

Self-assessment, self-direction, self-regulation and other myths

Deconstructing the fallacy of the adult learner

Glenn Regehr, PhD

Richard and Elizabeth Currie Chair in Health Professions Education Research
Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto
Scientist, Toronto General Research Institute, University Health Network
Associate Director, The Wilson Centre

The responsibility for self-regulation

- A cornerstone of professional autonomy
 - Both a privilege and a responsibility
- Manifests in two forms
 - “Authorities” set standards and address breeches of standards by members
 - Individual members ensure personal maintenance of competence

Archetype of the self-regulating professional

- Reflect regularly on daily practice
- Self-assess gaps in knowledge or skill
- Seek opportunities to redress gaps
- Invest energy to learn (or relearn)
- Incorporate new knowledge into practice
- Repeat

(Handfield-Jones, et al, 2002)

Today's talk

- Identify assumptions in this model of the self-regulating professional
- Briefly examine the evidence for each of these assumptions
- Discuss implications for conception of self-regulation
- Construct a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon

Problematic assumptions

- We use reflection to look for gaps
- We find gaps when we look
- We try to address gaps through learning
- We incorporate new information into practice

We use reflection to
actively search for gaps

The self-protective role of reflection

- Presumption that reflection on practice is used to expose gaps
- But reflection often used to protect self-concept
 - Eg, gamblers' interpretation of losses (Gilovich, 1983)
 - Eg, surgeons' reflections on bad outcomes
 - “It's a one time thing, it just happens a lot”
 - Suzanne Vega

Value of self-protective reflection

- Such re-interpretive reflection important
 - Depressed people have more “accurate” interpretation of own role in events
 - Lab-induced “learned helplessness” model of depression
 - Self-efficacy leads to success
 - Confidence to persist in face of initially negative feedback
 - Willingness to keep trying in difficult situations

Implications for practice change

- “Rose colored glasses” approach to reflection understandable and necessary
 - Not just a “selfish” activity
 - Important for ability to function and succeed
- But
 - May get in the way of self-improvement
 - How much rationalization is too much?

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We find gaps when
we look for them

The rhetoric of self-assessment

- Almost every article on self-assessment begins with the same basic sentence:

“The ability to self-assess is vital to the concept of professional self-regulation”
- Cornerstone of many professional “Maintenance of Competence” programs

The literature on self-assessment

- Hundreds of articles
- Many literature reviews
- One conclusion:

