Investigating Inquiry-Based Learning in an Introductory Course on Semiconductor Devices

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Presented at the Third Annual Research and Scholarship in Engineering Education Poster Session. 10/14/08.

Hypothesis

Fundamental concepts on semiconductor materials and devices can be taught in an improved manner through inquiry based learning and just-in-time teaching methods. We expect students’ motivation to increase when we start with subject matter that is familiar to them; and we link new concepts to the familiar through student-led exploration. We reveal the underlying physics of devices such as transistors and diodes through inquiry. Students are expected to retain the concepts better and develop a higher level of interest in the subject matter compared to traditional lecturing methods.

Research Questions

- Does inquiry-based learning improve student learning and retention?
- Do just-in-time teaching methods improve student learning and retention?
- Do inquiry-based learning and just-in-time teaching approaches increase students interest level in the subject matter?

Methodology

**Inquiry based learning:** We will implement an inquiry based approach to learning primarily via rearranging the order in which we introduce the major concepts in the syllabus. We will establish a top-down approach, where inquiry establishes the need to understand a concept.

**Just-in-time teaching (JITT):** We expect that getting students to think about the concepts at hand immediately before class meets will be immensely beneficial. It will allow students time to come up with questions and ideas to contribute. We will divide the class into two groups for this study:

- The class will be divided into two groups, each group will perform a different set of three web-based JITT assignments at different points in the semester.
- Both groups attend the same class/lecture.
- Student performance/interest will be tracked for the two groups at points in the course where JITT assignments were implemented.

**Assessment**

We will design exam questions to focus on concepts addressed by different JITT assignments separately. We will compare the exam performance of the two groups of students to check for correlation to their access to relevant JITT exercises.

We will assess retention and interest level through surveys conducted on the entire class. There will be surveys in the beginning, middle and end of the semester. We will investigate retention in the second and third surveys, via questions on the confidence level of the students on earlier concepts.

Questions investigating students’ interest and motivation level will be behavioral:

- What classes are you planning to take next semester?
- Are you planning to pursue an internship dealing with semiconductors?
- Will you sell your textbook back, or will you hold on to it?

Acknowledgement

This project is supported by an Investigating Student Learning grant from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan.