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CARNEGIE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



A GUIDE TO DILEMMA-BASED COACHING

COLLECTIVED AND LEEDS LEARNING ALLIANCE



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WELCOME

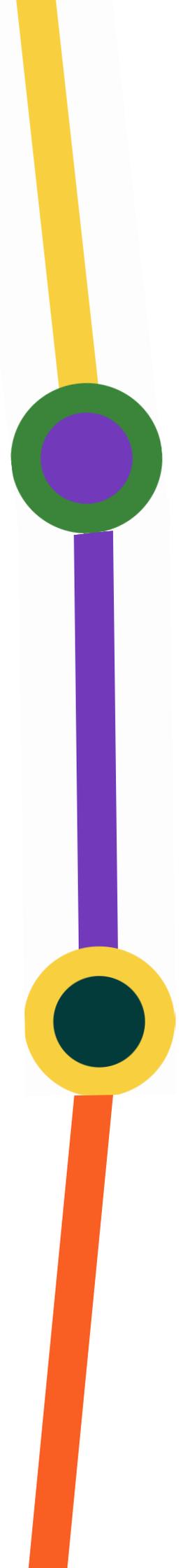
Welcome to this CollectivED and Leeds Learning Alliance (LLA) guide to dilemma-based coaching (DBC). We have been part of a collective journey in developing the use of DBC in education, which has connected ideas and people together over the last few years. In this guide we offer our experiences of developing, engaging in reviewing DBC through the CollectivED / LLA Inclusion Network. It also builds on the origins of dilemma-based coaching from an Erasmus+ PROMISE project and CoachingLab network. Outlines of these projects and names and organisations of key contributors are acknowledged at the end of this guide.

As a reader of this guide, we invite you to engage with the guidance and insights so that you can experiment with the DBC 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.

The perceived impacts of DBC are illustrated through quotations included in this guide. These were gathered during online focus groups with participants in the LLA network which were facilitated by an independent researcher.

There are five parts to this guide:

- Core Ideas of DBC
- Practical guidance for DBC
- From dilemmas to hopefulness
- Reflections
- Further information



CORE IDEAS OF DILEMMA-BASED COACHING

Why focus on dilemmas?

Educators often find themselves in situations that create professional dilemmas. This is because education is complex, contextual, and contingent. As society changes the demands placed on education systems seem to grow, but the resources and capacity in education often lag behind these expectations. There is often a lack of agreement on the purposes of education, and sometimes different activities and priorities in education seem to contradict or even undermine each other. These complexities can create tensions that are felt by the people in the education system including policymakers, stakeholders, teachers, leaders, the wider education workforce, academics, as well as students and their families and carers.

The dilemmas faced by educators do not have easy answers, they are not problems that can easily be solved or passed-on and they cannot be addressed with a quick-fix solution. As professionals, educators are faced with making a choice between a range of options to respond to the dilemmas that emerge in their context or role, knowing that any decision they make is likely to be contingent, and have both advantages and disadvantages. Educators also know that when they respond to dilemmas the circumstances and actions related to the dilemma are likely to need revisiting multiple times as situations evolve over time.

A dilemma is ... (different to a problem)

"A dilemma is something that you think about. So you take your time, you percolate it, you look at all the options. You sort of consider outside views on it, you go around all the different avenues to find the solution. But it's one of those, your lost cause, you know, chasing it down because they matter the most really."

"Whereas some things, the answer's simple, this is the problem, I do x,y and z and that's solved. This person's been doing it longer than me ... and they do it like that, so I'm replicating that person."

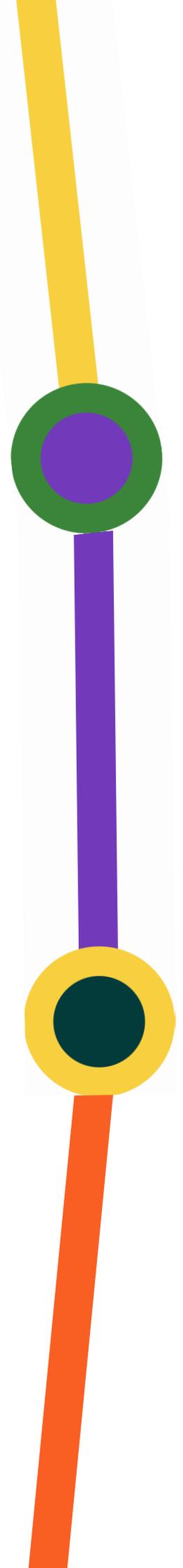
"A problem is something that you need to sort of instantly fix, it needs to be done right away. Whereas a dilemma once you've solved it, it lasts, a legacy for a long time."

Quote from focus group

Recognising a dilemma does not imply fault. Dilemmas in education are persistent and multi-layered, and while they are experienced through the unique lives of individuals their characteristics are rarely unique to the individual situation.

Typical dilemmas relate to:

- meaningful curriculum development and appropriate means of assessing learning,
- tensions inherent in complex organisations and professional communication and management challenges;
- relationships with parents;
- complexities of meeting diverse learning needs;
- the diverse and conflicting expectations that society has of education provision, working within systems of inequality to address bias, vulnerability, and disadvantage.



What is coaching in education?

There are several purposes for coaching in education, including those focused on supporting good classroom practice, developing leadership capacity, and fostering wellbeing. In addition to the varied purposes for coaching, some coaching models are more directive than others, and these can create a greater overlap with mentoring.

