**INTRODUCTION**

According to Glaser, the process of critical thinking comprises a persistent effort to analyze any accepted form of knowledge in the light of new evidence that supports it or challenges it for further analysis. It begins with the ability to recognize problem with the existing knowledge, belief or assumptions then goes on to find workable means of solving the problem. This process includes collection of empirical evidence and then to state the unstated assumptions and values with clear descriptions in understandable language. Clarity and accuracy of interpreting the data is the key to convince those who stand strong on the already constructed knowledge. It is not at all an easy task to cohesively appraise evidence and evaluate arguments, to recognize the existence (or non-existence) of logical relationships between propositions, and then to carefully draw warranted conclusions which are not over generalized. The critical thinkers are ready to put the conclusions and generalizations to test before reconstructing one's patterns of beliefs, and they examine closely before they move on to render judgments about specific things phenomenon of life.

(Edward M. Glaser, An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking, spoken at

Teacher’s College, Columbia University, 1941)

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After completion of this unit you will be able to

1. Understand the origins of critical approaches in social sciences

2. Describe how this phenomenon developed in the field of education

1.1 ORIGINS OF CRITICAL APPROACHES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

Critical thinking is not a new concept. It goes back to at least the known etymology of Socrates’ vision of teaching and learning; which goes back not less than 2500 years ago. In those times the method of question-answers and questioning the existing beliefs was a unique mode of critical thinking. Socrates recognized the fact that one cannot rely upon those in "authority" to have complete knowledge and insight. He established that people may have power and high position but still can be intensely confused and irrational. He enhanced the importance of asking profound questions that probe deeply into thoughts before we establish a belief. His method of questioning is now known as "Socratic Questioning" and is the best known strategy of critical thinking teaching so far. In his manner of questioning, Socrates marked the need of deep thinking for clarity and rationality.

Socrates’ practices were followed by the critical thinking of Plato, Aristotle, and the Greek thinkers, all of whom emphasized that reality is often very different from what it appears to be and that only specially trained minds are prepared to perceive it the way it appears on the surface (delusive appearances) to the way it is beneath the surface (the deeper realities of life). From this ancient Greek tradition emerged the need, for anyone who desires to comprehend the deeper realities, must think systematically, and draw proposition broadly and deeply because only this is the way to go beyond and beneath surface level observation.

In early middle ages philosophers like Al-Farabi and Thomas Aquinas continued the tradition of systematic critical thinking. Al-Farabi is known with the honorific "the Second Master", after Aristotle. According to Al Farabi Human beings are exceptional in the universe because they are positioned between two worlds: a "higher"-immaterial world of the heavenly and universal intelligibles, and a "lower"-material world of generation and decay. Each level of existence in Al-Farabi's cosmology is characterized by its movement towards perfection, which according to him is possible through “constant intellection and contemplation”. Similarly systematic critical thinking was embodied in the writings and teachings of Thomas Aquinas (Sumna Theologica) who heightened the awareness not only of the potential power of reasoning but also of the need for reasoning to be systematically cultivated and "cross-examined." Of course, Aquinas’ thinking also illustrates that those who think critically do not always reject established beliefs, only those beliefs that lack reasonable foundations.

In the Renaissance (15th and 16th Centuries), a torrent of scholars in Europe became active in thinking critically about religion, society, human nature, and law. Their assumption was that most of the domains of human life were in need of searching analysis and critique. Among these scholars were Colet, Erasmus, and Moore in England. Francis Bacon, in England, was explicitly concerned with the way we seek knowledge. He recognized explicitly that the mind cannot safely be left to its natural tendencies. In his book The Advancement of Learning, he argued for the importance of studying the world empirically. He laid the foundation for modern science with his emphasis on the information-gathering processes.

In France, Descartes is the one who gave rebirth to critical thinking in his text be called the Rules for the Direction of the Mind. In it, Descartes argued for the need for a special systematic disciplining of the mind to guide it in thinking. He maintained that there is a need in thinking for clarity and precision. He developed a method of critical thought based on the principle of systematic doubt. In the same time period, Sir Thomas Moore developed a model of a new social order, Utopia, in which every domain of the present world was subject to critique. The critical thinking of these Renaissance and post-Renaissance scholars opened the way for the emergence of science and for the development of critical theory as we find it today.

In the Italian Renaissance, Machiavelli’s The Prince critically assessed the politics of the day, and laid the foundation for modern critical political thought. Hobbes and Locke in 16th and 17th Century in England displayed the same confidence in the critical mind of the thinker that was found in the writings of Machiavelli. Hobbes adopted a naturalistic view of the world in which everything was to be explained by evidence and reasoning. Locke defended a common sense analysis of everyday life and thought. It was in this spirit of intellectual freedom and critical thought that people such as Robert Boyle in the 17th Century and Sir Isaac Newton in the 17th and 18th Century did their work. Eighteenth Century thinkers extended the horizons critical thought even further. Applied to the problem of economics, it produced Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations. In the same year, applied to the traditional concept of loyalty to the king, it produced the Declaration of Independence. Applied to reason itself, it produced Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason.

