Memorization or understanding: are we teaching the right thing?

Universidad de los Andes
Santiago, Chile, 22 August 2012

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Universidad de los Andes
Santiago, Chile, 22 August 2012

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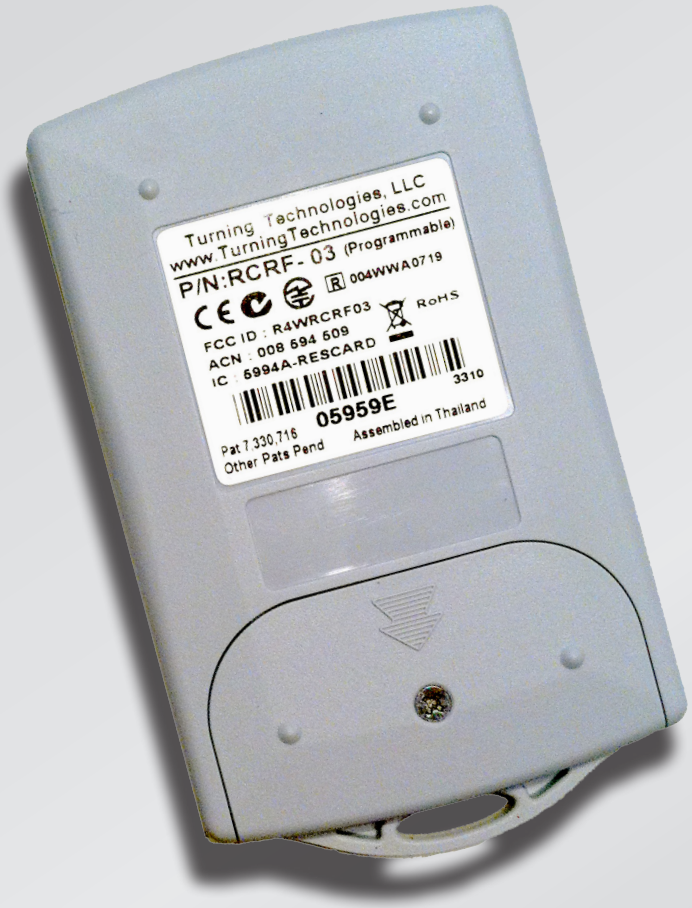

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How do we learn?

Think of something you are good at — something that you know you do well.

How do we learn?

Think of something you are good at — something that you know you do well.

***How* did you become good at this?**

How do we learn?

Became good at it by:

1. trial and error
2. lectures
3. practicing
4. apprenticeship
5. other

How we teach…

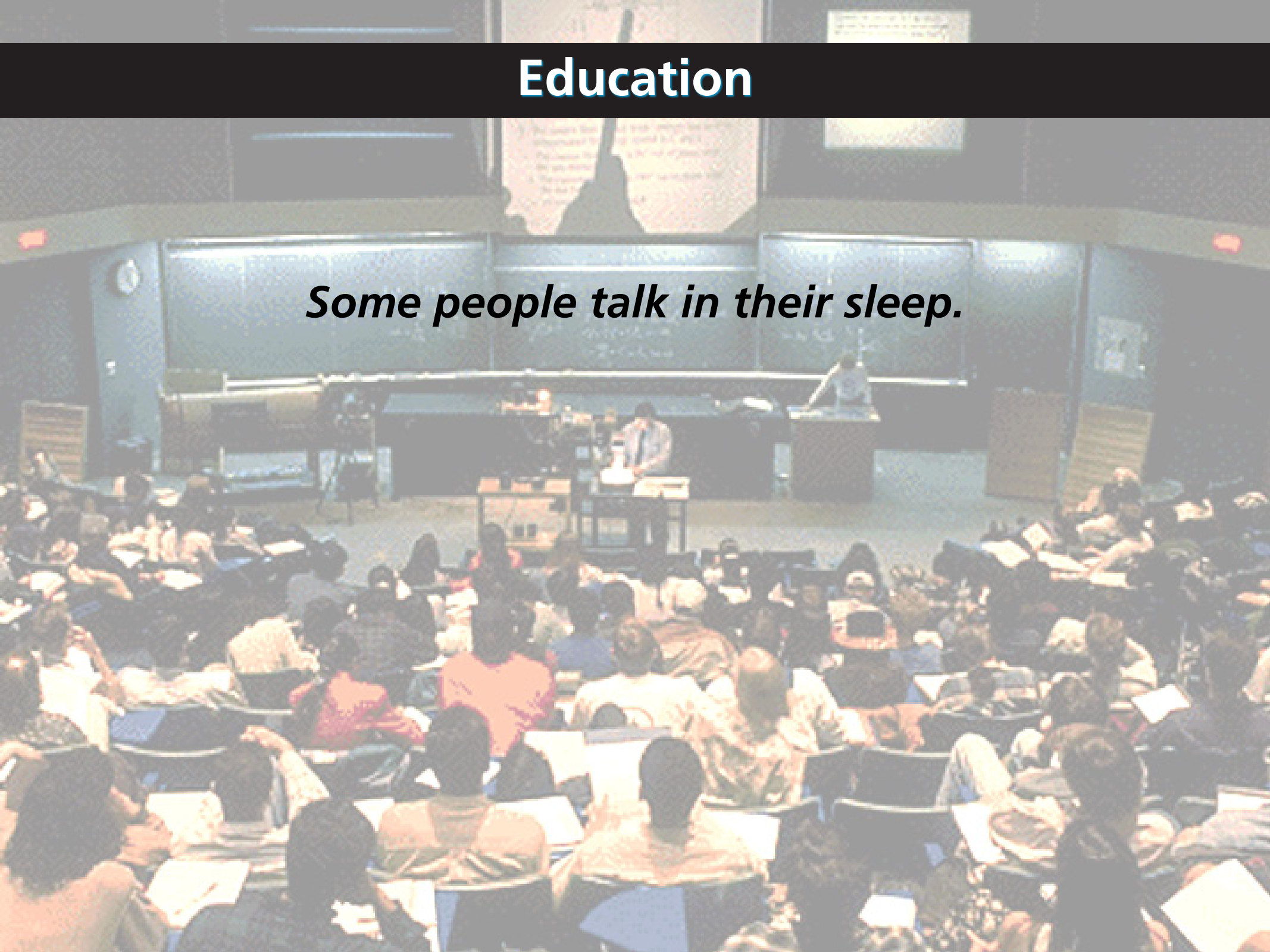
Learning spaces

Learning spaces

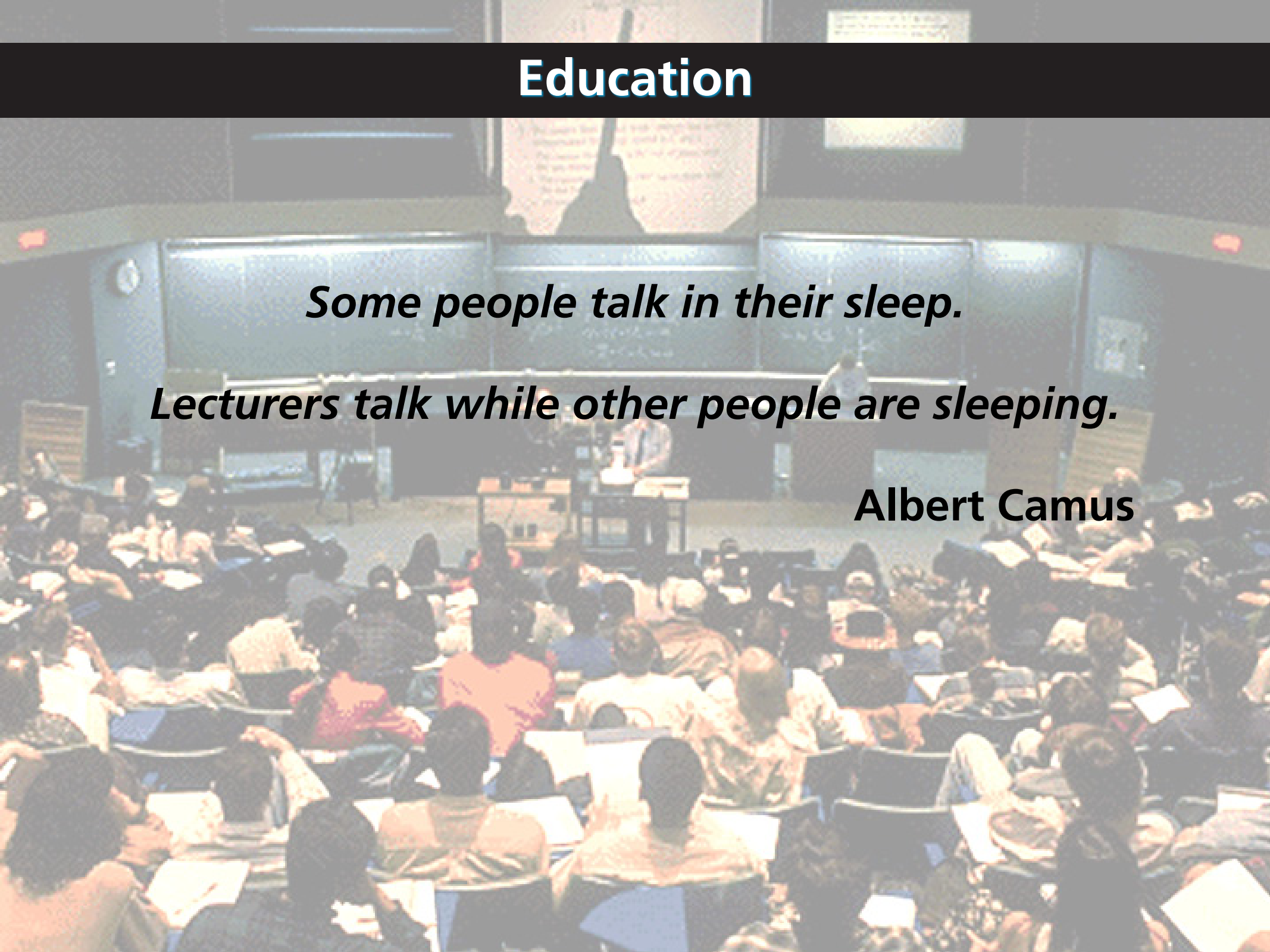
Learning spaces

Education

Education



Education



Some people talk in their sleep.

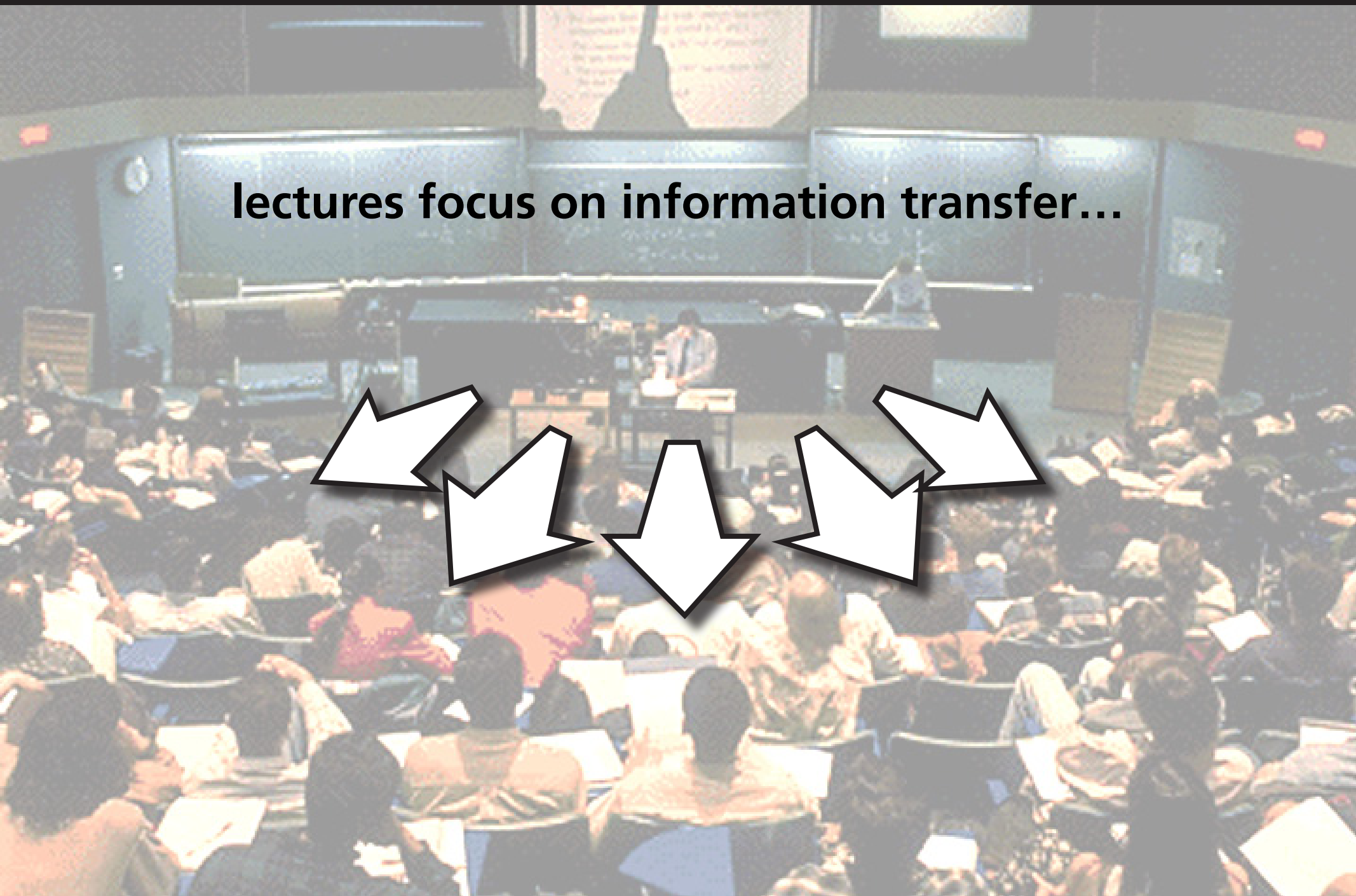
Lecturers talk while other people are sleeping.

