

Analysis of the Extent to which Critical Thinking is Promoted in Examination Questions in the History High School Matriculation Examination Papers of Australia and Croatia

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Abstract

High school leaving matriculation examination papers are taken by final year high school students and contribute to university entrance in both the countries of Australia and Croatia. A hierarchical critical thinking taxonomy was developed based on similar taxonomies in existing literature in order to research the questions in the History high school matriculation examination papers of Australia and Croatia respectively in terms of critical thinking. The examination questions were where necessary translated into English and then classified according to this taxonomy and the results are displayed according to the level of critical thinking demanded in these examination papers. The similarities and differences in the findings between the examination paper questions of the two countries in terms of critical thinking were compared and closely studied. Based on these results, conclusions and implications for further consequences of matriculation examination results, for example, university entrance, teaching, learning and good citizenship were then examined.

Keywords: critical thinking, examination questions, taxonomy

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to categorize the examination questions of two comparative school leaving subjects; the 2009 Australian Victorian Certificate of Education examination paper in history and the 2010 Croatian *Matura* Matriculation examination paper in history according to a model of critical thinking. This model of thinking was influenced by the various critical thinking taxonomies which contain obvious overlapping in the levels of thinking which constitute critical thinking. (Paul, 1996)¹

2. Rationale

The elements by which I propose to categorise the school leaving examination questions would best be summarised by Anderson and Krathwohl's² revision of Bloom's taxonomy (1956)³ of critical thinking.

My suggested model is the following hierarchy with item 6 classified as being at the highest level of critical thinking down to item one which is the lowest level of critical thinking.

1. Creating producing new arguments, ideas and heuristic solutions inspired by output of given information.
2. Assessing Assessing given information, providing valued judgements about information, with justifiable reasons.
3. Analysing Interpreting information determining the causes and consequences of information
4. Applying Comparing and contrasting both previous and given information
5. Understanding Demonstrating understanding of pre-learned and given information by explaining
6. Remembering Providing pre-learned information and facts.

¹ Paul

² Anderson, Lorin W and Krathwohl, David R 2001 *A Taxonomy for learning, Teaching and Assessing: a Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy*. New York. Longman

³ Bloom, B. S. (ed.) (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the classification of educational goals – Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* New York: McKay 37Huitt, W. (2009). Bloom et al.'s taxonomy of the cognitive domain. *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. Retrieved [date], from <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/cogsys/bloom.html> 38Langrehr J (2005) *Assessing Creative and Critical Thinking* Hawker Brnlow

This model seems to best summarise what critical thinking skills are in an hierarchical form and seem to be the most logical for the kind of document analysis of examination questions that I am proposing. It can be applied easily in particular to questions, as it is questions in particular that I will be categorising in terms of the critical skill demanded. As Bloom purports, creative thinking together with high levels of critical thinking require highest levels of brain activity.⁴

Precisely, I pinpointed what each question in the examination is demanding in terms of my taxonomy's skills. I categorised the skills asked by the questions in term of my taxonomy and then I will display in graphical form the frequency of each asked skill. If more than one skill is demanded from the question, I noted both and specify whether the question demanded one or more skills and what those skills are. Therefore, the number of questions was specified as well as what skill/s is/are being asked in each question.

3. Description of Examinations

3.1 Croatia Matura History examination paper 2010. School year is from September to June.

The examination paper is comprised of:

Part 1: 1-20. 20 Multiple Choice questions with A, B, C and D options which consist of a single word. One question has a map as input and one question has an illustration as input.

Part 2: 21-30. 10 Sentences of Fill in the Gap with the Missing Word Task.

Part 3: 31-37. 6 Multiple Choice questions with the options comprised of historical events sequences.

Part 4: 38.1-50.4. 13 Matching Tasks, each one containing 4 matches. Matching given historical events, eras, historical items or people with other phrases, or matching phrases with marked areas on a map or illustrations.

Part 5: 50.1- 60.3. 31 questions. Answer each question with a word or term based on an input map or illustration.

Each correct answer is worth one point. Total number of points: 119

Duration of examination: 90 minutes

3.2 Australian VHC History examination paper 2009. The school year is from January to December

The examination comprises four sections as follows;

Section A: In response to an illustration or excerpt from a text and drawing on knowledge gained from studying history in school, students answer 3 questions in written, complete sentences, paragraph form. 20 marks made up of question 1ai worth 2, 1a ii worth 4 marks, 1aiii worth 6 marks, and 1aiv worth 8 marks.

Section B: Drawing on knowledge from a chapter in the high school history textbook, students answer 3 questions in written, complete sentences, paragraph form. 20 marks made up of 2a worth 4 marks, 2b worth 6 marks and 2c worth 10 marks.

Section C: Write an essay choosing from 3 given topics worth 20 marks.

Section D: Choosing one of and based on one of 4 given documents/ illustrations, and simultaneously based on a chapter of the high school history textbook, students respond to a question in written, complete sentences, paragraph form worth 20 marks.

Total number of marks: 80

Duration of examination: 120 minutes with 15 minutes reading time.

3.3 Categorisation of questions

Categorisation of the examination questions will be based on the above suggested critical thinking scale with item 6 classified as being at the highest level of critical thinking and one is the lowest..

Croatia History Examination
N.B. Questions 1-20, and 31-37 have given options A-D from which students choose their answer. Questions 3,9, 14, 20,41, 43, 44,48, 49,51.1-51.352.1-52.3,54.1-54.3, 55.1-55.3, 56.1-56.3,57.1-57.3,58.1-58.3,59.1-59.3, 60.1-60.3 have input based on a map, picture or text excerpt

⁴ Bloom, B. S. (ed.) (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the classification of educational goals – Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* New York: McKay

Question	Rating On Critical Thinking Scale
1. Of the following, what is the most significant invention of the Mesolithic age?	
2. Which class of Romans contributed the most to the Romanisation of Illyrian areas?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
3. What is the name of the group of nations whose emigration is displayed on the map?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
4. Which Roman Emperor established the first Roman province within contemporary Croatian territory?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
5. What is the name of the port of the city of Athens?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and 1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
6. In which principality did Cyril and Method act as opposition against German influence?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
7. In what kind of union were Croatia and Hungary after the year of 1102?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
8. Which period of central Europe's history is characterised by the renewed slave-monetary economy?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
9. Which crusade war resulted in the division of the Byzantine Empire as displayed on the map provided ?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
10. Which battle was Croatia's biggest defeat in its war of defence against the Turks?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
11. Which political body in the year 1792 proclaimed France as a Republic?	
12. Under which political pressure did the Croatian governor Ivan Erdödy defend Croatian municipal rights with the statement <i>Regnum regno non proscribit leges</i> („The kingdom does not prescribe the law to the kingdom“)?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
13. In Zagreb in 1794, who set up "a printing press to publish Illyria books"?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
14. Which ruler tried to Europeanise his tribe by acting in the way shown in the picture?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
15. Which of the following Croatian political issues remained unresolved during the 19th century until the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
16. Which of the following countries was the first to come out of World War I?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
17. With which political party did the Croatian Peasant Party start a coalition in the year of 1927?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
18. By which document was the opposition with Vlado Maček as its head united against the October Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
19. Today what is celebrated in the Republic of Croatia on May 30th?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
20. What period of European history characterises the political division shown on the map provided?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
21. The Roman Colony in the Valley of the Neretva River was called _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
22. The cradle of humanity is the continent of _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
23. The wars which led to the crisis of the survival of cities- states (<i>polis</i>) in Ancient Greece are _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
24. In the period of the developed Middle Ages, support for rulers in strengthening centres of power was offered by the population of _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
25. The Venetians lost territory by peaceful means from Kvarnera to Drač in 1358 in _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information

