Ideas for Promoting Critical Thinking

One of the primary goals of clinical education is to promote critical thinking and problem solving. "Critical Thinking" is a broad term that can encompass a variety of skills. Try to move beyond basic "recall" questions (name the rotator cuff muscles), and consider using some of these questions/strategies to facilitate a STRONG set of critical thinking skills in your students!

Comprehension (Understanding): to convert information into a form that is personally meaningful, i.e., that makes sense to the individual who is learning it.

Paraphrasing: How would you put _____ into your own words?

Illustrating: What would be an example of _____?

Application: to apply abstract or theoretical principles to concrete, practical situations.

How can you make use of _____?

How could _____ be put into practice?

Analysis: to break down or dissect information into its component parts in order to detect the relationship among the parts or the relationship between the parts and the whole.

Prioritization: What are the most important/significant elements of _____?

Deconstruction: What assumptions/biases underlie or are hidden within _____?

Compare/Contrast: What parts of _____ would be similar to/different than _____?

Synthesis: to build up or connect separate pieces of information to form a larger, more coherent pattern.

Integration: How can this idea be combined with _____ to create a more compete or comprehensive understanding of _____?

Classification: How can these different ideas be grouped together into a more general category?

Evaluation: to critically judge the validity (truth), morality (ethics), or aesthetic (artistic) value of ideas, data, or products by using relevant assessment criteria (standards for judging quality).

How would you judge the accuracy or validity of _____?

How would you evaluate the ethical (moral) implications or consequences of _____?

Deduction: to draw conclusions about particular instances that are logically consistent with or derive from general principles and premises.

What specific conclusions can be drawn from this general _____?

If this general _____ were true, then it would logically follow that _____.

What particular actions or practices would be consistent with this general _____?

Adduction: to make a case **for** an argument or position by accumulating supporting evidence in the form of logical arguments (rational thinking) or research evidence (empirical reasoning).

What are logical arguments for _____?

What research evidence supports _____?

Refutation: to make a case **against** an argument or position by accumulating contradictory evidence in the form of logical arguments (rational thinking) or research findings (empirical reasoning).

What are logical arguments against _____?

What research evidence contradicts _____?

Balanced Thinking: to carefully consider arguments/evidence **for and against** a particular position or viewpoint.

What are the strengths/advantages and weaknesses/disadvantages of _____?

What evidence supports and contradicts _____?

Multiple Perspective-Taking: to view an issue from a variety of viewpoints, standpoints, or positions in order to gain a more comprehensive and holistic understanding.

How might people from different cultures view this _____?

How might people who differ in age or gender react to _____?

Causal Reasoning: to identify cause-effect relationships between different ideas or actions.

How would you explain why _____ occurred?

How would _____ affect or influence _____?

Creative Thinking: to generate imaginative ideas, unique perspectives, innovative strategies, or novel (alternative) approaches to traditional practices.

What might be a metaphor/analogy for _____?

What could be invented to _____?

What might happen if _____?

Incorporating open ended questions such as these in a non-threatening way can take the critical thinking that occurs during a clinical experience to a whole new level. These questions (and their responses) also allow a CI and student to identify where errors in problem solving are occurring to effectively focus teaching.

Make it a personal CI growth goal to try at least one new category of critical thinking question with your student each week!

Written by Kim Cox, ACCE at Bossier Parish Community College Spring 2017 and used with permission