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**Using Socratic questioning in the
facilitation of asynchronous discussions
in an online CPD course for educators**

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Using Socratic questioning in the facilitation of asynchronous discussions in an online CPD course for educators

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Co-researcher

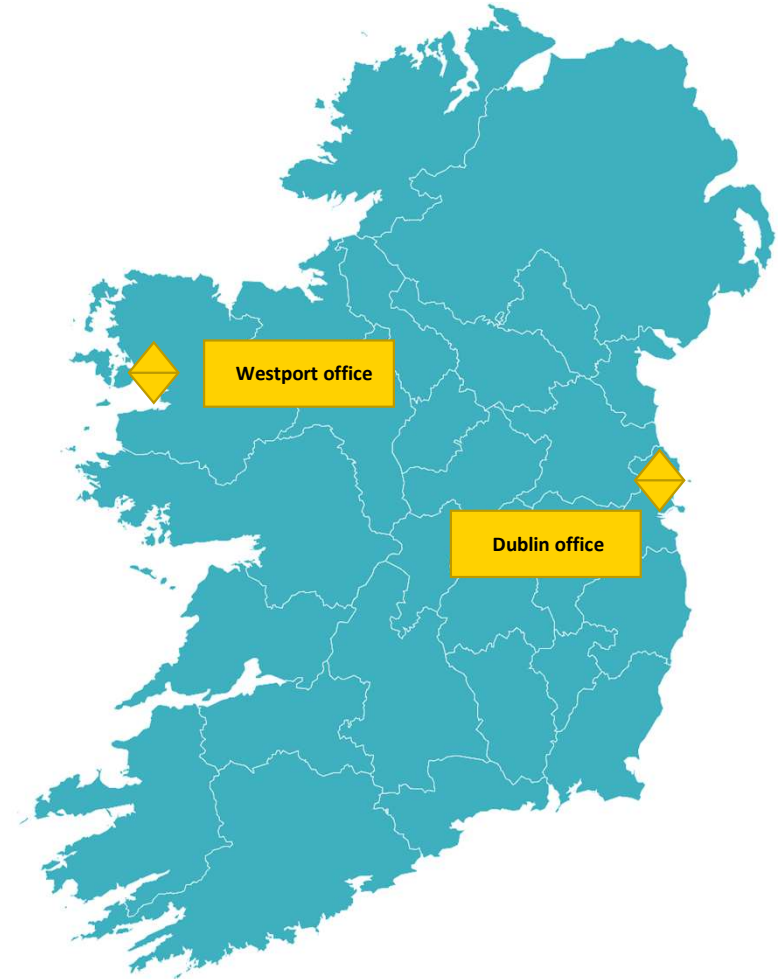
Dara Cassidy, former Director of Online Learning at Hibernia College