Albert Camus

Education

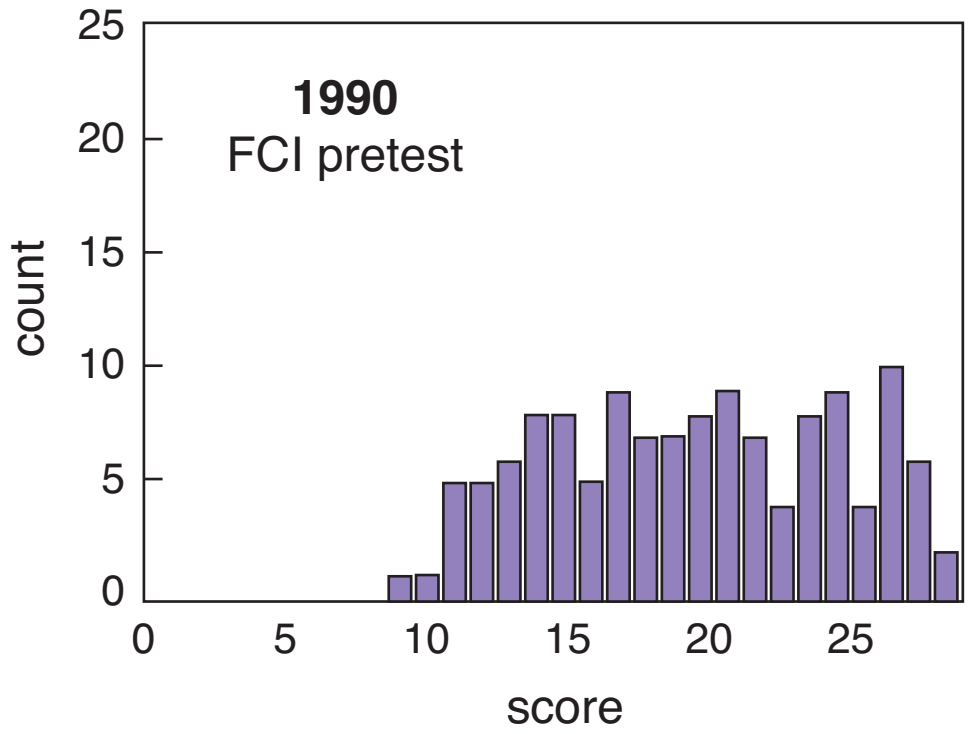
Education

lectures focus on information transfer…



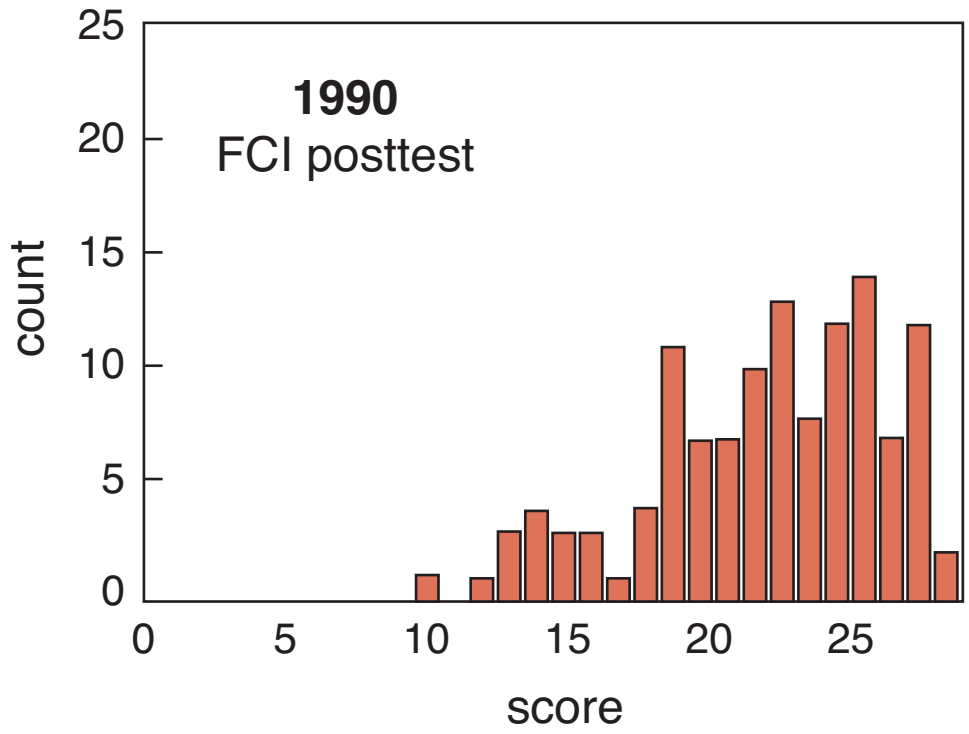
Education

education is not just information transfer



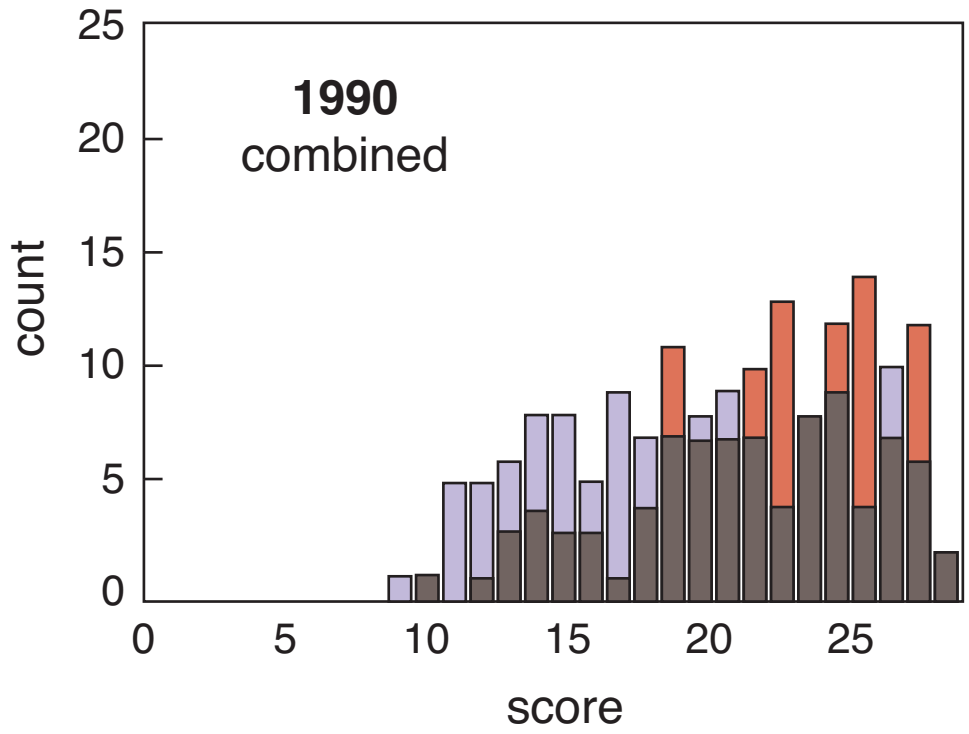
Education

education is not just information transfer



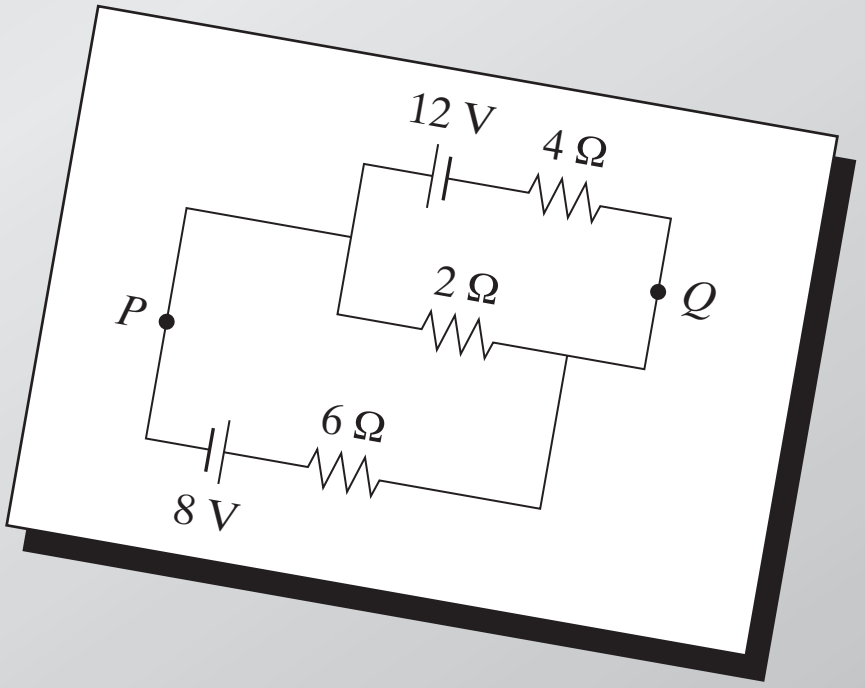
Education

education is not just information transfer



Education

conventional problems misleading



Education

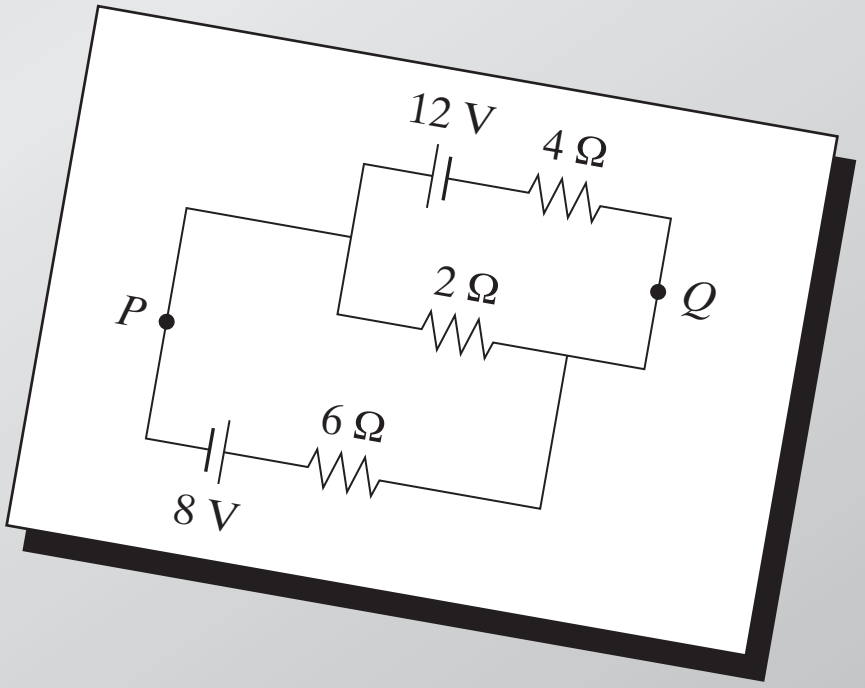
conventional problems misleading

Calculate:

(*a*) current in 2-Ω resistor

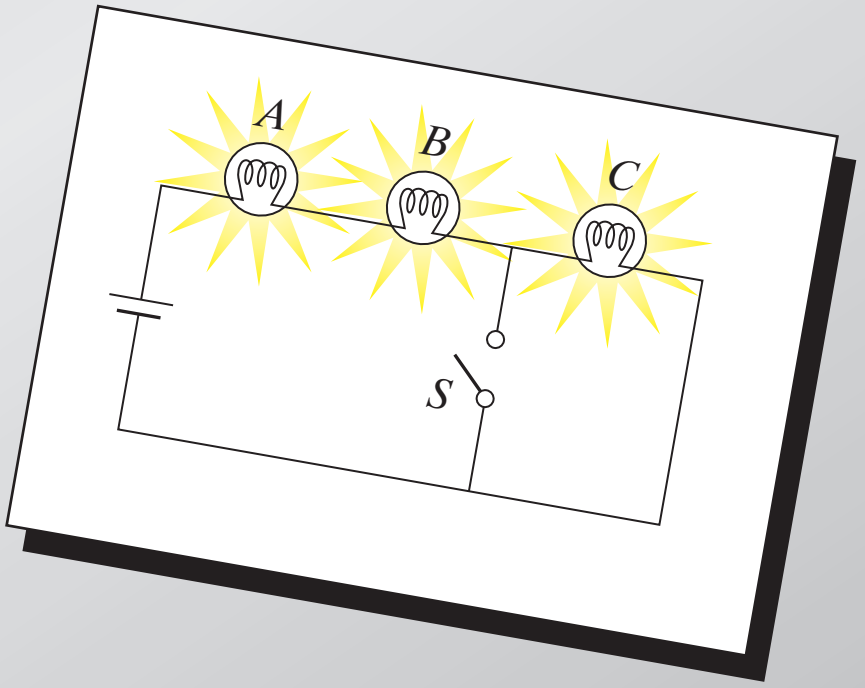
(*b*) potential difference

between *P* and *Q*



Education

are the basic principles understood?



Education

are the basic principles understood?

When *S* is closed, what happens to:

(*a*) intensities of A and B?

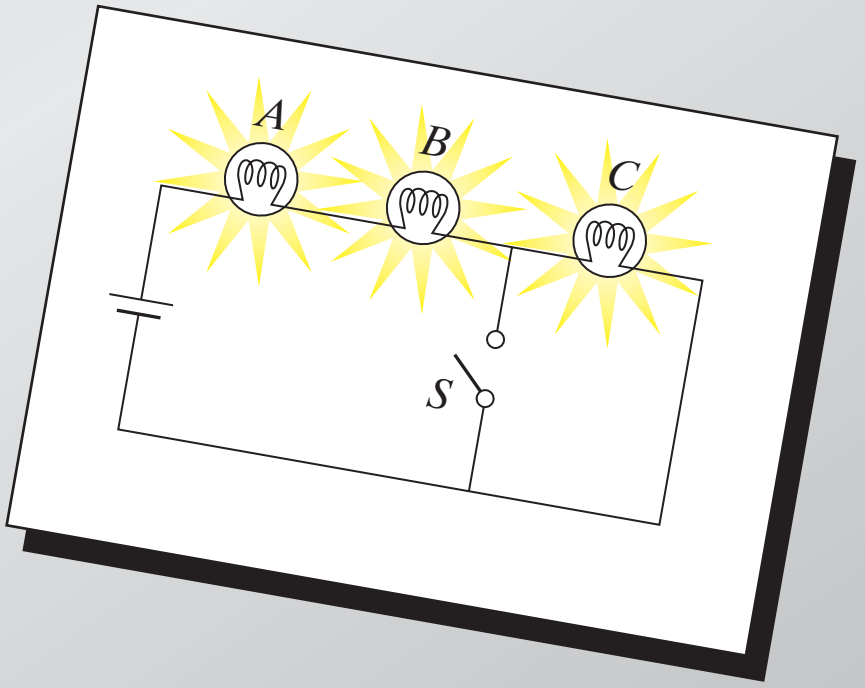
(*b*) intensity of C?

(*c*) current through battery?