In the 19th Century, critical thought was applied to the domain of human social life by Comte and Spencer. Problems of capitalism, and economic critique of Karl Marx are the examples of 19th century work; similarly Darwin’s Descent of Man; works of Sigmund Freud on Psychoanalytic Theory.

In the 20th Century, our understanding of the power and nature of critical thinking has emerged in increasingly more explicit formulations. In 1906, William Graham Sumner published a land-breaking study of the foundations of sociology and anthropology, Folkways, in which he documented the tendency of the human mind to think socio-centrically and the parallel tendency for schools to serve the (uncritical) function of social indoctrination. He mentioned "Schools make persons all on one pattern, orthodoxy. School education, unless it is regulated by the best knowledge and good sense, will produce men and women who are all of one pattern, as if turned in a lathe” (p. 630). He highlighted the urgent requirement of critical thinking by stating:

The critical faculty is a product of education and training. It is a mental habit and power. It is a prime condition of human welfare that men and women should be trained in it. It is our only guarantee against delusion, deception, superstition, and misapprehension of ourselves and our earthly circumstances. Education is good just so far as it produces well-developed critical faculty.... Education in the critical faculty is the only education of which it can be truly said that it makes good citizens” (pp. 632, 633).

John Dewey agreed to this and he also focused more on developing thinking skills rather than merely transfer of knowledge. Similarly from the work of Piaget, we get the awareness of the egocentric and socio-centric tendencies of human thought and of the special need to develop critical thought which is able to reason within multiple standpoints, and to be raised to the level of "conscious realization." From the contribution of depth-psychology, we have learned how easily the human mind is self-deceived, how easily it unconsciously constructs illusions and delusions, how easily it rationalizes and stereotypes, projects and scapegoats. Hundreds of thinkers have contributed to the development of critical thought. Yet for most educational purposes, it is the summing up of base-line common denominators for critical thinking that is most important.

The result of the collective contribution of the history of critical thought is that the basic questions of Socrates can now be much more powerfully and focally framed and used. In every domain of human thought, and within every use of reasoning within any domain, it is now possible to question:

. ends and objectives,

. the status and wording of questions,

. the sources of information and fact,

. the method and quality of information collection,

. the mode of judgment and reasoning used,

. the concepts that make that reasoning possible,

. the assumptions that underlie concepts in use,

. the implications that follow from their use, and

. the point of view or frame of reference within which reasoning takes place.

http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/a-brief-history-of-the-idea-of-critical-thinking/408

**ACTIVTY 3**

After reading how the critical thinking was developed and found a required process

for learning now see how would you critically analyze the news piece you chose

What is your critical question to the news?

What are people saying about it?

What is the relevant evidence you found?

What is your conclusion about it?

Put your conclusion out at a social network like face book for open discussion…

**1.2 CRITICAL THEORY IN EDUCATION**

Critical Theory in Education has emerged from the wider discipline of sociology, and focuses at the ways in which political ideology shapes Education as a way of challenging or maintaining existing scheme of privilege and social control within educational planning like any other social sector. It cross-examines the social, cultural, political and economic context of compulsory education to demonstrate how education is serving the dominant cultural interests in any society by developing generations whose members are unable to question or challenge the status quo, and merely accept the dictation they are given by any “Authority”. It took a special turn in twentieth century by building up the assumption that society as it is currently constituted under Capitalism is basically unjust, and exploitative. It maintains that those normative values through which societies are operating and organizing must be challenged and changed if human beings are to apprehend their full potential. Drawing from sociological, psychological and anthropological evidence, critical theory advocates that a better society is possible, but can only be achieved through fundamental changes in values and dispositions, rather than cosmetic changes in the discourse, but that this change can occur within the life opportunities of each individual who is allowed to practice freedom. Its critical analysis is thus directed towards those structures and mechanisms which create and maintain the hegemonic normative values of society and through them the power status quo. The critical theorists soon found their way into the studies of education that were taking place in the mid of twentieth century.

Critical theory in education thus throws a critical eye upon the history, the development and practice of education and educational contextualization. It holds that education in the modern world is shaped by the ideologies and power structures that devolve from all previous and current schools of thought i.e. Socialism, Capitalism, and etc. The critical theorists hold that the education in its current form serves to reproduce these conditions in ways which benefit the already-powerful. Critical Education Theory strives to promote an ideology of education as an instrument of social transformation and as a means of attaining social, cultural, and economic equity. Initially, it did this from Marxist point of view, but gradually has adopted many of the doctrine and theories of Cultural Studies to reveal how cultural codes play a primary role in both curriculum development and classroom practices. The field of critical theory in education hence covers a wide range of Social and Educational issues – the Context, Curriculum, the pedagogy or teaching style, the role of the State, the influence of corporate powers, the as well as the issues of Cultural and Individual Identity etc.

Source: http://www.tonywardedu.com/critical-education-theory/a-history-of-critical- education-theory