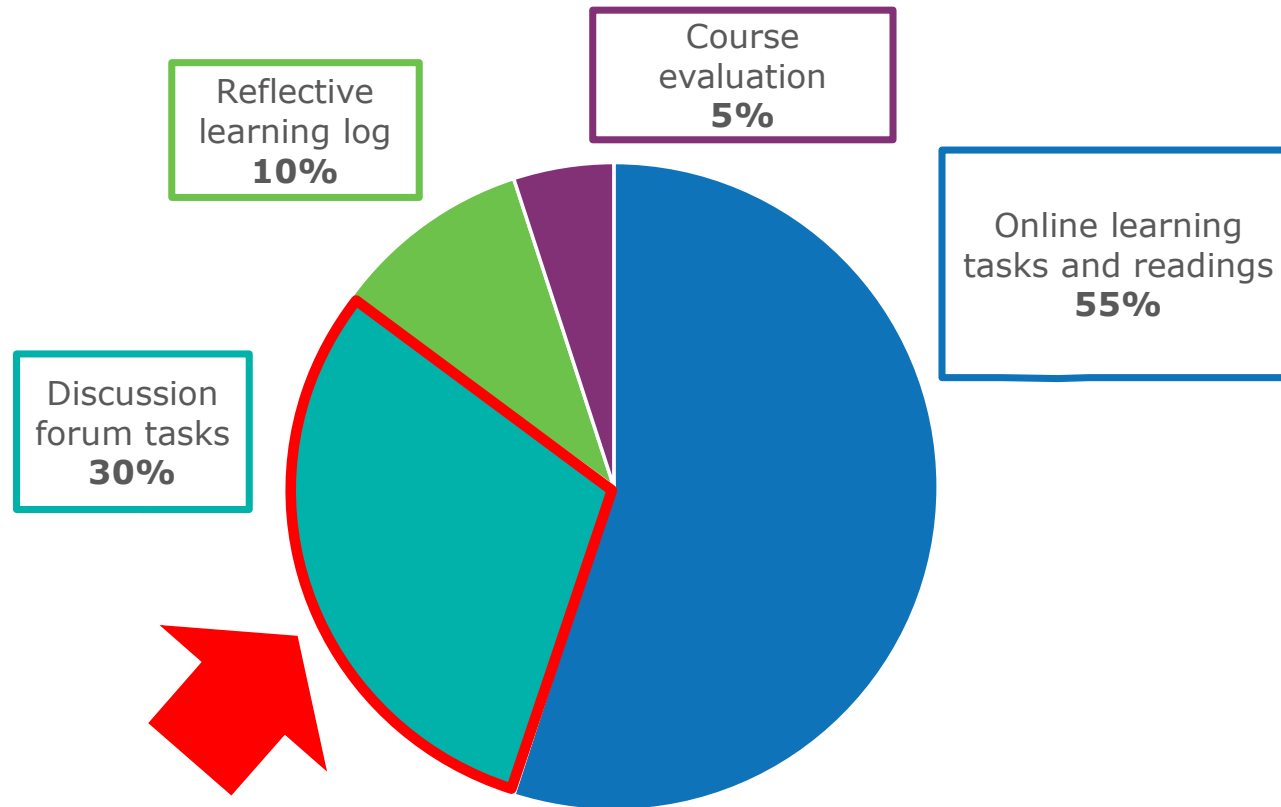


HIBERNIA COLLEGE

- Professional Master of Education in Primary Education
- Professional Master of Education in Post Primary Education
- CPD courses for teachers



CPD courses for teachers




Asynchronous discussion forums

Benefits:

- Time (Murphy and Coleman, 2004)
- Considered responses (Newman et al., 1997)
- Very process of writing helps to carefully construct their ideas (Vonderwell, 2003)

Standard facilitation approach

- Welcoming participants
- Thanking them for their contributions
- Summarising the key points of their post
- Inviting participants to comment on posts
- Suggesting resources



Relationships

by [redacted] - Monday, 2 July 2018, 5:03 PM

[redacted] a chara,

Thank you for starting off this discussion by posting the first post and by sharing your thoughts on the essential difference between leading and managing a school. In essence, you have identified **RELATIONSHIPS** as the key distinction, that an effective leader can establish, maintain, develop and nurture relationships in addition to managing the school. I invite other participants to respond to this great insight by sharing their own thinking and experience.

Míle buíochas!

[redacted] course Tutor.

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Critical thinking

Definitions

“ The intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and/or, evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action

(Scriven & Paul, 1992)

Socratic questioning

To promote and enhance critical thinking

Thinking is driven not by answers but by questions. (Elder & Paul, 1998)

Approaches:

- Responding to all questions with another question
- Treating all assertions as connecting points to further thoughts
- Treating all thoughts as being in need of development



Types of Socratic questions



Type
Questions about the question
Questions of clarification
Questions that probe assumptions
Questions that probe reasons and evidence
Questions about viewpoints or perspectives
Questions that probe implications and consequences

Research questions

1

Does Socratic questioning produce evidence of enhanced critical thinking in the contributions of those participating in forum discussions?

2

Does facilitation using Socratic questioning encourage participants to engage with the discussion forum in excess of the mandatory requirement for contributions?

3

Is there a difference in participants' perception of the effectiveness of the Socratic approach to facilitation compared to the standard approach?

4

What are the facilitators' perspectives on the use of the Socratic questioning method in comparison to their usual facilitation style?

Research: groups



Primary teachers and post-primary teachers studying Leadership in Education CPD course

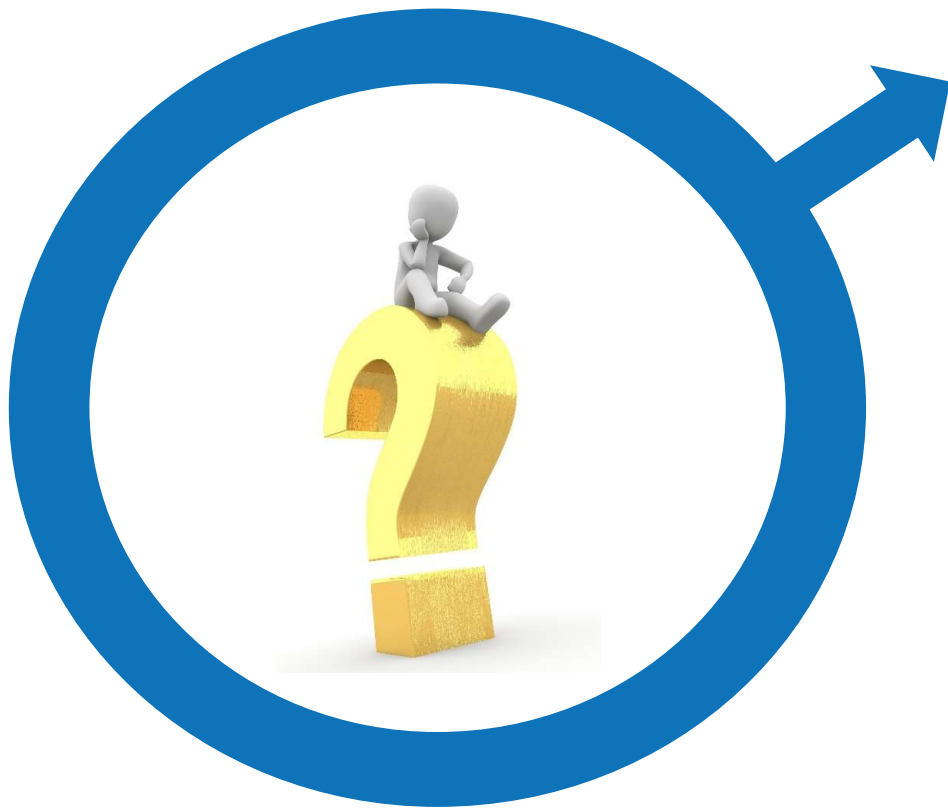
Control group

Participants who began and completed their course during the *first* two weeks

Experimental (Socratic questioning) group

Participants who began and completed their course in the *final* two weeks

Discussion forum questions



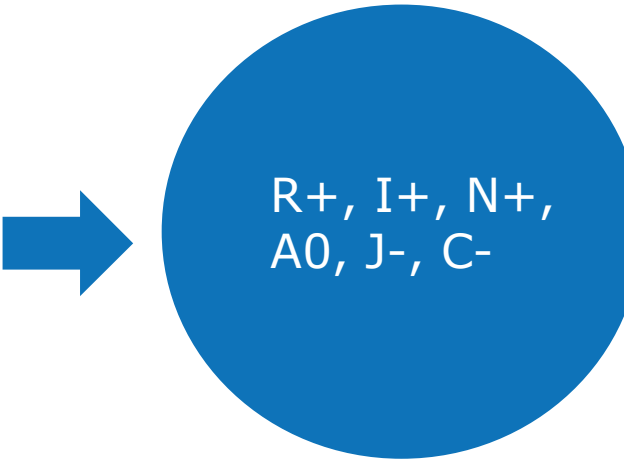
What are the main differences between a principal 'managing' a school and 'leading' a school?

In your opinion, does the size of a school affect leadership? How?

Many teachers struggle with change. Is there anything school leaders can do to make changes more palatable to staff, especially if this change is external?

Research: measures and data analysis

Analysis Model for Analysing Depth of Critical Thinking	
CT Indicator	Tag Codes
Relevance	R+
	R-
Importance	I+
	I-
Novelty	N+
	N-
Accuracy	A+
	A0
	A-
Justification	J+
	J-
Critical assessment	C+
	C-



R+, I+, N+,
A0, J-, C-

Table based on Yang et al (2005)

Research question (1)

1

Does Socratic questioning produce evidence of enhanced critical thinking in the contributions of those participating in forum discussions?