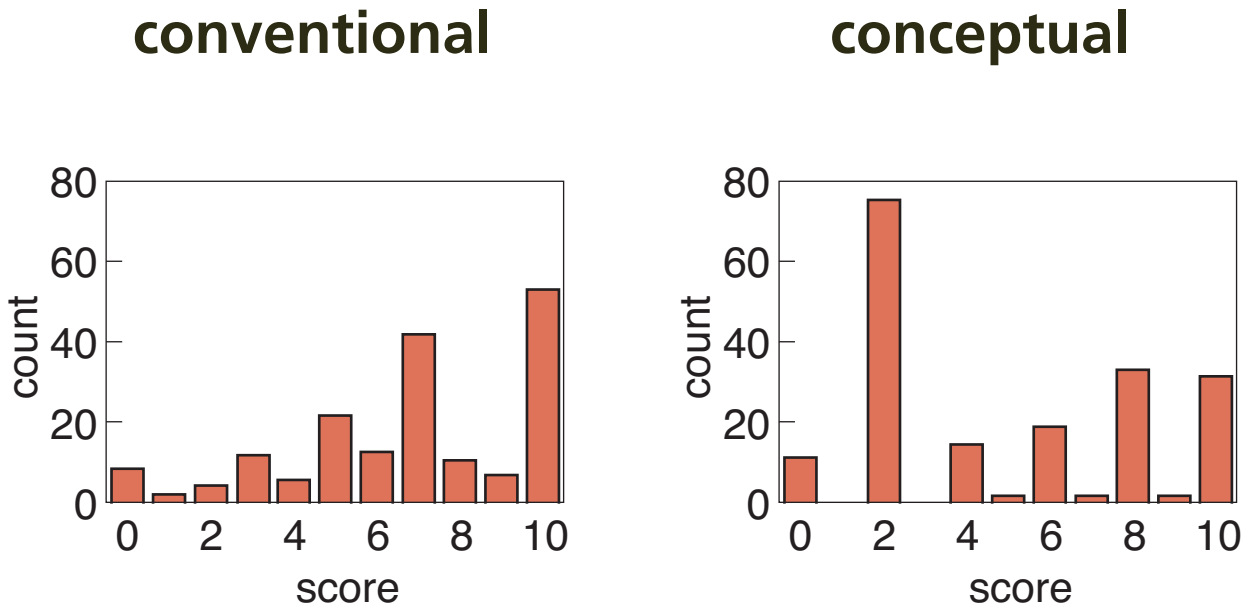
(*d*) potential difference across

A, *B*, and *C*?

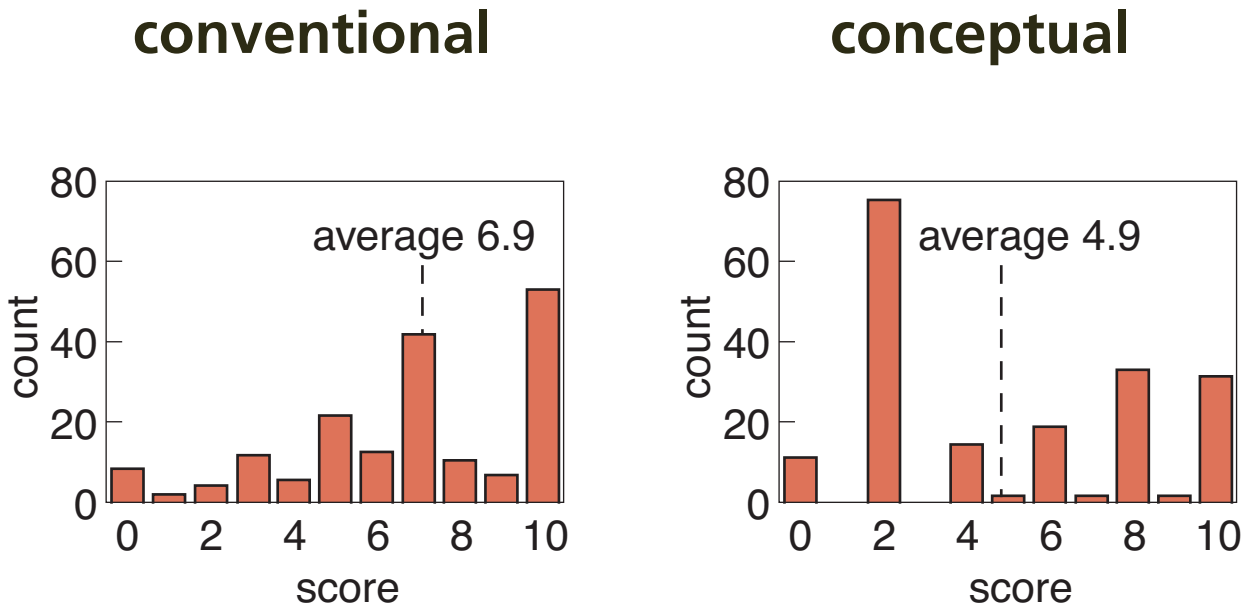
(*e*) the total power dissipated?



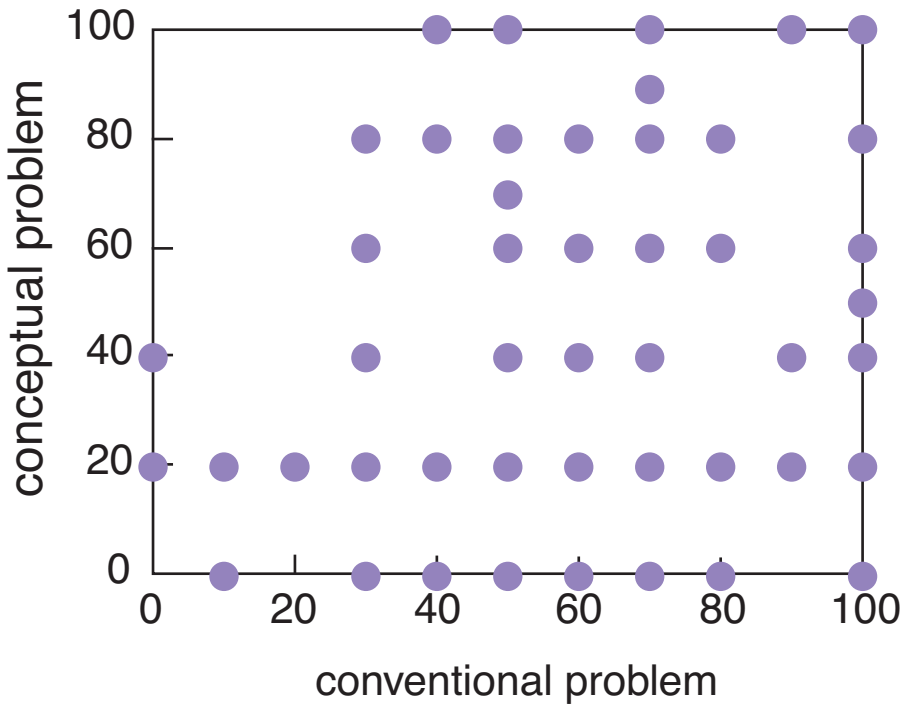
Education



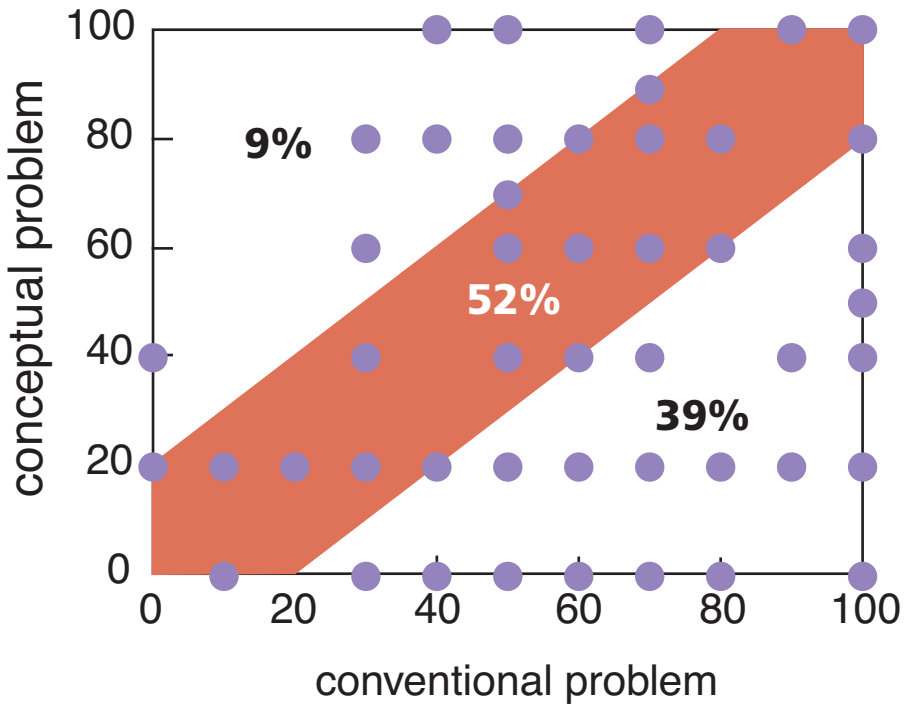
Education


conventional
conceptual
average 6.9
average 4.9
count
score
0
20
40
60
80
0
2
4
6
8
10

Education


100
80
60
40
20
0
conceptual problem
0
20
40
60
80
100
conventional problem

Education


100
80
60
40
20
0
conceptual problem
9%
52%
39%
0
20
40
60
80
100
conventional problem


So what should we do?