**Self-assessment ability
is generally poor**

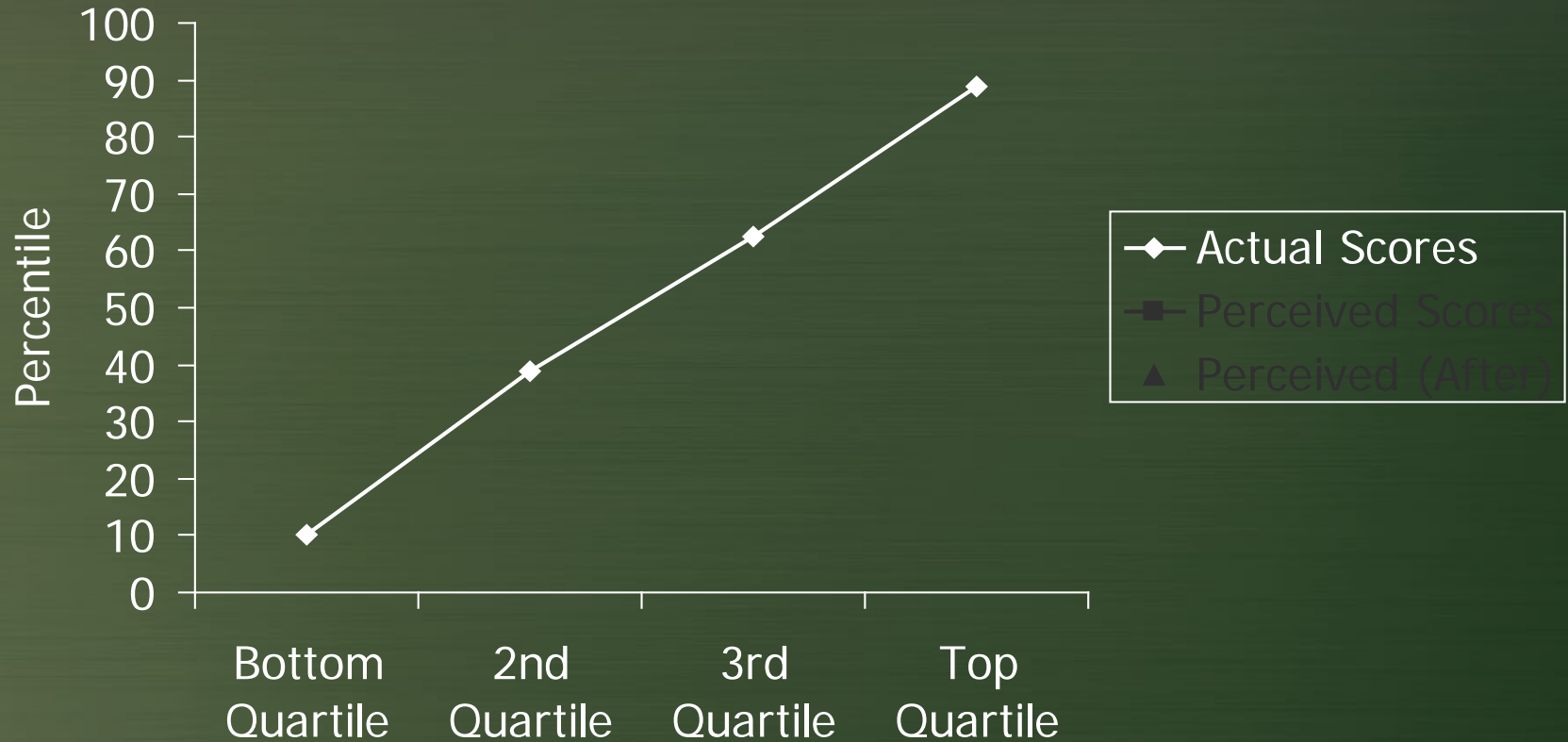
Three key patterns of data

- Little or no relationship between externally generated scores and self-assessed scores
- All but the very highest performers tend to overestimate ability