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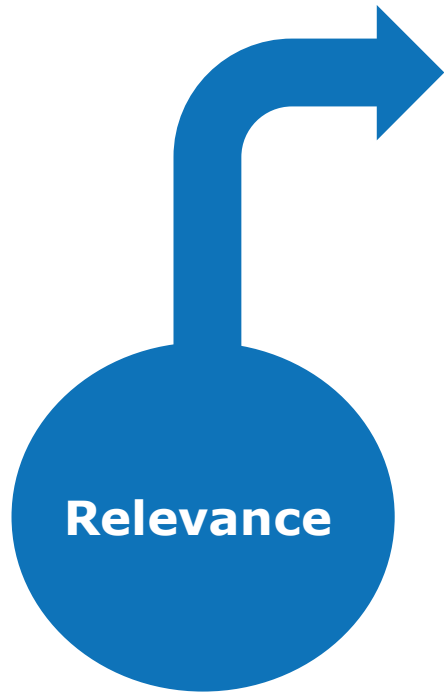
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Is there a difference in participants' perception of the effectiveness of the Socratic approach to facilitation compared to the standard approach?

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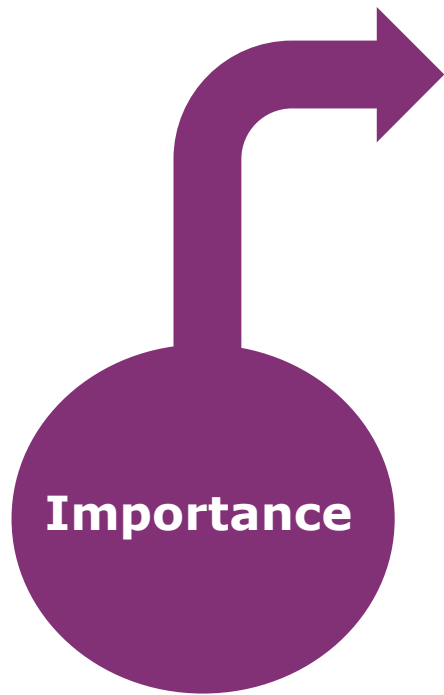
What are the facilitators' perspectives on the use of the Socratic questioning method in comparison to their usual facilitation style?

Results: depth of critical thinking



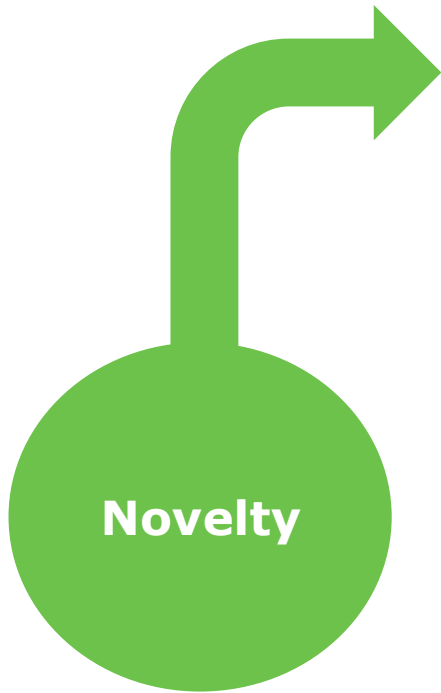
		Socratic Questioning Group (n=73)		Control Group (n=109)	
	Tag Code	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio
Relevance	R+	73	1	106	0.94
	R-	0		3	

Results: depth of critical thinking



		Socratic Questioning Group (n=73)		Control Group (n=109)	
	Tag Code	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio
Importance	I+	72	0.97	106	0.94
	I-	1		3	

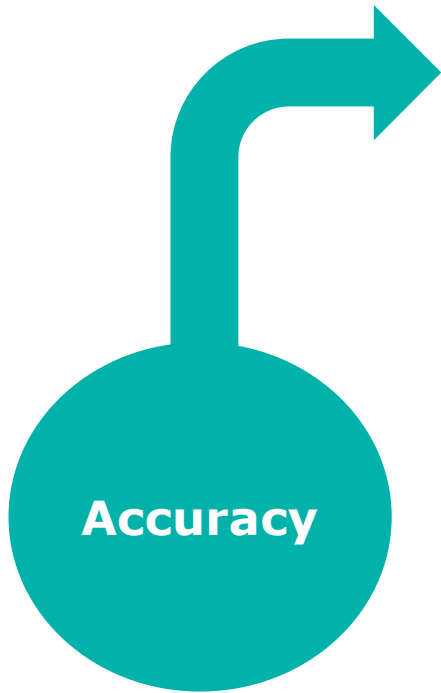
Results: depth of critical thinking



		Socratic Questioning Group (n=73)		Control Group (n=109)	
	Tag Code	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio
Novelty	N+	48	0.32	57	0.05
	N-	25		52	