Peer Instruction

Give students more responsibility for gathering information…

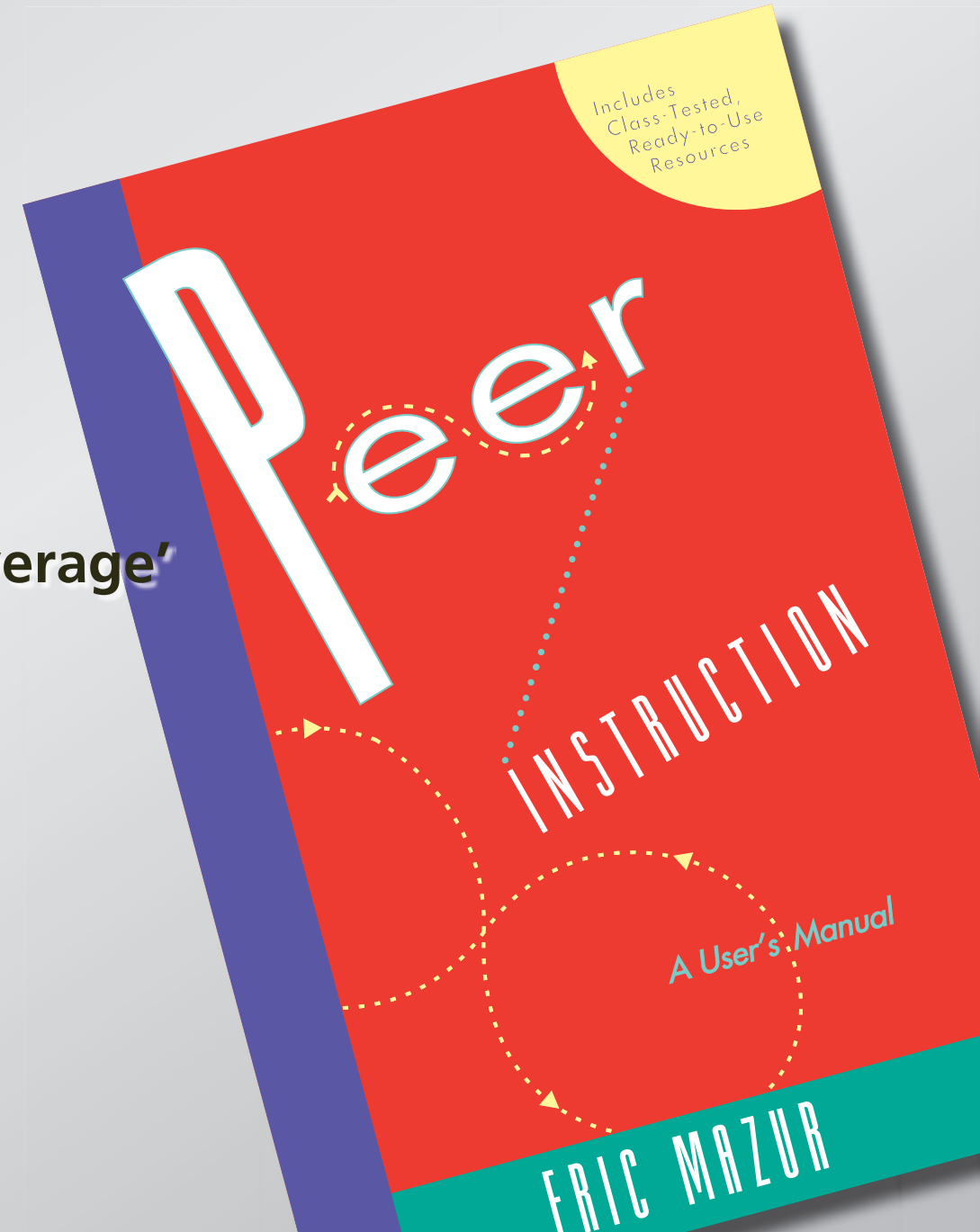
Peer Instruction

Give students more responsibility for gathering information…
so we can better help them assimilate it.

Peer Instruction

Main features:

- pre-class reading
- in-class: depth, not ‘coverage’
- ConcepTests

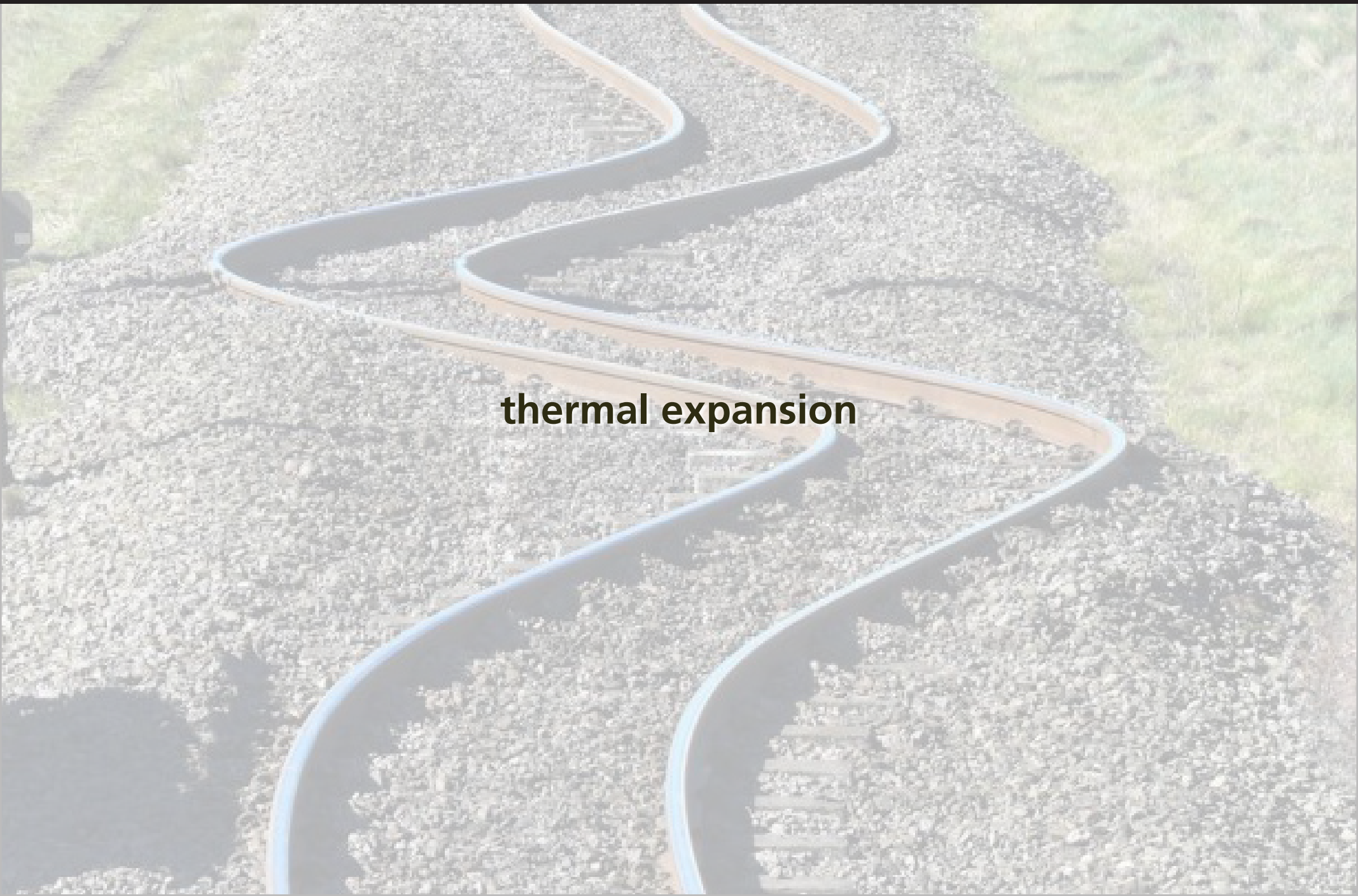


Peer Instruction

ConcepTest:

1. Question
2. Thinking
3. Individual answer
4. Peer discussion
5. Revised/Group answer
6. Explanation

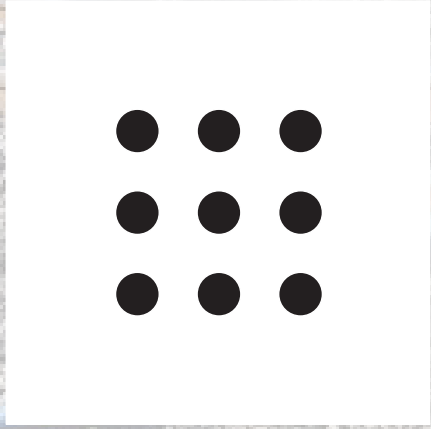
Let's try it!



thermal expansion

Let's try it!

When metals heat up, they expand because all atoms get farther away from each other.



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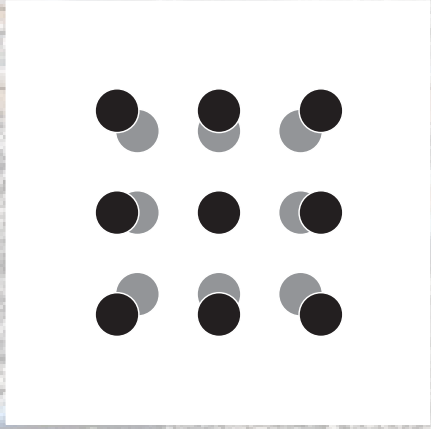
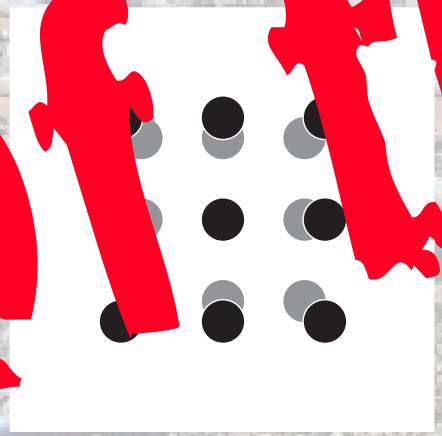


Let's try it!

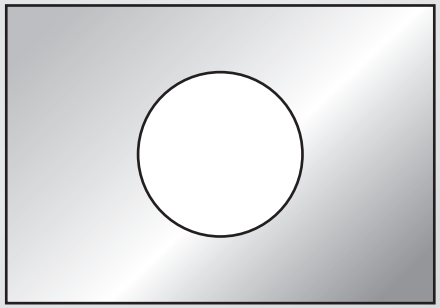
When metals heat up, they expand because all atoms get farther away from each other.

all of them!



Let's try it!

Consider a rectangular metal plate with a circular hole in it.



