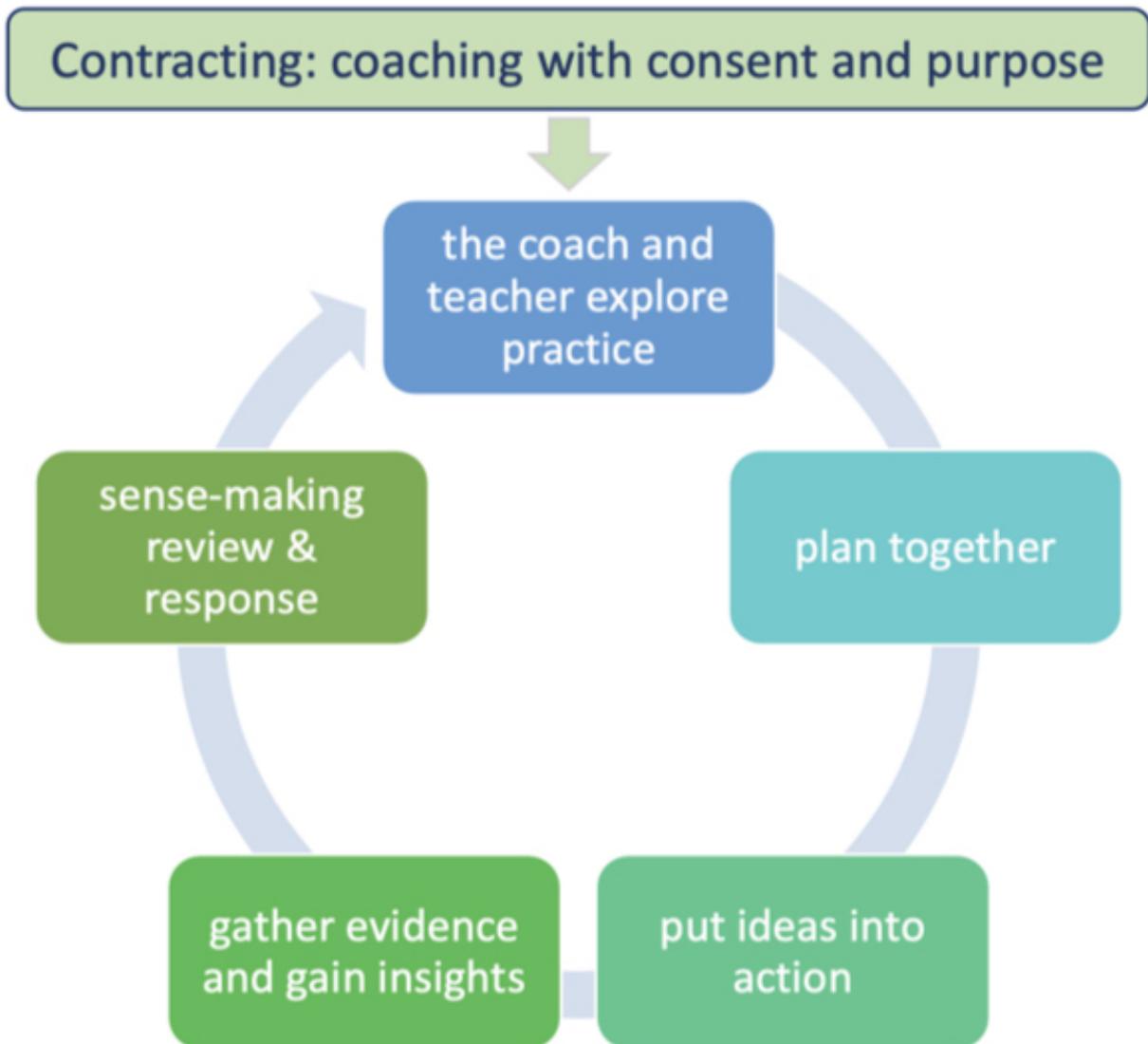
Preparing for coaching includes contracting (or the setting up of a partnership agreement between the coach and coachee), through which an understanding of the AACT approach and positive intention to participate are gained. Details of coaching discussions should remain confidential. Individual or co-constructed reflective records may be kept but should not be shared beyond the coaching partnership.



What is the Cycle of Enquiry in AACT?

AACT is based on an underpinning cycle of co-enquiry, based on sequential stages.

AACT Co-enquiry Cycle

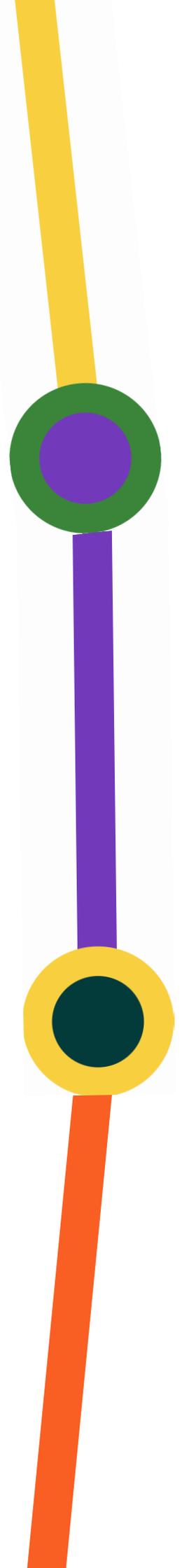


Through the process of co-enquiry (thinking and finding out together) the coach supports the teacher to develop their knowledge and understanding.

The co-enquiry cycles include elements of

- reflection,
- seeking out information to guide decision-making,
- facilitating planned changes,
- exploring existing and new evidence,
- acknowledging both tensions and opportunities,
- engaging with values and beliefs,
- feeling less discomfort with uncertainty
- helping the teacher to recognise the ways that they can respond within their professional roles and using their expertise.

These elements are achieved by fostering substantive conversation which creates safe space for and enables sense-making through higher order thinking. Coaching conversations are characterised by analysis of information, questions and provocations which lead to creative and critical thinking, synthesising, hypothesising, and evaluating. These lay the foundations of effective future decision making. These outcomes are shared by both the coach and teacher.



Unlike some coaching models in AACT we have not developed a scaffold of questions, but we do recognise that the coach will need to engage the coachee in purposeful conversation relevant to each stage. It is also the coach's role to help maintain an appropriate focus for the co-enquiry. An example of a coaching cycle is given below.

AACT Co-enquiry Cycle Example

AACT co-enquiry component	Illustrative example (cycle 1)	Time sequence
Contracting: coaching with consent and purpose	A secondary Maths teacher requests an AACT coaching approach to support them to engage Yr 7 students more successfully in collaborative group work. The AACT coach agrees to support the teacher over three cycles.	A whole school CPD session on group work encourages the teacher to request a coach
coach and teacher explore practice	There is an initial coaching discussion and the coach then offers to observe the class during a lesson which involves paired work. This allows a more informed conversation about the students. The coach and teacher agree to each watch a relevant online webinar based on group work in Maths. They swap reflection notes as a way of maintaining focus.	Weeks 1 & 2: 2 x 20 mins conversations, 50 mins observation, 90 mins watching webinar and making notes
plan together	The coach and teacher meet to plan a lesson together. They deliberately draw on a key idea from the webinar regarding the nature of the Maths task suited to group work and also think about which pupils will work together.	Week 3: 1 x 45 mins conversation
put ideas into action	The lesson is taught. The coach is not available to observe the whole lesson but he can get cover for the last 30 minutes and this is when the group work is planned for. The teacher lets the students know that she is deliberately inviting the coach in to the lesson and that he might ask a few of them questions about how they are learning.	Week 4: 30 mins observation
gather evidence and gain insights	The teacher makes reflective notes about the lesson, and the coach has responses from two groups based on their questions. The work that was done in groups is collected and marked. All of these are used as the foundation of a post-lesson discussion.	Week 4: gathering of notes and marked work
sense-making, review and response	The students' work, and the teacher's and coach's notes are used in post-lesson discussion of what worked well and what was less successful. Reference is made to original CPD and webinar. Decision to keep going into next cycle. Teacher decides to seek more advice about two SEND students who struggled. The next cycle will start with 'plan together'.	Week 5: 1 x 45 mins conversation

It is suggested that three coaching cycles of coaching co-enquiry help deepen understanding and develop practice over time and can be undertaken at an appropriate and responsive (rather than predetermined) timescale. The co-enquiry coaching components will be adapted according to context, for example there may be value in classroom observation, use of video, opportunity to engage with new training or reading as suits the purpose.

Reflections on AACT in Context

Participants in the original AACT co-creation group and colleagues using AACT in the trial phase offered feedback, which included:

"I am drawn to AACT as it has a real focus on building relationships and personalising the support I can offer, with no 'one size fits all' approach. As such it creates a safe space for teachers."

"I chose AACT because of the useful guidance on how to coach as this was my first time as a coach, although I have been a mentor before. AACT provided a structure that was useful for both myself as a coach and the coachees as they knew what to expect. The structure meant that the coachees came up with a development plan in an area of their practice that they wanted to concentrate on. This meant that something tangible came from the process."