'I feel that all too often the pressure schools experience from external forces, more often than not 'blinds' true teaching/learning and leadership/motivation strategies suited to a given school/class/pupil.'

Results: depth of critical thinking



		Socratic Questioning Group (n=73)		Control Group (n=109)	
	Tag Code	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio	Number of Codes	
Accuracy	A+	5	1	11	0.83
	A-	0		1	
	A0	68		97	

6.8%
93.2%

10%
90%

Results: depth of critical thinking



		Socratic Questioning Group (n=73)		Control Group (n=109)	
	Tag Code	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio
Justification	J+	17	-0.58	23	-0.53
	J-	56		86	

Results: depth of critical thinking



		Socratic Questioning Group (n=73)		Control Group (n=109)	
	Tag Code	Number of Codes	Depth of CT Ratio	Number of Codes	
Critical Assessment	C+	6	-0.84	11	-0.80
	C-	67		98	

Research question (2)

1

Does Socratic questioning produce evidence of enhanced critical thinking in the contributions of those participating in forum discussions?

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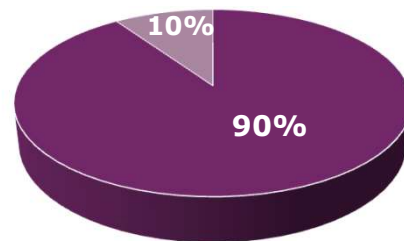
4

What are the facilitators' perspectives on the use of the Socratic questioning method in comparison to their usual facilitation style?

Levels of engagement

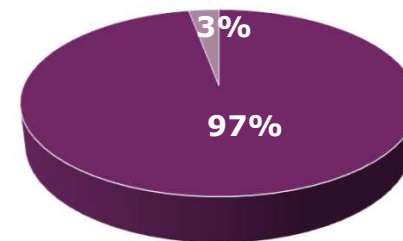
	Control group	Socratic group
Total participants	52	34
Total participant posts	109	73
Participants with two posts	47 (90%)	33 (97%)
Participants with three posts or more	5 (10%)	1 (3%)

Control group



- Total Participants with 2 posts
- Total participants with 3 or more posts

Socratic group



- Total Participants with 2 posts
- Total participants with 3 or more posts

Research question (3)

1

Does Socratic questioning produce evidence of enhanced critical thinking in the contributions of those participating in forum discussions?

2

Does facilitation using Socratic questioning encourage participants to engage with the discussion forum in excess of the mandatory requirement for contributions?

3

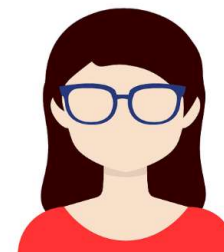
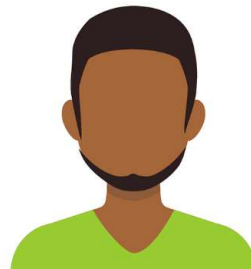
Is there a difference in participants' perception of the effectiveness of the Socratic approach to facilitation compared to the standard approach?

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What are the facilitators' perspectives on the use of the Socratic questioning method in comparison to their usual facilitation style?

Participant feedback

Participant feedback	Control	Socratic
Q6: The tutor ably led the learning and ensured there were good levels of engagement.		
Strongly agree	64%	67%
Agree	31%	33%
Neither agree nor disagree	4%	0%
Disagree	1%	0%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%



Research question (4)

1

Does Socratic questioning produce evidence of enhanced critical thinking in the contributions of those participating in forum discussions?

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What are the facilitators' perspectives on the use of the Socratic questioning method in comparison to their usual facilitation style?

Facilitator feedback: positive (1)

- How did you find the process of facilitation using Socratic questioning?
- Was it much more work than standard facilitation?