- Worst offenders are those in lowest quartile of performance

Why is self-assessment so bad?

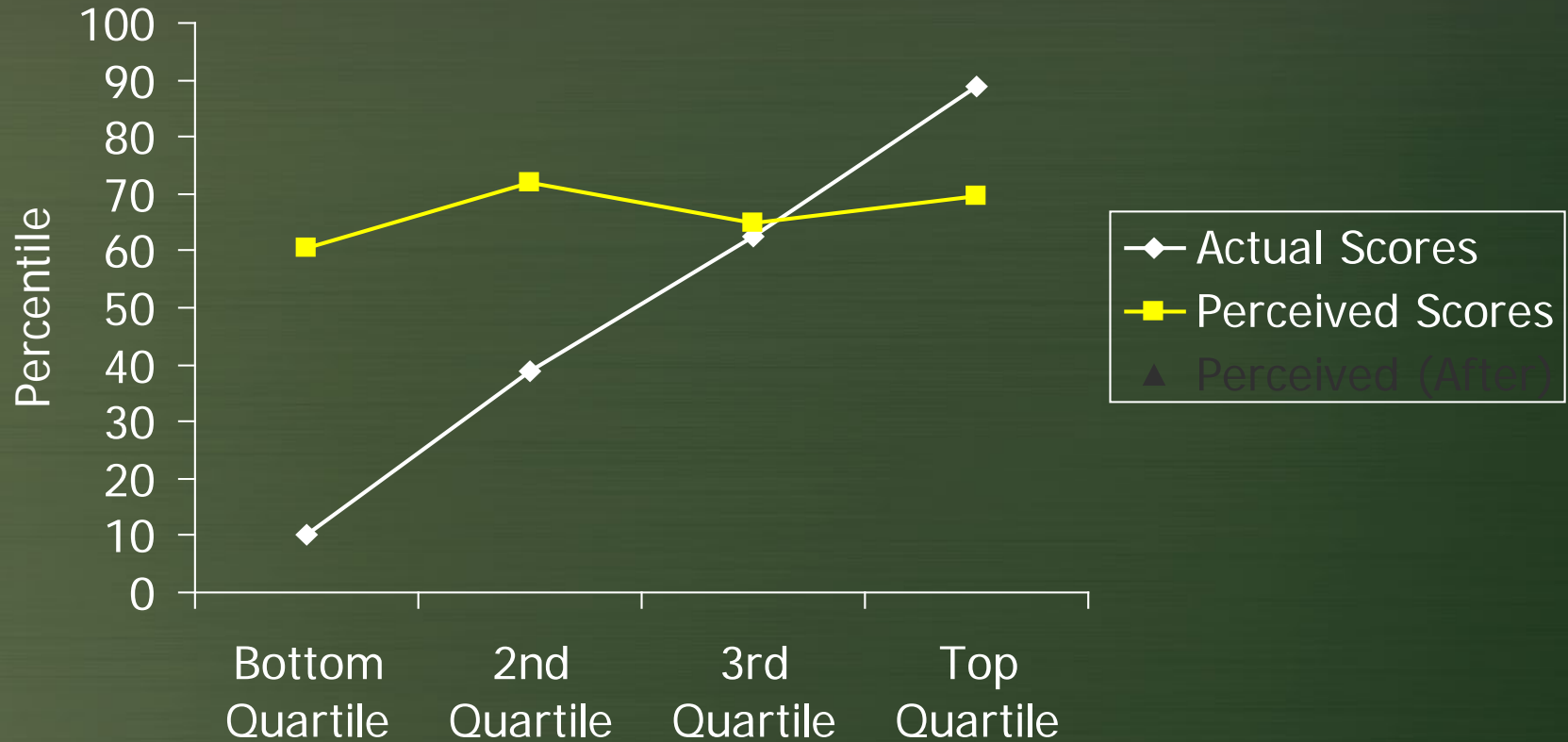
- Kruger & Dunning (1999): “Unskilled and unaware”
 - The skills required to know whether you are performing well are also the skills required to actually perform well