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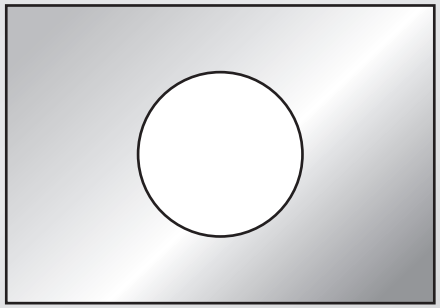


When the plate is uniformly heated, the diameter of the hole

1. increases.
2. stays the same.
3. decreases.

Let's try it!

Consider a rectangular metal plate with a circular hole in it.

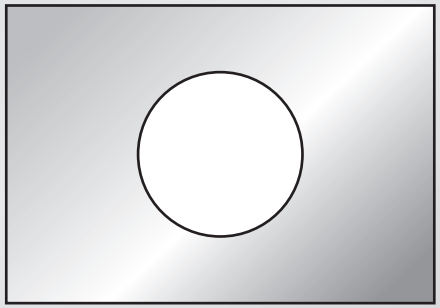
When the plate is uniformly heated, the diameter of the hole

1. increases.
2. stays the same.
3. decreases.

you got all fired up!

Let's try it!

Consider a rectangular metal plate with a circular hole in it.



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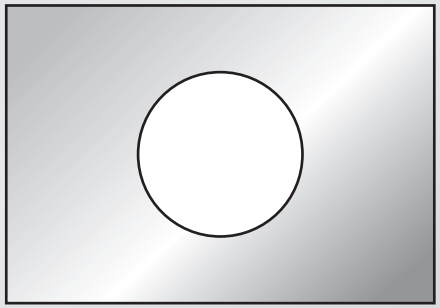
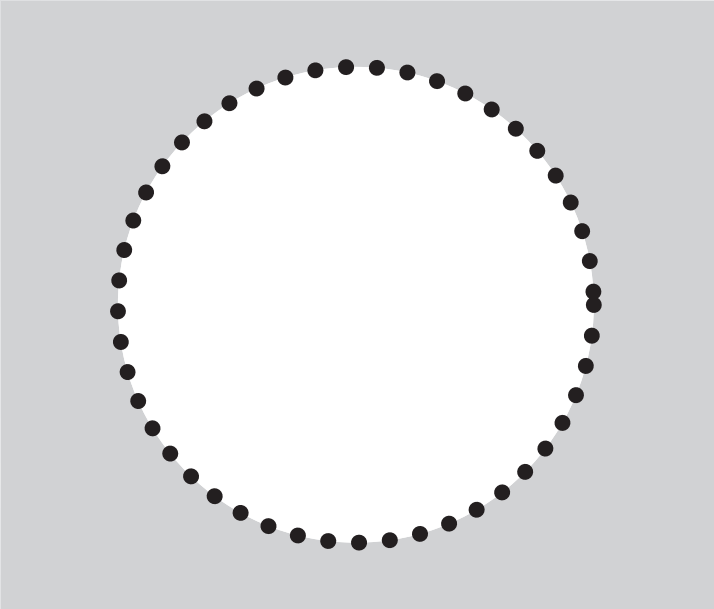


When the plate is uniformly heated, the diameter of the hole

1. increases. ✔
2. stays the same.
3. decreases.

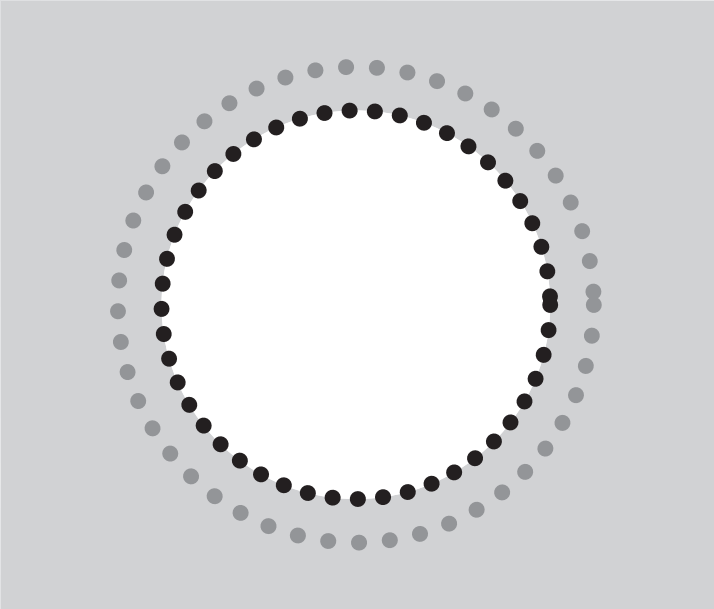
Let's try it!

consider the atoms at the rim of the hole



Let's try it!

consider the atoms at the rim of the hole



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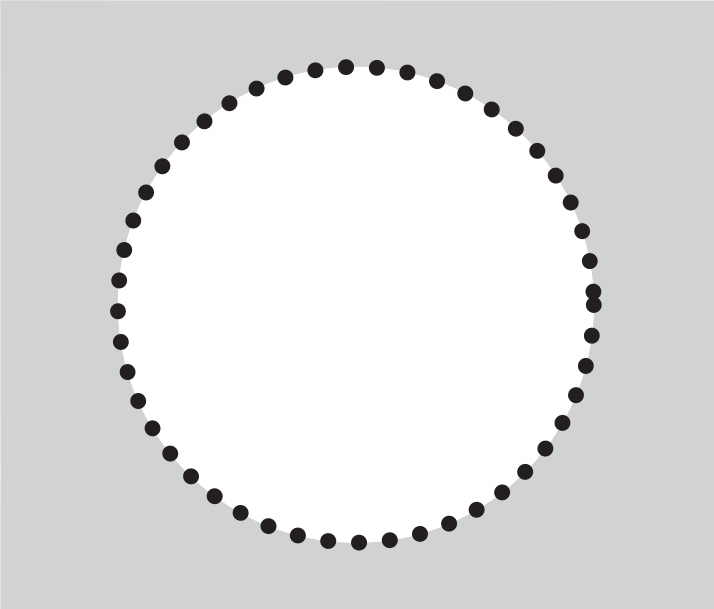

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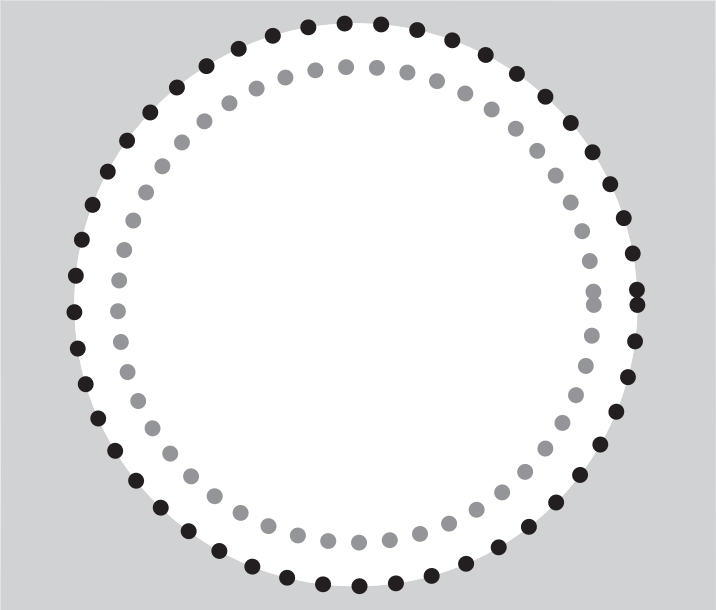


Let's try it!

consider the atoms at the rim of the hole

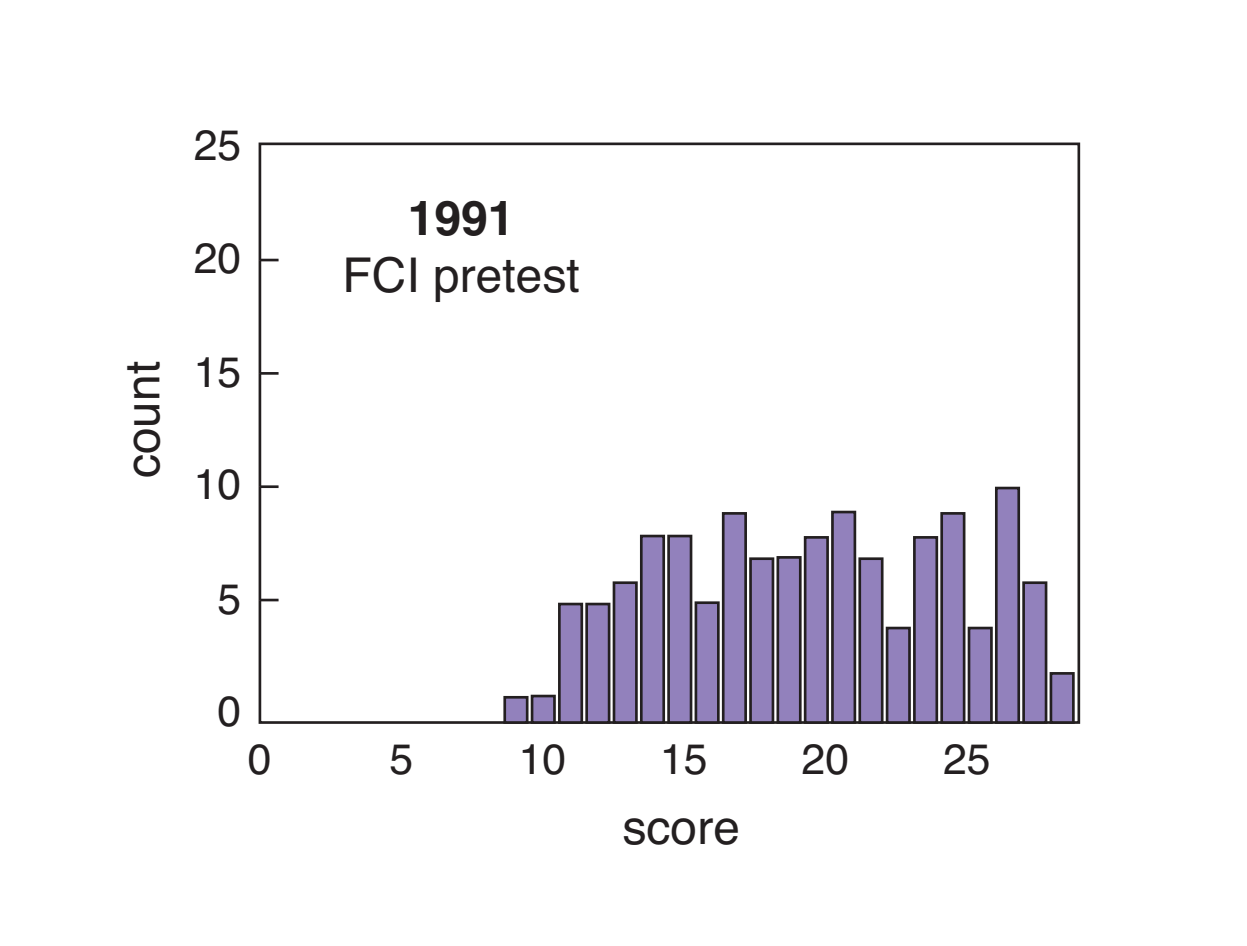
you won't forget this

Results

is it any good?