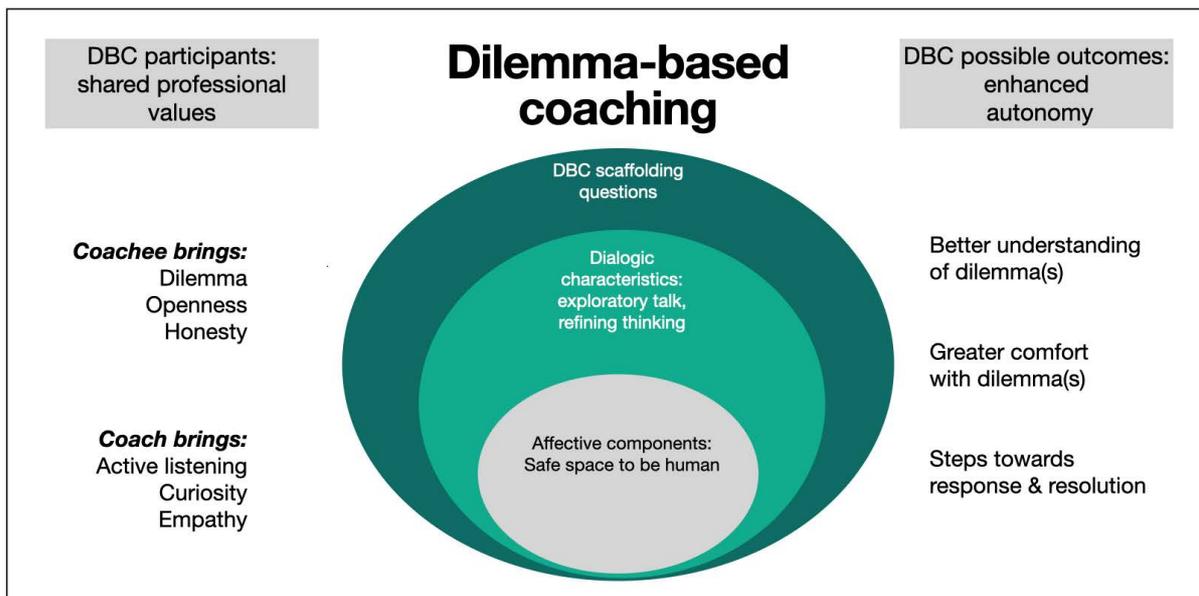
The following bullet points identify critical features of non-directive coaching in education:

- Coaching is a meaning-making, 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.
- Coaching is not the same as training. It is sometimes referred to as an inside-out process, which means that it is led by the coachee and scaffolded by the coach.
- Coaches know that not everyone has the same background knowledge or experience, and their role is to support and enable, not to judge or instruct, others.
- Through coaching dialogue, a coach works with a coachee to facilitate their 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.
- During each coaching conversation, the focus is carefully sustained by the coach. This creates opportunities for the coachee to think and talk without fear of unhelpful interruption or judgement. Through engaged listening the coachee is able 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.
- Where possible coaching occurs over time, with a sequence of encounters, to allow relationships to develop and outcomes and additional challenges to be considered.
- Coaches may have specific professional qualifications or be undertaking a coaching role within an organisation or network. They engage in relevant professional development and learning to help them to gain experience of coaching and reflect on their own practice.
- Coaching conversations can be based on peer approaches and if so, are often reciprocal.

What is dilemma-based coaching?

In dilemma-based coaching the person taking the role of coach supports the coachee to think through a genuine dilemma that they are experiencing.

- During dilemma-based coaching the coach may help the coachee to explore what or who is influencing or impacted by the dilemma, how it makes the coachee feel, how they are approaching it, both individually and with others, and what their responses to the dilemma offer as opportunities for change and professional learning.
- In DBC the coach recognises the curiosities, anxieties, scepticism, and ambitions that coachee experiences in relation to their dilemma. Coaching conversations are therefore always unique.
- The intention of DBC is that it creates opportunities for educators to embrace complexity rather than seek to reduce it. This supports a professional aspiration to learn from and work appropriately when dilemmas emerge. There is less focus on reacting to and resolving a discrete problem (which may be only surface level), and more focus on acknowledging and responding to an authentic dilemma.



PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR DBC

Getting Started - Consent, Questions, Listening and Trust in DBC

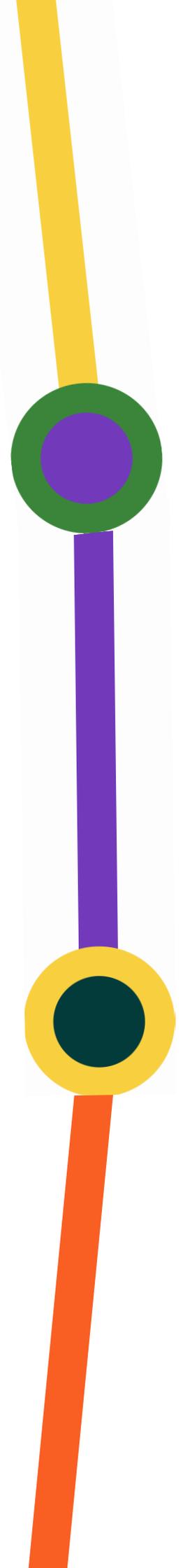
Participation in coaching conversations and networks should be by consent. Central to this is the fact that coaching is not a 'done to' process. It is appropriate to invite colleagues or a wider network to engage in DBC, it is not appropriate to obligate participation.

A classic starting point for a coaching conversation is a framework of purposeful questions, and this is where the work on dilemma-based coaching began. As coaching is an inside-out process the coach needs to let the coachee 'lead' the way but does take responsibility for supporting their thinking. The dilemma should be introduced by the coachee, not assumed, or imposed by the coach.

The coach can support and sustain the focus of the coaching conversation using appropriate questions. The questions below are meant as a scaffold for the coach rather than a script. We do not promote a 'fidelity' concept which would imply that positive outcomes of DBC were dependent on uniform uses of it as a direct intervention. However, it is completely appropriate to use the questions quite closely, especially when new to DBC. It is the case that more fluidity and flexibility develops through experience.

To support the conversation using DBC questions it is useful to think about whether the dilemma that is being discussed is 'emerging' or 'ongoing'. Most dilemmas are likely to be wrangled with over time and may be discussed across a sequence of coaching conversations because they remain live issues and are worthy of reflection on as a source of learning. There are two sets of questions below, and they may have more relevance at different stages of a coaching sequence.

When you are starting a conversation about a dilemma which is emerging or has not previously been discussed, the following questions may be helpful.



Questions likely to help in emerging dilemmas

- What is the dilemma you are concerned with?
- Who does this involve?
- How does the situation make you feel?
- What seems to be influencing what is happening?
- Can you see any opportunities for change?
- How confident are you about your relevant knowledge and experience?
- How can I help you at this point?
- Who else might be worth discussing this with?