University students' performance on a grammar test



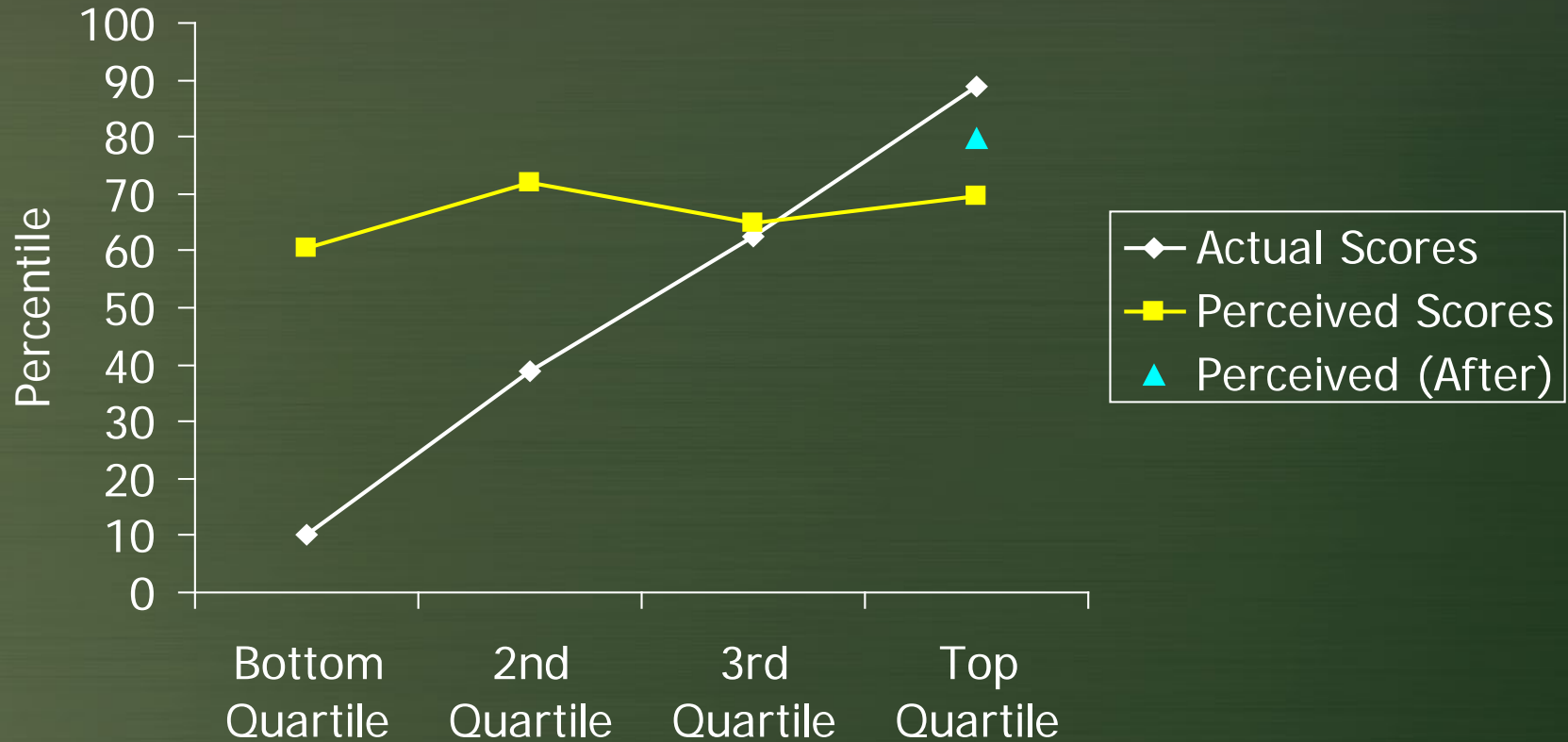
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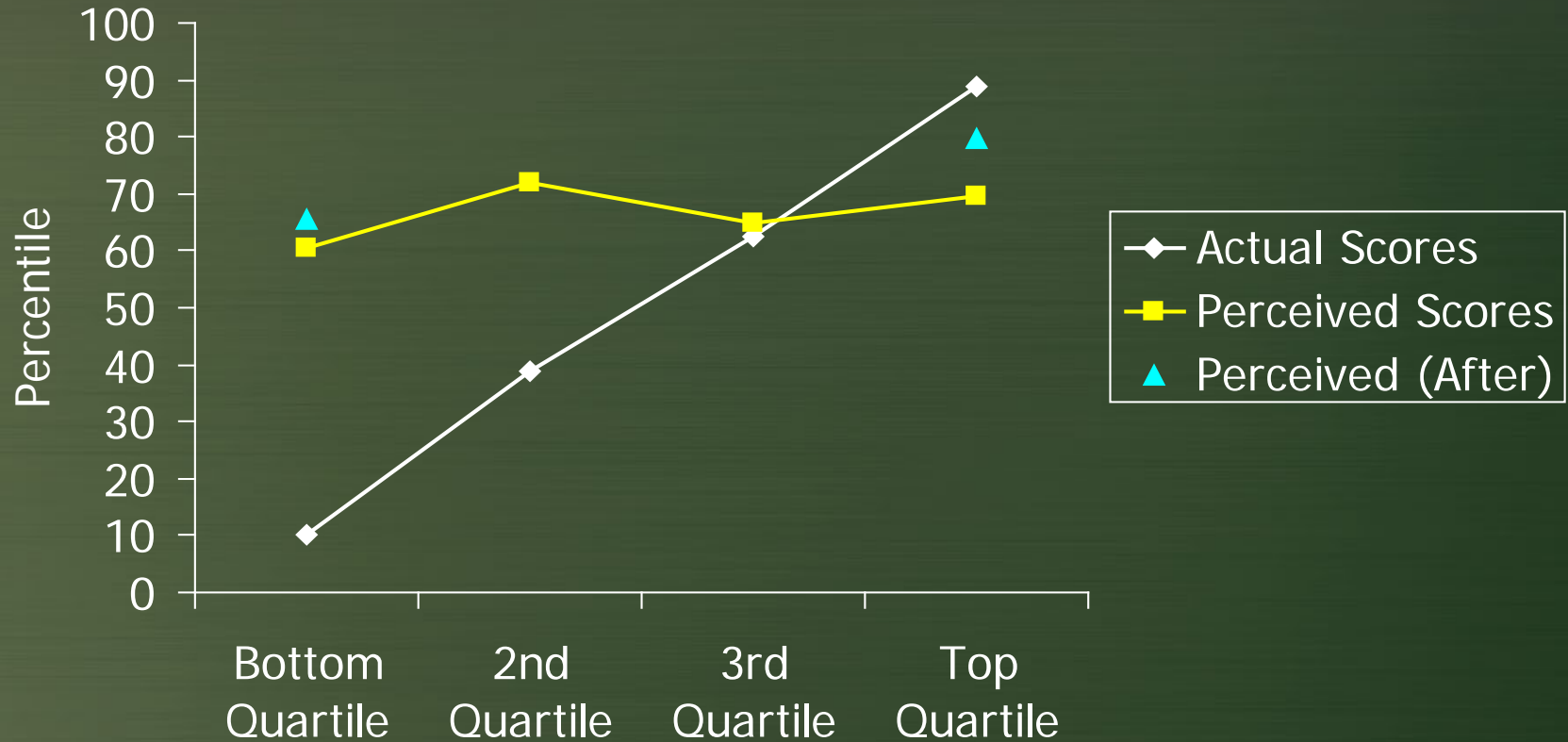
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Kruger and Dunning 1999