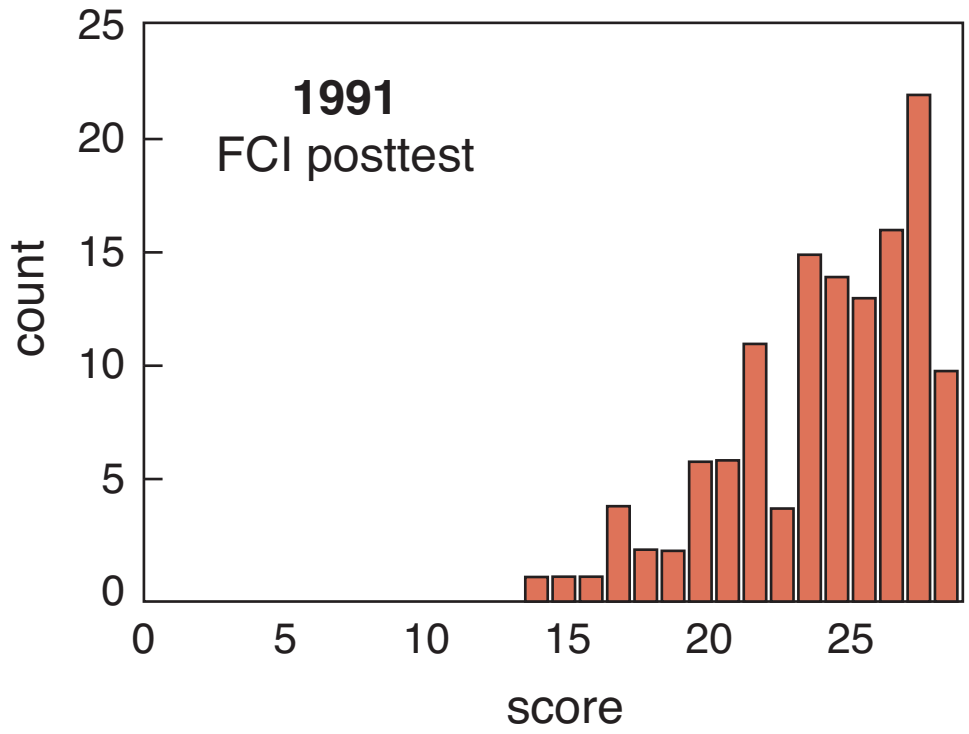
Results

first year of implementing PI



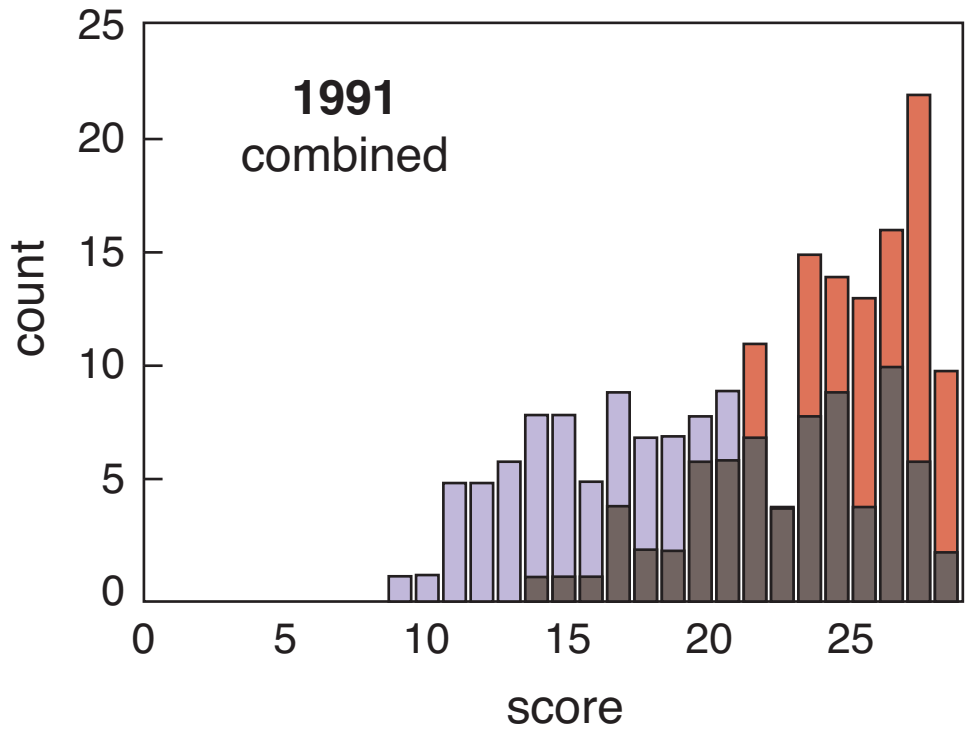
Results

first year of implementing PI



Results

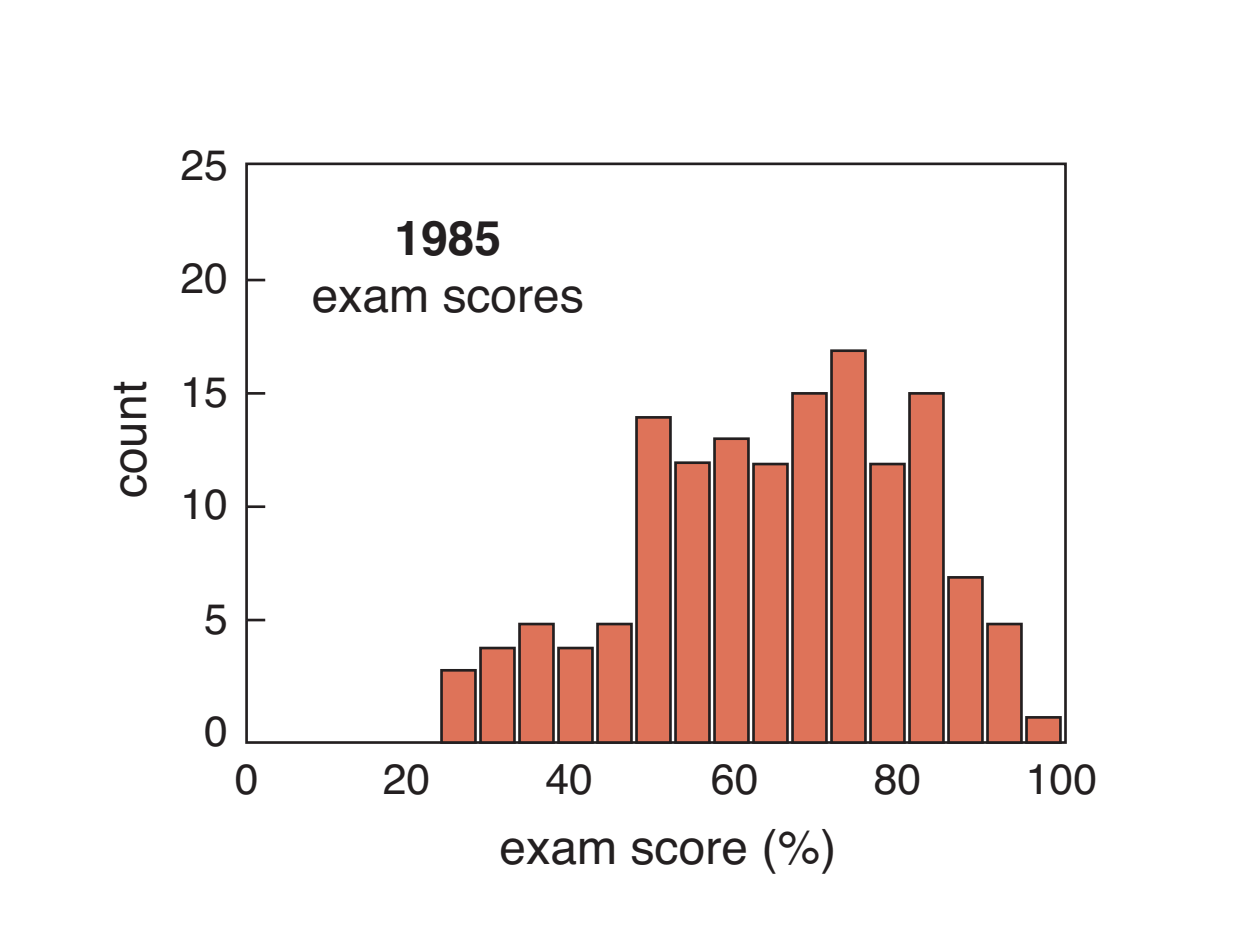
first year of implementing PI



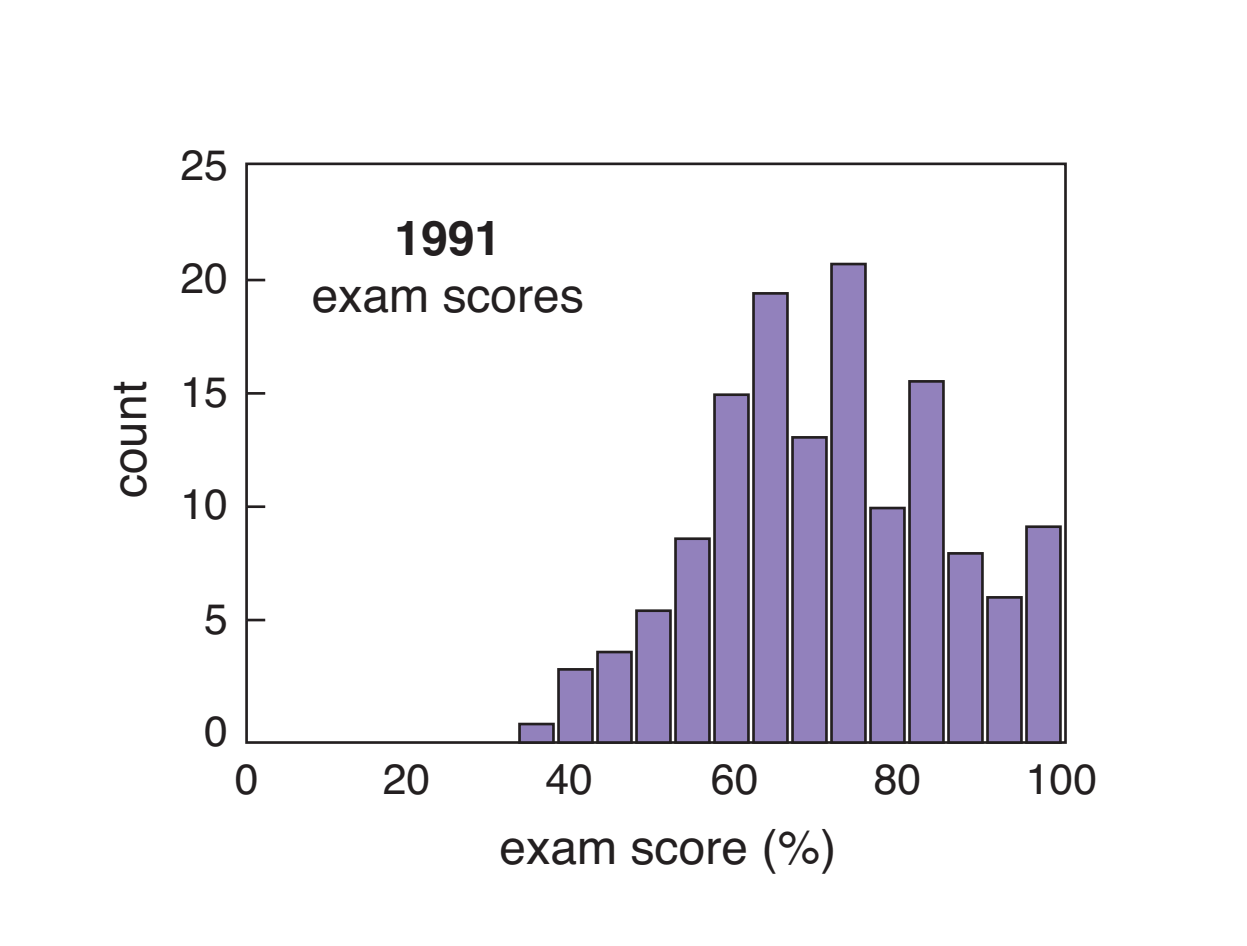
Results

what about problem solving?

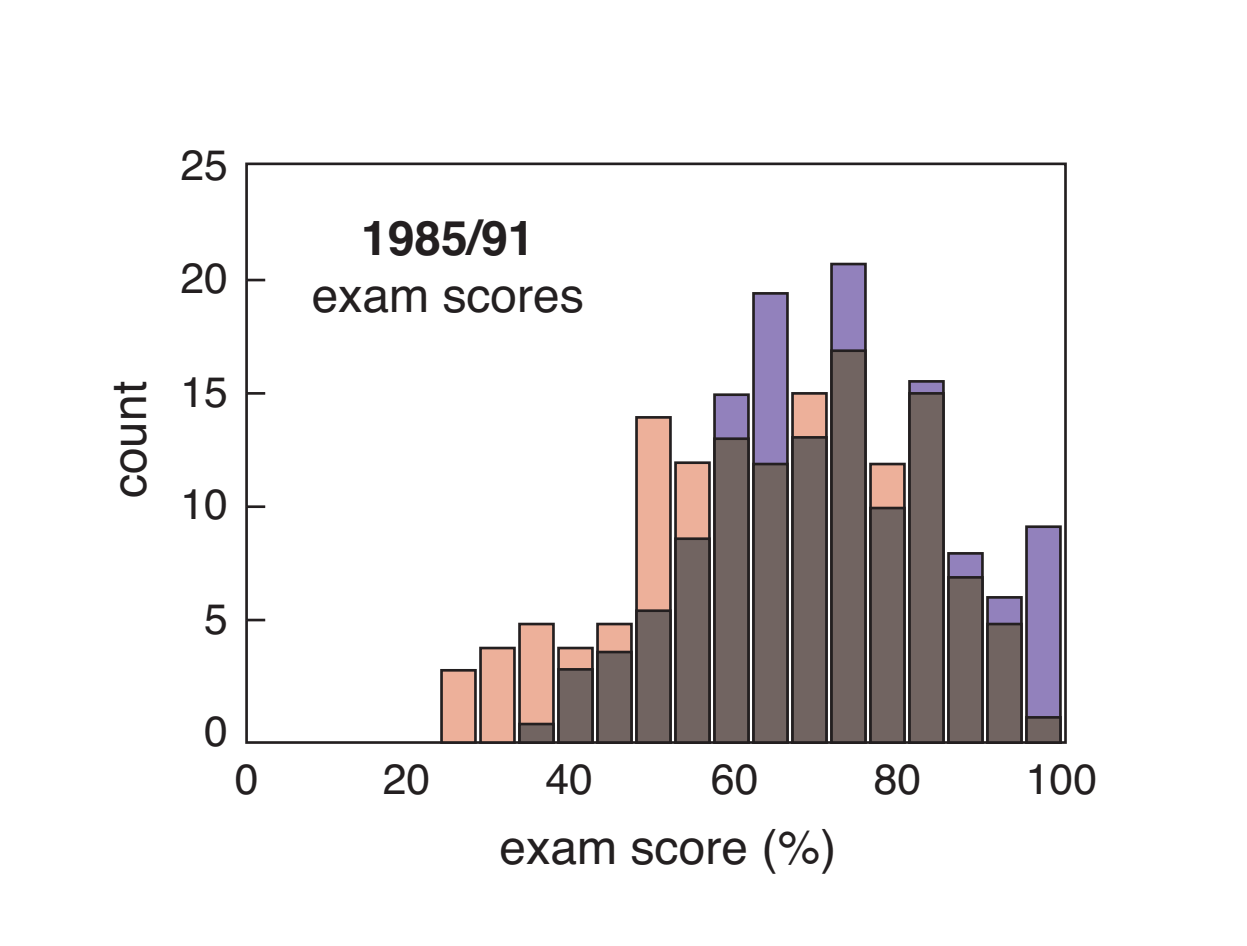
Results


1985
exam scores
count
25
20
15
10
5
0
0
20
40
60
80
100
exam score (%)

Results


1991
exam scores
count
25
20
15