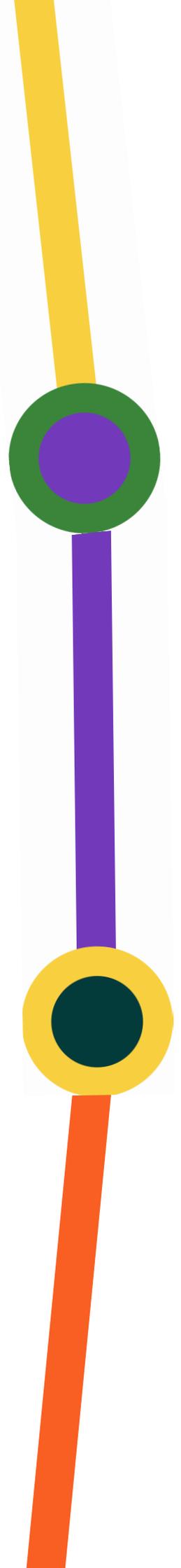
In ongoing conversations about a dilemma or when it has already started to be responded to, the focus may turn to the decisions and actions being taken and the professional learning that is emerging from working through dilemmas. At this stage, the following questions may be helpful.

Questions likely to help in ongoing dilemmas

- Did you try anything new in relation to this dilemma?
- What are you learning about others and yourself as you engage more with this dilemma?
- Do you see things differently at all and if so can you talk about that?
- What might be the legacy of this approach in your setting and practice?
- How might other educators gain insights from your experiences?



Perhaps the most useful advice for coaches is to develop careful and considerate listening skills. This means that questions should be used sparingly to structure thinking and should also be introduced as appropriate based on what is being discussed, rather than in an obligatory order. It is important that the coach allows the coachee to pause along the way rather than feel that they are being hurried along. In our LLA inclusion network meetings we found that a meaningful DBC conversation often took about 20-30 minutes.



Intentional conversation using DBC scaffold and stance

" The questions that the coaches were asking were being asked with a very specific purpose in mind ... to make the coachee think about something specific. It wasn't sort of like asking questions willy nilly with no intention or no purpose, it seemed quite considered on both sides. "

" you have to remember to be like that and that's what you do. You need to consciously think. "

" the dilemma based nature of it helps, because both the coach and the coachee are going into the conversation with the same understanding that you're going to bring your dilemma "

" By the second session, it was almost 'okay we've got the questions now, I might mix up the order a little bit because this question's a bit more appropriate' and then it kind of reduced the scaffold each time. I still think it was needed because you need to kind of have those deliberate questions ... the reliance on the scaffold was reduced throughout the time and confidence in ... using similar questioning. "

Quotes from focus group

A final vital component of getting started with DBC is to gain and maintain trust through the promise of confidentiality.

There are several components of this:

- The coach commits to holding in confidence the details of the conversation with the coachee;
- The coachee ensures that they do their best to maintain the anonymity of others whose role in the dilemma they are discussing;
- When working in a network (such as the LLA) the nature of dilemmas may be discussed within the meetings, with insights from them gained and hopefully translated into the wider contexts and work of participants, but the personal details are not shared beyond the network;
- We acknowledge that giving priority to confidentiality would change in relation to notifiable safe-guarding issues.

Getting Better - Using a Network to Develop Skills for DBC

DBC is an accessible form of coaching, as it has a clear purpose, and coaches can draw on the scaffolding questions and engage in careful listening to get started. However, like all coaching based on professional and interpersonal practice, the real value from DBC comes from the coach developing their skills and becoming actively aware of their coaching stance. This allows the DBC conversations to feel less formulaic. It also means that the coachee is likely to feel more comfortable about the information that they are sharing and willing to embrace their own vulnerability and potential agency in the discussion of the situations that they experience as dilemmas. As most educators have direct experience of mentoring and line management it is easy for them to slip into these modes.

The value of developing coaching in the DBC network

“ the more you do it, the people relaying the dilemma build up their own confidence in expressing themselves and the coach builds up their own confidence in asking different types of questions ”

“ it was quite cathartic at times, being able to have that conversation, but also know that it was in a safe space where nobody was going to be judging you or nobody was gonna be judging the situation, or nobody necessarily even knew the people involved ”

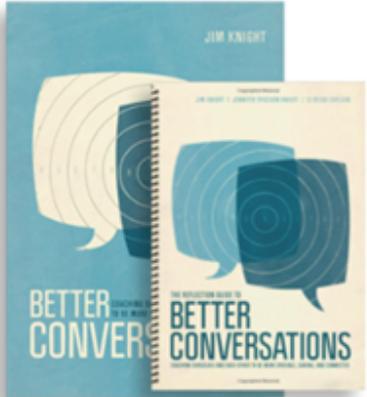
“ the more we practised using those questions, the better people got at it and the more people practise, the better people got at talking about their own dilemma as well [...] and the better people’s questioning became at being able to get to the root of your dilemma quicker ”

“ It felt positive, even though people were talking about quite complex dilemmas at times, and things that really impacting them and really impacting on children. It did feel like a positive space where positive conversations were happening and I definitely left feeling a lot better about some of my dilemmas. ”

Quotes from focus group

In the LLA network all participants shared an interest in both engaging with their own dilemmas through DBC and developing coaching understanding and skills. They wanted to get better over time. The network structure also allowed for 'triad' approaches. Participants often worked in groups of three, with a real DBC conversation being observed by the third person who was able to provide appreciative feedback and help the coach and coachee reflect on their experience. Principles of confidentiality were applied in triads and within the network. The roles in the triads were swapped to allow each participant to experience and learn from each component part of coach, coachee and observer. We created debriefing opportunities to allow participants to provide feedback and consider how their skills were developing.

We found Jim Knight's (2016) work on 'Better Conversations' helpful in the LLA network, helping to keep the coaching stance separate from habits of line management, mentoring or even 'helpful colleague' who might be rather keen to wade in with unsought or ill-informed advice.