26. The first Croatian railroad, in use from 1862, through Zagreb linked the towns of Zidani Most and _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
27. The Second Reich or Second German Empire was proclaimed on 18th January, 1871 in _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
28. Antifascist Day is celebrated in Croatia on 22nd June to commemorate the formation of _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
29. The most well known person who was a victim of an orchestrated political trial in post-communist Yugoslavia was Zagreb Archbishop _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
30. The beginning of the fall of Communism in Europe started in November 1989 with the fall of the _____.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
31. Which of the following sequences determines the correct chronological order of the use of these materials?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
32. Which of the following sequences correctly determines the chronological order of the work of Athenian reformers?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
33. Which of the following sequences correctly determines the chronological order of the rule of the governors of the Principality of Croatia?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
34. Which sequence correctly determines the correct cause-consequence order of events related to the Reformation?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
35. Which sequence determines the correct chronological order of the events of national formation in Croatia in the 19th century?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
36. Which sequence determines the correct chronological order of events in the process of the Unification of Germany?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
37. Which sequence determines the correct chronological order of the following conferences at the time of World War II?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
38. Match the research items with their historical associated science.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
39. Match the persons 1-4 with their achievements marked A-F.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
40. Match the following Croatian historical literary works with their authors.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
41. Carefully examine the map of Croatian territory at the time of the conflict with the Turks. Map	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
42. Match the rulers 1-4 with the appropriate events from A-F at the time of their rule.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
43. Carefully examine the map and the travel paths marked by numbers 1 to 4 and match them with the appropriate explorer.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
44. Carefully examine the front pages of newspapers. Match them with the period of their inception.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
45. Match the political and military alliances 1-4 with their members from A-F.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
46. Match the Croatian political parties from the 19th century 1-4 with their political leaders from A-F.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
47. Match the political events 1-4 with the appropriate year and country from A-F.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
48. Carefully examine the historical map of Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinian territory before World War I. Areas in the map marked 1-4 match with the administrative legal statuses marked A-F.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
49. Carefully examine the historical map of the division of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the beginning of World War II. Match the areas marked 1 to 4 with their political –territorial status marked A-F.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
50. Carefully examine the historical map from the time of World War I. Match the areas marked from 1 to 4 to the military actions marked A-F.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information

51. Carefully examine the picture and answer the following questions.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
51.1. What is the name of the building shown in the picture?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
51.2. Name the civilisation which first erected such buildings.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
52. Carefully examine the historical map of the Roman Provinces and answer the following questions.	
52.1. Which Roman Emperor made this administrative-territorial division of the territory as shown on the map?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
52.2. Which town was the main business and administrative centre of <i>Druga Panonija (Panonie Secunde)</i> ?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
52.3. What is the name of the form of power in the division of the Empire into 4 prefectures with 4 joint rulers?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
53. Carefully examine the picture of the remains of the historical town before Columbus discovered America and answer the following questions	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
53.1. Which nation before Columbus built this town?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
53.2. What is this town called?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
53.3. Which script did this nation use?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
54. Carefully examine the historical map of the Mediterranean in the early middle ages and answer the following questions	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
54.1. Which nation's conquests and expansion is shown in this map?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
54.2. Which military general stopped their further expansion into Western Europe?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
54.3. What was the name of their country on European soil?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
55. Read the excerpts from this original historical text and answer the following questions.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
55.1. When and where was the ecclesiastical parliament held, for which this letter was meant?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
55.2. In which language were the holy rites held by order of this parliament?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
55.3. Which person was in opposition by the decision of this parliament?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
56. Carefully examine the historical source from the second half of the 19th century and answer the following questions.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
56.1. Following the signing of which legal and political document was this pamphlet published?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
56.2. What year was that document signed? _____	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
56.3. Which language in which the document was published became the official language in Croatia?	V
57. Carefully examine the given illustration and answer the following questions.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
57.1. What is the name of the international institution symbolised by this logo?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
57.2. The victims of which war were the catalyst for the foundation of this organisation?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
57.3. What is the name and surname of its founder?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information