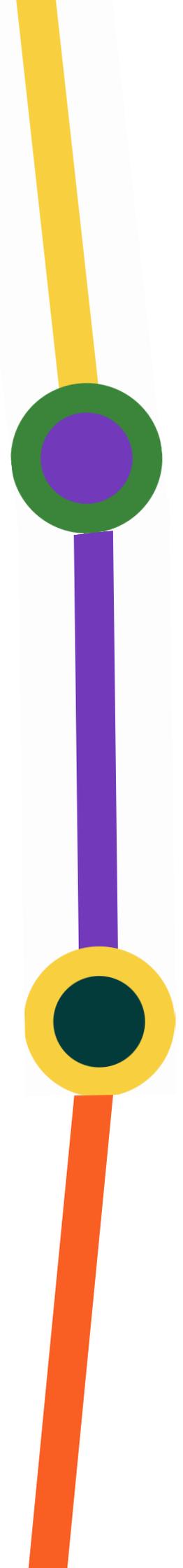
"A key feature of AACT that attracted me was that the values underpinning the approach strongly align with our school ethos."

"As a new coach I have had to learn to listen and not to interrupt with my great ideas! This has been the hardest part, which I am still working on."

"For my colleagues, I think it has been a tremendous success. For example, one colleague has introduced a Maths carousel in her class which has provided challenge for students who need it and allowed her time to work with lower ability students. The overall impact on students is improved outcomes in Maths (she is extending the carousel idea to other subjects next year). Above all I think all of us have developed more confidence in ourselves as we have taken on new challenges."

"AACT has brought the culture of coaching into the school. In a short space of just a few months using AACT has led to school improvements. Next year we plan to launch coaching as a professional learning community, and probably start with the AACT structure as I feel it is a good way to help coaches start to build their coaching skills."

"I have appreciated the ability to use AACT with flexibility to personalise coaching cycles and create a responsive approach over time."



Summary Points for AACT

CREATE	Create supportive relationships between colleagues
PROVIDE	Provide teachers space to be valued, seen, and heard
PERSONALISE	Personalise professional learning and development
EXPLORE	Explore research and connect to practice
SCAFFOLD	Scaffold reflection and enquiry
ENABLE	Enable experimentation and evaluation
SUPPORT	Support teachers to make autonomous, situated decisions
ENSURE	Ensure teachers find their niche and utilise their talents

FINAL THOUGHTS

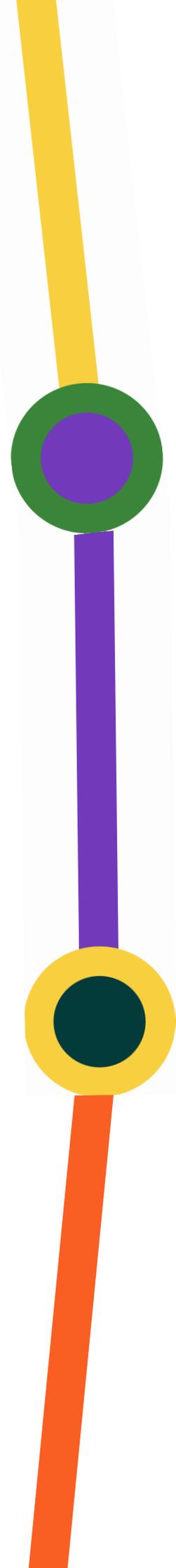
Coaching can create a time and space for busy teachers to focus their minds. This is essential for them to do their best thinking. And this can make all the difference to what goes on in their classrooms.

Enabling AACT coaching opportunities can be a fine balance of leadership. Micromanagement can be an obstacle to building trust in the process. Leaders need to be aware of power structures that may act in contradiction to the desired benefits.

All coaching should be a learning process for both coach and coachee; providing both participants with opportunities for reflection and responsive decision-making. Through engaging with coaching, educators at all levels can gain insights and be supported to develop specific skills and to enhance their professional confidence.

Coaching allows participants to share deeper thinking, gain clarity, and recognise that their role is to respond realistically and often to do so in collaboration with others.

When it is working well coaching offers a unique opportunity for teachers to have personalised and formative conversations about their own work. Coaching can help educators to create supportive professional relationships based on trust and curiosity. Coaching can re-connect teachers with each other, with a sense of purpose and perspective and with their potential.



FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

There is a CollectivED blogpost on AACT:

<https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2024/03/time-to-acct/>

There is also a CollectivED blogpost on Attuned Teaching which includes links to additional resources and a video discussion:

<https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2022/12/>

[attuned-teaching-a-framework-built-on-relationships-for-learning/](https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2022/12/attuned-teaching-a-framework-built-on-relationships-for-learning/)

You can access a range of coaching resources at the CollectivED website:

<https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/collectived/>

Information on Authentic Instruction can be found here:

<https://ascd.org/el/articles/five-standards-of-authentic-instruction>

Look out for the new book:

Coaching with Purpose: Learning Encounters for Educational Change, by Rachel Lofthouse, Trista Hollweck and Jasen Booton, to be published by John Catt

<https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/collectived/>