...there was less thinking involved from my point of view because I was really focused on the particular content of each of the posts...



...one of the strengths of the Socratic approach is making use of what the teachers are bringing to the process. It gives us an opportunity to develop those lines of thinking...

The fact that it is driven by what the teachers are contributing also made it a little bit more motivating for those who actually respond to it...

Facilitator feedback: positive (2)



Stimulated discussion with probing questions...

Generated more considered and lengthy responses ...

Fostered a greater sense of a shared learning environment...

Gave an opportunity to engage in that critical thinking and reflective practitioner piece...

Facilitator feedback: negative (1)

...a somewhat disjointed discussion...

So there is a certain mind set and a certain expectation that we were trying to disrupt really...two posts are not going to be sufficient to go into any depth of Socratic questioning



Facilitator feedback: negative (2)

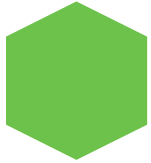
...new participants arriving all the time so the potential for Socratic questioning diminished a little bit because the group we have in front of us all the time is changing...



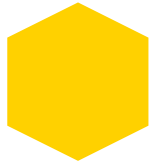
...a need to be sensitive to participants ...struggling with a balance between posing those questions...while at the same time trying to keep a comfortable, affirming environment...

...a culture of niceness...

Limitations



Short course, no accreditation associated with it



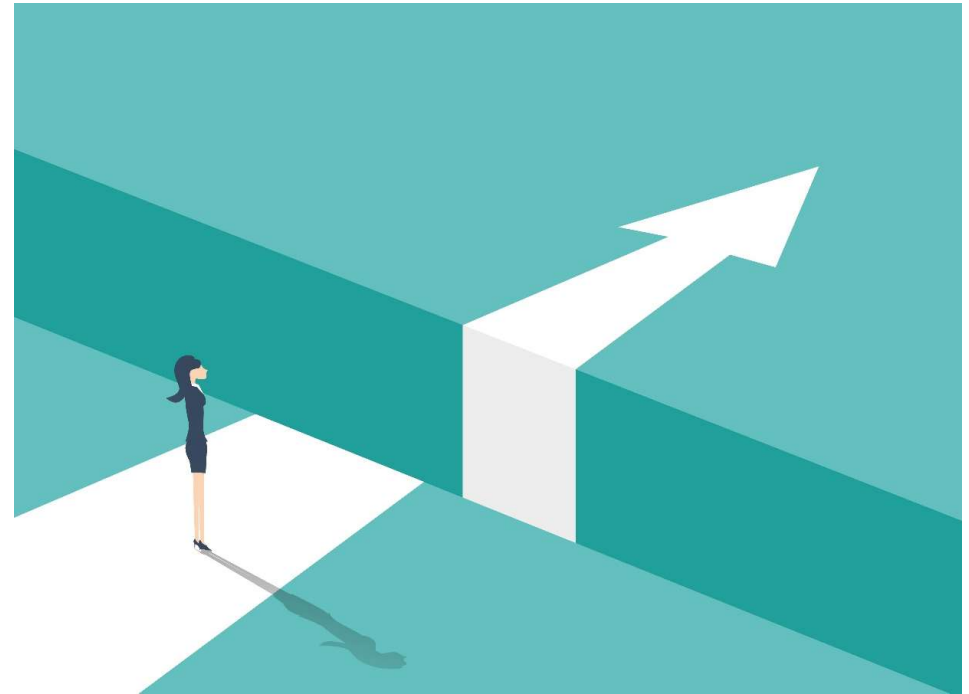
Small sample size so far



No flow analysis of discussion threads



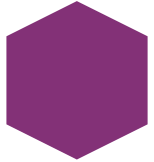
Convenience sample, included only those who gave consent



Recommendations if using Socratic questioning



Consider the length and level of the course.



Involve participants in the approach and inform them of the need to demonstrate critical thinking in their posts. Spend some time outlining how it works and what is expected of them.



Explain that if a question is directed to them in a post that they are expected to respond to it.



Invite participants to adopt the Socratic approach in their responses to fellow participants' posts.



Remember that Socratic questioning is useful to advance discussion and to reduce repetition, even if it doesn't always enhance critical thinking.

thank you

