

There are several problems with such self-reports when used in K–12 classrooms. First, often students do not know what they do not know. It is hardly surprising that students with a better knowledge of the subject produce more accurate self-assessments than those with a weak understanding (see, for example, Longhurst & Norton, 1997).

Second, social pressures may influence students in their self-assessments. Students may inflate their estimates if they believe they are in competition with other students or that the teacher will think less of them if they report a low level of understanding. Students are also likely to increase their scores if they know that their score will contribute to a formal grade. On the other hand, students may underestimate their achievement if they are worried about appearing too arrogant or do not want to appear to be too successful. These effects may, of course, cancel out, but there is no reason to expect that they will do so. For example, when teachers use traffic lights to get students to self-assess, it is common to find male students giving themselves a green and a female student with a similar level of understanding giving herself a yellow. This could, of course, be diffidence on the part of female students, but in our experience, it is more likely to be overconfidence on the part of the male students.

Ross (1998) reviews eleven studies that compare second-language learners' self-assessments with those of their teachers. In all, the eleven studies produce sixty correlations, and the values of the sixty correlations are shown in Figure 7.1. Only ten of the sixty correlations are greater than 0.70, which means that in the other cases, the self-assessment accounts for less than half the variation in the scores the teacher determines (the proportion of variation accounted is the square of the correlation coefficient). We do not know whether these rather inaccurate self-assessments are the result of students not knowing how well they have done or whether social pressures influence students in their self-assessments, but there is no doubt that asking students to self-assess in terms of scores or grades makes it more likely that irrelevant factors influence the students' assessments.

Figure 7.1: Correlation of Self-Assessment With Teacher Assessment in Sixty Studies of Second Language Learners (Ross, 1998)