Jim Knight's core advice on 'Better Conversations'

- 1. BE CURIOUS:** When we are curious we see a conversation as a living interaction that we co-construct with our partner, not a means to tell someone something or an opportunity to control somebody.
- 2. ASK OPEN, OPINION QUESTIONS:** Open questions elicit unlimited responses and provide the opportunity for an expansive, extended response.
- 3. BE NONJUDGEMENTAL:** When we ask better questions, we do not use questions to make a statement or direct the conversation to the destination we've chosen. We ask the questions because we are genuinely interested.

We also drew on earlier research on teacher coaching by Lofthouse et. al (2010) which highlighted dimensions of coaching conversations and identified key features supporting positive coaching experiences and outcomes. Reflection questions based on the dimensions were useful as light-touch audit tools to consider how the participants were developing their repertoire of coaching dialogue across several key dimensions drawn from the original research:

- the content or subject matter being discussed and the extent to which a focus is maintained, existing knowledge is drawn upon and relevant terminology and language adopted to enhance the professional nature of the conversation;
- the tone of the conversation and the role that both coach and coachee play in an orientation towards a neutral, curious tone which is more advantageous than a negative or glibly positive tone;
- the extent to which the conversational 'turns' are initiated by the coach or coachee, with the coach ensuring that the coaching is 'led' by the coachee, rather than overtly directed by the coach
- the qualities and characteristics of the interactions and intentions of the conversational patterns, ensuring that the coaching does not feel like an interview with one-way questions and responses, that opportunities are taken to extend and clarify contributions, that feedback is only given by the coach when indicated by the coachee that they would find it useful, that areas of tension, uncertainty or dissonance are not overlooked but used as productive stimuli.

DBC: getting better 1

Reflecting on subject, tone and interaction



Subject matter.

What is the subject focus? What knowledge is brought into the conversation? How is language used in relation to the focus?



What is the tone?

E.g. Does the focus on dilemmas lead to a negative tone? When does the tone become neutral or positive? How does the coach support this?



Initiation and interaction?

How are the questions used to scaffold the conversation? Does it feel fluid or formulaic? What other interactions are evident (e.g. explanation, clarification, dissonance?)

Additional coaching dimensions were introduced and were used as qualities to gauge how coaching was progressing as follows:

- the scale of the components of the dilemma being discussed, helping to ensure that the focus is not only individual but that it is situated in a context that includes organisations, colleagues and/or community, and systems often influenced by policy;
- the variations in relevant time or chronological focus of the dilemma, ensuring that past, present and possible futures are all considered, so that the discussion does not get stuck in one disconnected episode;
- the degree to which the quality of the conversation and the level of trust in the coaching relation allows the coach and coachee to engage in genuine co-construction based on developing thinking together, sharing responsibility for ideas that emerge and being testament to the fact that 'two heads are better than one!'

DBC: getting better 2

Reflecting on scale, time and co-construction



Scale?

At what scale is the dilemma and the reflection on it located? Is the focus on individuals, episodes, patterns, policy, systems, society?



Time?

Does the conversation allow reflection on the past, analysis of the present and consideration of the possible futures?



Co-construction?

Are the coach and coachee developing thinking together as they talk?

Reflecting on the Coaching Process

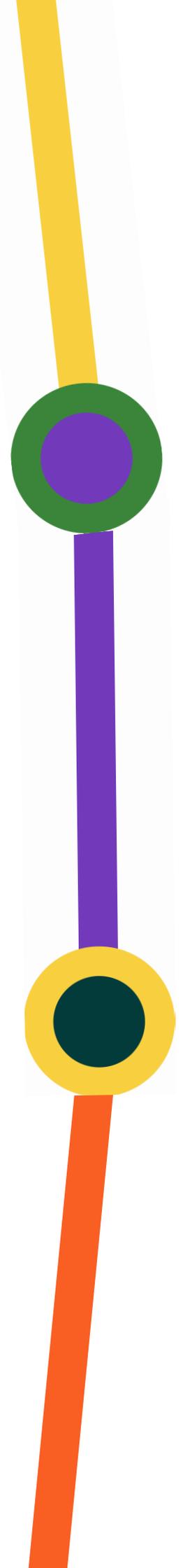
There is no doubt that the best coaches use opportunities to reflect on the ways that they use dialogue to support their coachee's thinking and help them to consider ways forward. In DBC a coach acts with purpose and sensitivity to make in the moment decisions about their role. The following features of coaching were identified in a video-recorded DBC session shared with the LLA network to help their understanding of the coaching approach. These features help to illustrate the coaching dimensions in action:

Opening the DBC conversation

- At the start of the DBC conversation the coach's opening question is an invitation to the conversation and centres the focus on the dilemma.
- The coach summarises the coachee's responses and checks with the coachee to seek clarity.
- The focus on the coachee's emotional response is deliberately situated by the coach, who treads sensitively but allows feelings to be expressed.
- The coach shows that they have been listening and can thread together the information being offered by the coachee.

Continuing the DBC Conversation

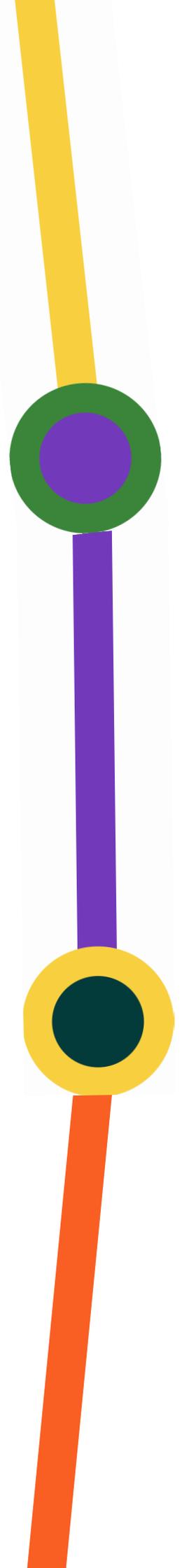
- The coach puts a few related questions together, helping to centre the discussion around the learners, and exploring the relationship between the teacher's response and the learners' needs.
- As the conversation goes deeper the coach offers reassurance that the expression of the dilemma is valid and begins to connect the specificity of it with wider school concerns. They also start to orientate the conversation towards the future.
- The coach focuses in on the coachee's potential role in the future, highlighting their agency, which allows the coach notices a key future action and push for a little more detail.
- The coach uses a deliberate provocation to check intention.
- The coach offers an extended response showing an understanding of the dilemma but attempting to offer solutions. New questions are used to start to build towards co-construction of ideas.