58. Carefully examine the historical map of Croatian territory in the 18th century and answer the following questions.	
58.1. During which rule did such a territorial- administrative division exist?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
58.2. What is the name of the body of power under the rule of which was Croatian territory represented by number 1?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
58.3. Which three counties were reinstated then?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
59. Carefully examine the historical map of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and answer the following questions.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
59.1. What is the name of the Constitution according to which the map showing the division of territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes called?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
59.2. What kind of politics was legalised by that Constitution?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
59.3. By which royal union was the displayed territorial division of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes dissolved?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
60. Carefully examine the photograph taken from the time of the Homeland War and answer the following questions.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
60.1. The destruction of which Croatian town is shown in the photograph?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
60.2. On which date was this town occupied?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information
60.3. What are the places of the massacre of Croatian soldiers and citizens of this town called?	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information

Australia History: Australian History Written Examination
N.B.

All questions request reference to specified various chapters from the high school history textbook.
Questions 1 and 4 are based on input illustrations or an excerpt from a text.

Question	Rating on Critical Thinking Scale
1. Section A contains two documents – Document A and Document B. For Question 1 you are to answer all questions for EITHER Document A or Document B. The question is based on Unit 3 Outcome 1: A new land: Port Phillip District/Colony of Victoria 1830–1860. 1.a/b.i. Identify two changes, as illustrated in this image, that the arrival of European settlers brought to the Aborigines in the Port Phillip District.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information 2 marks
1.a/b.ii. Identify from the document two pieces of evidence that show Melbourne was a bustling settlement in 1852.	1. Remembering and providing pre-learned facts and information 4 marks
1.a/b.iii. Identify and explain two observations made in the document that illustrate the social attitudes of many gold rush immigrants.	1. Understanding Demonstrating understanding of pre-learned and given information by explaining 6 marks
1.a/b.iv. Evaluate the impact of European settlement on Aboriginal communities in the Port Phillip District/ Colony of Victoria.	2. Understanding Demonstrating understanding of pre-learned and given information by explaining 8 points
2. Answer the following questions relating to Unit 3, Outcome 2: Nation, race and citizen 1888–1914. In each case you must support your views with specific information and evidence. 2.a Explain two ideas that underpinned the creation of the new nation.	2. Understanding Demonstrating understanding of pre-learned and given information by explaining 4 marks
2.b Discuss to what extent the benefits gained and the responsibilities accepted by women as citizens of the new nation differ from those of men	2. Applying Comparing and contrasting both previous and given information 6 marks

2.c Evaluate the extent to which legislation introduced between 1901 and 1914 achieved the hopes that had led to the creation of the new nation.	2. Understanding Demonstrating understanding of pre-learned and given information by explaining 10 marks
3. In essay form answer either a. , b. or c. for Question 3. This question is based on Unit 4, Outcome 1: Testing the new nation 1914–1950. a. 'Australian society did not change significantly during World War I.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? OR b. 'Divisions in society virtually disappeared during the crisis of the Great Depression.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? OR c. 'For many Australians World War II provided new experiences and opportunities for change.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?	5. Assessing Assessing given information, providing valued judgements about information, with justifiable reasons 20 marks
4. Analyse one of the documents, commentaries or quotations in the insert relating to Unit 4, Outcome 2: Debating Australia's future 1960–2000. Your response should include • identification of the attitudes reflected in the representation. Use evidence from the representation to support your comments • evaluation of the degree to which the representation reflects attitudes about the issues that you have studied at that particular point in time • analysis of changing attitudes in relation to this issue. To support your comments, use evidence from the other point in time that you have studied.	5. Assessing Assessing given information, providing valued judgements about information, with justifiable reasons 4. Analysing Interpreting information determining the causes and consequences of information 3. Applying Comparing and contrasting both previous and given information 2. Understanding Demonstrating understanding of pre-learned and given information by explaining 20 marks

4. Research Results

Comparison between the analysis of the two countries' school leaving examinations questions in terms of critical thinking can be more clearly viewed by comparing the numerical results and the graphical illustration of results viewed side by side.