10
5
0
0
20
40
60
80
100
exam score (%)

Results


1985/91
exam scores
count
25
20
15
10
5
0
0
20
40
60
80
100
exam score (%)

Conclusion

So better understanding leads to better problem solving!

Conclusion

So better understanding leads to better problem solving!

(but “good” problem solving doesn’t always indicate understanding!)

Funding:

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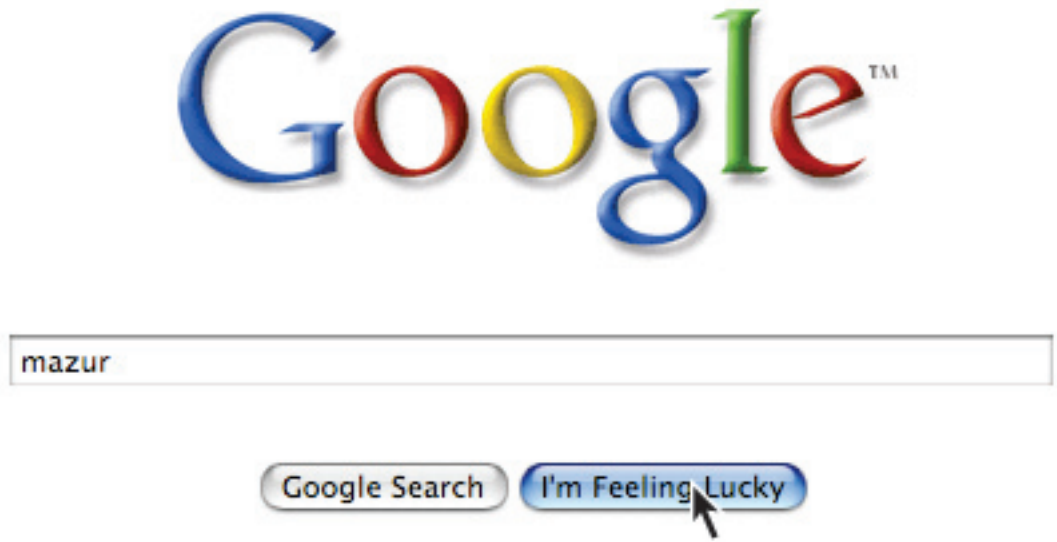
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