Closing the DBC conversation

- As the conversation ends the coach shares their informed perspective (not judgmental feedback) and ensures that while several next steps have been identified by the coachee these are connected to each other in a way that might aid further sense-making and a pathway to starting to respond to the dilemma.
- The coach offers appreciation and closure of the conversation, with an assurance of the opportunity for future engagement.

These reflections suggest that DBC is not conducted to a script, but that the coach uses the questions in the framework as a scaffold. The coach uses the dialogue with clear intentions, and thus the interaction is purposeful and responsive. The coach encourages the coachee to draw on the past, present and future, as well as to make relevant connections with the context. Direct feedback and instruction are not offered (this would be more akin to line management or mentoring), but the coach is engaged in active sense-making with the coachee. The coach is aware of the sequence of the conversation, almost creating a narrative arc leading from the details of the dilemma to a sense of future direction.

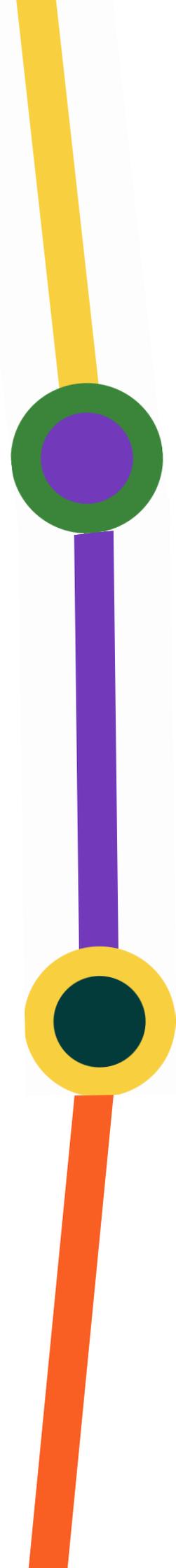


Keeping Going - Maintaining Trust and Creating the Time and Space for DBC

DBC can offer a unique opportunity for teachers and leaders to have powerful conversations, held in and with confidence, and can help create supportive professional relationships based on trust and curiosity, but the promise of coaching is not sufficient. However, it is not uncommon for initiatives such as coaching to fade over time. This may be appropriate, or it may lead to a lack of ongoing opportunities, a feeling of wasted time and effort or initiative fatigue. It can be difficult to keep going, even when there is a feel-good factor. Resources and time are often very tight. Following successful launches and original capacity-building of initiatives sustainability also needs to be considered, including opportunities to further situate or contextualise the approach and contingency planning. Attention has to be paid to keeping it going if the desire is there and this relies on maintaining trust and creating time and space for DBC.

Our experience in the LLA network suggests that despite contrary pressures coaching should not be based on hierarchy, power, or influence. It should be rooted in trust between participants and consent to engage. This means that participating in coaching should be a positive and voluntary choice rather than another expectation on educators. In our experience this meant that the network was sustained over the full year, but with the acknowledgement that some original participants had chosen other priorities for their time during this period. This did not diminish our appreciation of them as professionals or what we had learned from and with them when they were able to commit.

The network itself was based on six two-hour meetings across the year. Part way through the participants were asked whether they would prefer to remain meeting in person or transition to online sessions, and they chose the former. Participants were encouraged to bring real dilemmas and participate in coaching conversations each time they met, with some choosing to remain in the same pairings or groups and continue to discuss ongoing dilemmas across the timespan. It was neither necessary, nor time-effective to run roleplays or mock dilemmas. During each meeting time was also taken to explore new ideas, reinforce what had already been achieved, and address challenges that emerged. Reflection was critical, particularly in considering how the DBC approach was seeping out into their wider work, how it contrasted or overlapped with other practices (including restorative practice, other forms of coaching, mentoring and professional development).



The role of collaboration in the DBC network

" It was a chance to pollinate with different people as well from different schools "

" It offered more opportunities to listen to the other person ... working with more instead of things being done to."

" I really liked working with the other people from all the different places just to realize that it's the same dilemmas, really. You know what I mean? It's people being nervous, people being challenged ... This is what I found really empowering, is that everybody that I met who was involved in the project ... they were all kind of driven to get best outcomes for the pupils. I just really like that whole strategic approach that everyone was coming [at] it with a point of growth and that we want everything to be better for the children. "

" The fact that [my coach] didn't know all the ins and outs of the organisation was a big sort of factor as well because that helped me look at it from a new perspective and what are the basic things and strip it back. Once we did strip it back, we were quite successful in finding the solution. "

Quotes from focus group

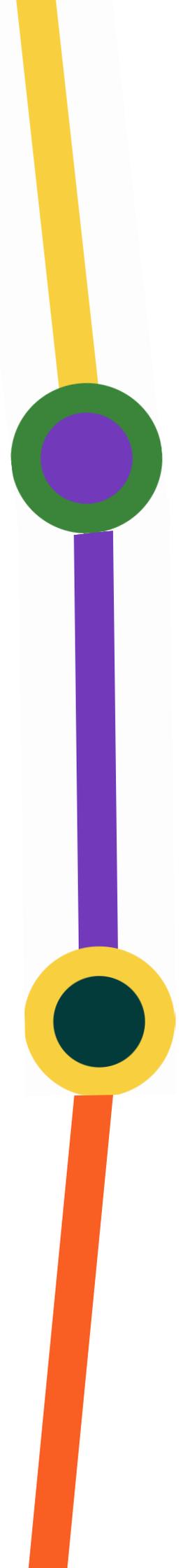
Whether DBC is based in a network or not, keeping going is also based on maintaining trust in each other and appreciating the value that is being gained from the approach. A critical component of this is the ongoing agreement that information shared in coaching is treated confidentially by the coach and not passed on to other people in ways that make it attributable to the coachee. Issues raised by the coachee can, of course, be considered and discussed by them in other situations. Indeed, an intended outcome of DBC is to support the coachee in thinking about with whom, and when, such discussions could be helpful and give them more confidence to share concerns. In addition, DBC conversations could prove useful to participants in gaining awareness of patterns and trends in relation to critical education issues, and thus the coaching conversations can provide professional insights that are relevant in their wider roles.