Legend

- Ct 1 = critical thinking level 1 remembering
- Ct 2 = critical thinking level 2 explaining
- Ct 3 = critical thinking level 3 applying
- Ct 4 = critical thinking level 4 analysing
- Ct 5 = critical thinking level 5 assessing
- Ct 6 = critical thinking level 6 creating

Australia

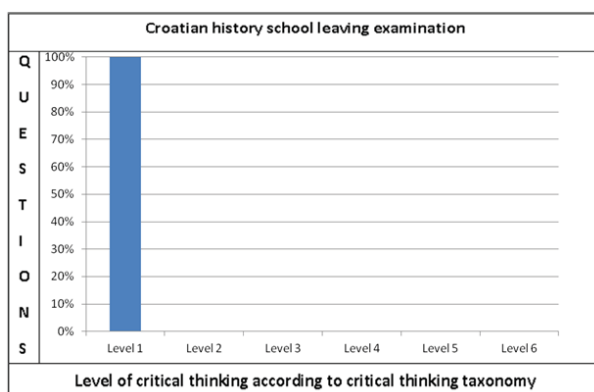
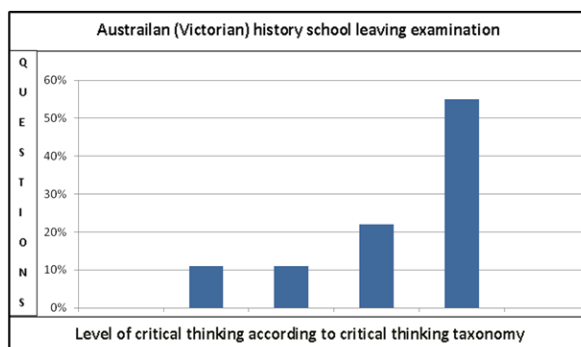
Ct 1	Ct2	CT3	CT4	CT5	CT6	Total number of questions
0	2	1	1	5	0	9
0%	22.22 %	11.11 %	11.11 %	55.55 %	0	100 %

Croatia

CT 1	CT 2	CT 3	CT 4	CT 5	CT 6	Total number of questions
62	0	0	0	0	0	62
100%	0	0	0	0	0	100%

5. Comparative Graphical representation

5.1 History



6. Analysis of Results

The Croatian history examination had a high, in fact sole concentration of a single low level critical thinking skill at level one which involves providing pre-learned facts as its aim. The Australian history examination questions demanded higher levels of critical thinking. One could conclude that there is a huge difference between what is demanded of students in terms of critical thinking skills between Australia and Croatia.

It was interesting to note that the skills from the Australian paper were intertwined within questions which meant in one question demanded the demonstration of more than one skill within the same question.

The Croatian history paper's questions all asked for the same skill, i.e. remembering pre-learned information. One mark was awarded for each correct answer and was therefore commensurate with the level of skill, that is weighting of marks equalled the demanded skill.

In the Australian history paper, the questions demanded a variety of critical thinking skills and marks varied, mostly hierarchically in keeping with the level of skill required, that is lower level demanded critical thinking skill was awarded lower mark, higher demanded critical thinking skill was given higher marks, but not always.

Interestingly, creativity was not included as a separately demanded skill in either examination paper. Awarding marks for creativity might be difficult and subjective for an examination such as this which is designed to rank students for entry into university.

There is a considerable difference in the types of answers sought. The Australian paper's answer must be in written, complete sentences, paragraph form. The Croatian paper's answers consist of multiple choice, a single word or phrase or mix and match. Does this reflect what skills and competences are taught in the respective schools?

7. Conclusion

It is obvious that questions that promote higher levels of critical thinking skills are represented more in Australian history examination matriculation paper than in the Croatian one. One recommendation stemming from this research is that higher level critical thinking skills need to be promoted more in the Croatian history paper. This is more the case in the Australian history paper. However, more work needs to be done on the Australian history marking scheme to make allocation of marks more commensurate with the level of critical thinking skill. Further research would be interesting to determine on the extent to which this reflection of critical thinking skills in examination papers is also a reflection of what is taught in class.

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