There is a key role for leadership here, either to enable and encourage DBC within a school or as facilitators of a DBC network. Leaders in this context create the conditions for practices to thrive, giving due attention to where expertise resides, how it can be drawn upon, and who may benefit from an invitation to get involved. Leaders also act as gatekeepers to resources and time, having some capacity to ring-fence and schedule opportunities for DBC sufficiently to discover what its value might be. Leaders also need to learn from participants; ensuring that DBC is not simply a talking-shop activity, but instead can be an experience from which insights are built on by individuals and systems can learn from.

GETTING TO THE HEART OF IT; FROM DILEMMAS TO HOPEFULNESS

This part of the guide to DBC is based on extracts from a CollectivED blogpost published by Leeds Beckett University.

It draws on an open round discussion held with participants of the LLA network in the fifth of six network meetings. This allowed all participants to share their freshest thinking in relation to the approach that they were adopting. The first participant's comment was very interesting. She noted that the dilemma-based coaching approach got quickly to the heart of 'it', with 'it' being the range of inclusion issues (the focus of the LLA network) experienced in her education setting. She contrasted this with other models of coaching which she described as valid but sometimes more laboured, and less compatible with helping the coachee to gain clarity and insight in a timely fashion.

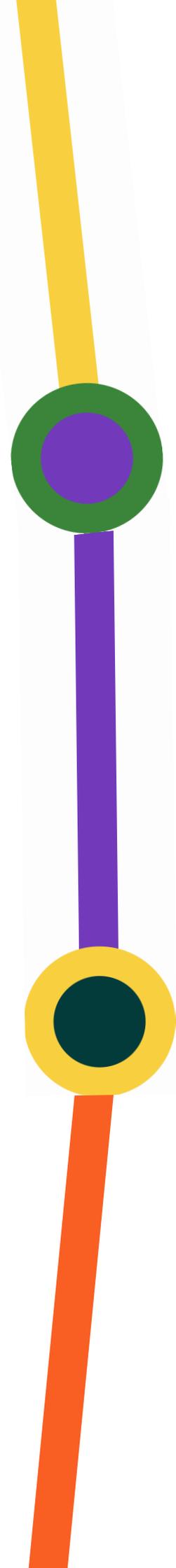


From Instruction to Coaching

In developing their coaching skills, and by taking the role of observers, the participants were conscious of enhancing their listening skills. As teachers and managers, the participants felt that sometimes they were too quick to offer advice or even instruction, instead of creating enabling spaces for others to draw on their own understanding and skills in relation to dilemmas. They recognised that in developing a coaching repertoire they were breaking from these habits and instead opening up a quality space for reflection. They acknowledged how unique the coaching spaces created during the network meetings were compared to the daily rush of school life and the routine debriefings of incidents.

Complexity and Change

The network participants reflected on how the dilemma-based coaching approach had helped them to unpack the complexities and multiple dimensions of the situations they found themselves in and to explore options for change in inclusion practices. They valued the chance to engage in coaching conversations with members of the network who did not work in their schools and did not necessarily inhabit the same professional role. It was felt that this meant that colleagues in the network typically brought no assumptions or bias to the coaching conversations. For example, the working through of the dilemma led to one participant noticing that she was correcting herself as she was talking, and as such identifying more clearly what the circumstances were and then focusing more positively on the opportunities for change that were present.



Positive Thinking

The fact that this quality space encouraged coachees to think positively in relation to inclusion dilemmas was a recurrent theme. Instead of seeing the dilemma as a stubborn problem the coaching conversation encouraged participants to understand it with more subtlety. They found themselves thinking in more depth and detail about the needs of individual pupils and students.

It also led them to recognise that while individual students are unique many of the associated inclusion dilemmas are shared rather than singular. The fact that the coach was neutral, while always curious, meant that while dilemmas may have triggered an emotional response, this was acknowledged but tended not to overwhelm the conversation. Instead, the participants' values, beliefs and ethics seemed to be brought to the fore. The dilemma-based coaching approach was also deemed to be appropriate in helping to establish a balance between reflection and forward thinking. This forward thinking was described as 'planting seeds' which were already bearing fruit in creating new opportunities for inclusion.

Acknowledging values and feelings through DBC

" [The coach] asking me to think about things in a different way or to clarify certain aspects of my thoughts or feelings towards something helped me clarify how I actually felt about something. Was I frustrated about something or was I annoyed about something or was I just feeling passive about something? I think those kinds of questions and scaffolding kind of conversation really helped have that kind of sort of answers to the question. "

" ... talking to somebody that you don't really know ... it can feel quite daunting to ask what it feels like. [That's] quite a big question. "

" am more open and responsive [as a result of engaging in DBC] "

" if it is something that is quite emotive, that those feelings will surface at different times in the conversation depending on, you know if a question has provoked them or if a memory has provoked them or if a kind of clarification has provoked them. ... That question about 'how does it make you feel?' could become really relevant at any point and the good coach might know how to use that well. "

" I think it creates a culture of being able to speak openly. "

Quotes from focus group

Collegiality and Connectivity

In our ever-more online professional world it is worth noting one last characteristic of the network which seemed powerful. The request from participants to retain the in-person regularly scheduled meetings, and the fact that they prioritised their attendance at these demonstrated the value they felt in coming together as professionals, despite the journey through city traffic and the delayed return home that that implied. Being together and using dilemma-based coaching as a form of regular conversation was reported by the participants as having helped them to feel reassured that their own professional experiences are shared, and that the dilemmas they face are not because they themselves were in deficit. Holding the conversations in small confidential groups scattered around the room, with the opportunity to share the key issues that emerged created, what was described as, a lower-stakes scenario than the experiences that some of them had of line management, mentoring or coaching conversations conducted behind closed doors in schools and without the opportunity for shared reflection. They valued the expertise that each other brought as colleagues and coaches. They recognised that they were asking and being asked appropriate thought-provoking questions by people who could readily understand the terminology that was being used and the substantive nature of the contexts and communities in which each teacher worked.

Changing perspectives through DBC

" It makes such bigger impact when you yourself come up with the solution and having a coach to facilitate that. It's like when you do the experiment for the pupils or they find out the answer for themselves. They remember how much more clearly than if you just give them that knowledge. And it's a similar kind of feeling, isn't it? "

" it opens up your eyes to this new way of coaching and bringing up, allowing people to facilitate their own solutions "

" it's showing staff how to work together to answer that problem themselves "

" asking questions and giving space so people can think about it a little bit more themselves "

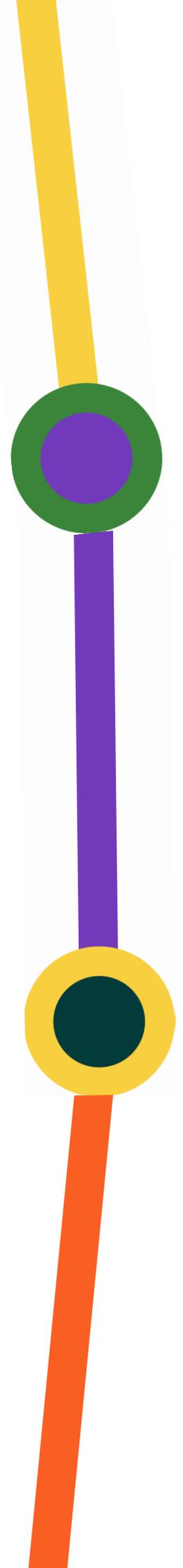
Quotes from focus group

" You come in with a dilemma, but you leave with a degree of hope. "

From Woeful to Hopeful

Perhaps the most positive note, and one which was first highlighted by an individual in the thinking round but consolidated by others as they too reflected on the experience, was one of 'hopefulness'. While the sources of the coaching conversations were the authentic dilemmas that the educators brought into the space, the structure of the coaching conversation meant that the conversation wasn't woeful but instead became hopeful. The teachers, leaders and teaching assistants grappling with the dilemmas of inclusion found participating in the network and the adoption of a dilemma-based coaching approach both in the network and rippling out into their own settings as a professional opportunity to create hope.

It is hard to overstate how affirming creating hope is.



REFLECTIONS

These reflections and discussion points may be helpful in considering the potential of DBC in your own work or context.

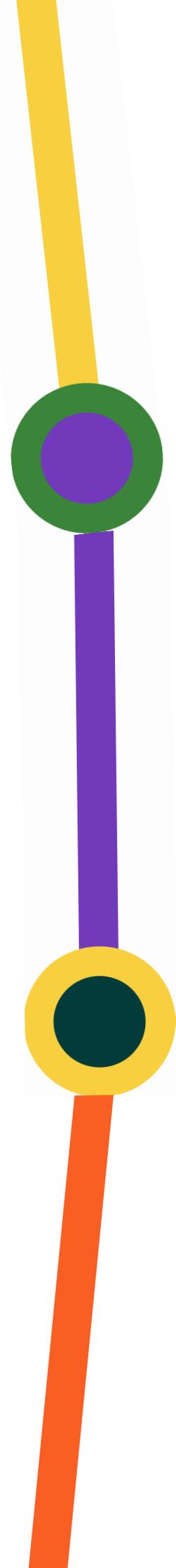
Reflections from the LLA network project

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.

In DBC the nature of the conversations can change how the dilemmas are perceived. DBC participants have reflected that the coaching provided a space to step away from seeking unsustainable quick fix solutions and helped them to resolve related anxiety. Coaching allowed 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.

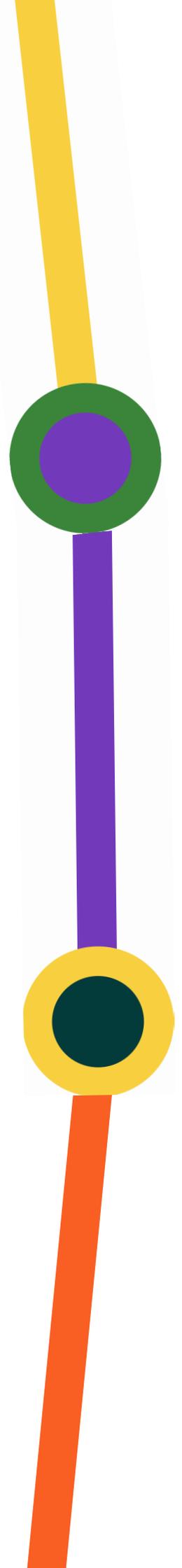
When it is working well coaching offers a unique opportunity for teachers to have personalised and formative conversations about their own work. Coaching can help educators to create supportive professional relationships based on trust and curiosity. Coaching can re-connect teachers with each other, with a sense of purpose and perspective and with their potential. 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 DBC coaching opportunities can be a fine balance of leadership. Micromanagement can be an obstacle to building trust in the process. Leaders can positively engage in networks, but need to be aware of power structures that may act in contradiction to the desired benefits. Creating DBC networks, which break down some of the common silos in education can be helpful in opening up new conversational avenues, generating authentic curiosity and a sense of professional empathy and shared capacity.



Reflections for Your Setting

- Drawing on the reflections above it is valuable to consider what approaches you have available to you, or that make available to others which might create similar outcomes to those identified above. What potential DBC might have in your context?
- You may also use this as an opportunity to consider what other forms of coaching are familiar to colleagues or common in your setting. How might these compare and contrast with DBC?
- If you are thinking of introducing DBC you should also start to think about how you can judge its value without creating a battery of new audits or surveys. How will all voices be heard, and who will take responsibility for learning from the information emerging?
- Do you or colleagues have experience of initiative fatigue or fade? What has been successful in the past in building longer term opportunities for positive change?
- Are there any existing networks or communities that exist which staff engage in which DBC may be a valuable additional approach?



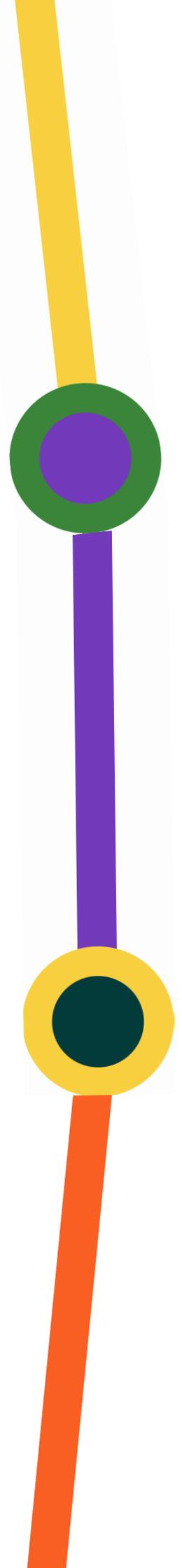
FURTHER INFORMATION

Origins of DBC

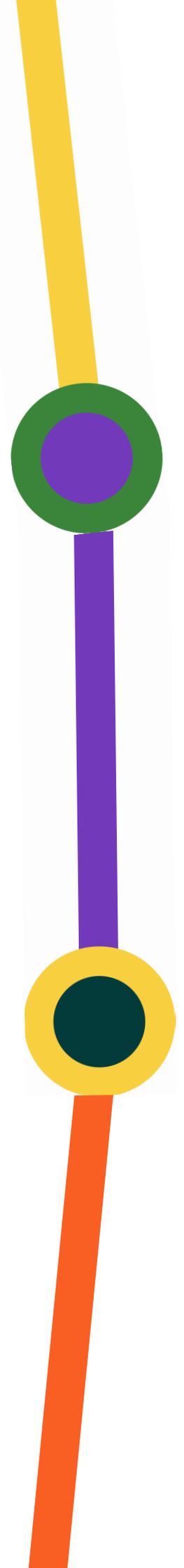
The purpose of the Erasmus+ PROMISE project in which DBC was first developed and used was to design professional development approaches which recognised that working with dilemmas creates opportunities for learning, growth, and the capacity for educators to become agents of change in their educational setting.

Dilemma based coaching (DBC) was developed through an Erasmus+ project, called PROMISE 'Promoting Inclusion in Society through Education: Professional Dilemmas in Practice' in which colleagues from CollectivED were partners and which was led by Leeds Beckett University. The European partners in PROMISE were based in England, Scotland, Slovenia, Netherlands, Hungary, and Germany. The focus of PROMISE was the professional development of educators and the promotion of high-quality and innovative teaching in a range of educational sectors, with a recognition that many of the challenges or professional dilemmas facing educators are embedded in issues related to inclusion. DBC was designed and introduced towards the end of the three-year project, it truly emerged rather than being part of the initial project plan. By this time, the pandemic lockdowns were occurring, so DBC was first trialled at an online European learning event for teachers, teacher educators and leaders from across a range of education phases and roles. It gave them the opportunity to engage in coaching-type conversations which were stimulated by sharing a specific dilemma related to inclusion that they were experiencing.

Two more sustained developmental opportunities then emerged to engage with a wider range of educators, over more sustained periods to help them become familiar with DBC and to allow research and evaluation of the approach. The first was called CoachingLab and involved an online network of educators in the UK, drawn from all phases, who met bi-monthly in four 'gatherings'. During these gatherings they were first introduced to DBC and then had multiple opportunities to use and discuss it together, with facilitated data gathering related to their experience and perceptions of its value. The dilemmas brought to these gatherings were wide-ranging, extending the use of the approach beyond its origins in inclusion.



The second opportunity was a year-long professional development and networking project hosted by Leeds Learning Alliance and CollectivED which brought together teachers, teaching assistants and leaders with specialist inclusion roles in half-termly in person meetings. Their shared focus was the acknowledgement and desire to address the complexity and dilemmas of inclusion, and they worked actively together to bring real situations to their DBC conversations, and to use these to surface areas of concern and uncertainty and to consider their capacities to respond well in their roles. Once again, the participants in this network helped us to further enhance our understanding of DBC and gain a sense of it as a professional practice with potential for impact.

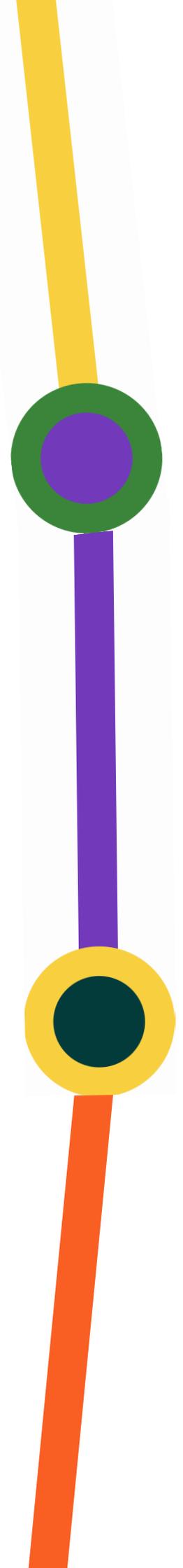


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It builds on the origins of dilemma-based coaching from an Erasmus+ project and CoachingLab network, the outcomes of which were analysed by Sarah Cornelius, formerly of Aberdeen University, and Professors Mhairi Beaton and Rachel Lofthouse of Leeds Beckett University.

We acknowledge the participation, feedback, and support of the wider LLA and CollectivED communities.



REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

There are two CollectivED blogposts on DBC:

[www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2021/04/
exploring-and-learning-from-educational-complexity/](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2021/04/exploring-and-learning-from-educational-complexity/)

[www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2023/03/
coaching---from-dilemmas-to-hope/](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2023/03/coaching---from-dilemmas-to-hope/)

You can access a range of coaching resources at the CollectivED website. Use this website to register to watch a free webinar on DBC which includes a recording of a genuine coaching session:

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

In the network we found ideas from two additional texts helpful:

Knight, J. (2016) Better Conversations: Coaching Ourselves and Each Other to Be More Credible, Caring and Connected, Corwin.

Lofthouse, R., Leat, D., and Towler, C. (2010) Coaching for teaching and learning: a practical guide for schools, CfBT Education Trust, Retrieved from

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/media/wwwnclacuk/cflat/files/coaching-for-teaching.pdf>

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/>