University students' performance on a grammar test



Kruger and Dunning 1999

The "Lake Woebegone Effect"

- Everyone thinks they are above average
 - Eg, driving
 - Eg, self-assessment
- Kruger and Dunning (1999) explanation:
 - Poor performers don't know what a good performance looks like
 - Form of domain specific "perceptual deficit"

Implications for self-regulation

- Those most in need of improvement are those least likely to know
- For any given skill, 25% of us are in the bottom quartile of performance
- Those of us who are in the bottom 25% think we are above average
- So whose job is it to tell us?

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We try to address gaps
through learning

The motivation to learn

- Assumption that the “adult learner” is motivated to fill gaps in knowledge / skill
 - Motivation comes from recognition of the value of learning the information / skill
- But where does assumption come from?

The theoretical support

- Malcolm Knowles
 - “The Adult Learner”
- Anders Ericsson
 - Expert Performance
- Bereiter and Scardamalia
 - “Surpassing Ourselves”

But...

- Think about last conference attended
- How did you select sessions to attend?
 - “Wow, thank goodness they have a session on that, I am really poor at that and should find out how to come back up to speed.”
- Evidence that health care professionals attend CE events that confirm what they already know
(cf Miller, 2005)

The flaw in the theories

- All theories of adult learning / expertise focus on the reasons why people learn
 - Areas where we excel
 - Areas where we have an interest
- Our own reflections focus on times we chose to learn
 - “I am here aren’t I?”

The flaw in the theories

- Little or no research or theory on why people DON'T learn
 - Areas where we struggle
 - Areas that do not interest us much
- Few examples in our own heads of times we chose not to learn or gave up
 - “Wouldn't it be fun to learn how to play the guitar?”

Regehr's axiom of learning

- LEARNING IS NOT FUN
 - Learning fun things is **fun**
 - Learning **hard** things is hard
 - Learning **boring** things is boring

The decision to learn

- Decision to learn/change is “cost/benefit” analysis
- Sometimes “cost” of outweighs benefits
 - Decision to avoid rather than engage in learning
- “Because it is the right thing to do” is seldom a sufficient motivator
 - (back to self-justifying reflection)

The adult learner redefined

- Differences between adult and child learners:
 - Children have lots of energy
 - You can make children do things
- Regehr's axiom of adult learners:
 - **The older we get, the less willing we are to exert the energy and the fewer people there are who can tell us we have to**

Implications for self-regulation

- For any given skill, 25% of us are in the bottom quartile of performance
- Placing the responsibility for improving areas of weakness on the individual professional may produce an unbearable burden
- So whose job is it to make us do something about it?

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We incorporate new
knowledge and skills
into practice

Translating knowledge to practice

- Surprisingly little research in the CE literature regarding implementation of learning in practice
 - When we do look, the data are worrisome (eg Davis et al, 1999)
 - Efforts to address this tend to focus on:
 - “What works best?”
- NOT:
- “Why doesn’t this work?”

Translating knowledge to practice

- Easy to underestimate difficulty of incorporating learned activity into practice
 - Sounds logical and sensible in the “class”
- But ...
 - Must recognize spontaneously when it is valuable (cf Elman, 2004)
 - Must have confidence to implement (cf Kennedy, 2004)

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 - Most CE learning fails to change practice

Summary so far...

- Many factors involved in “formal” practice change
 - Must see your way as inadequate
 - Must see new way as better
 - Must see that the difference is worth the energy required to learn the new way
 - Must see how to incorporate the newly learned way into your practice
- Many of the assumptions built into the “self-regulation” version of this process are questionable at best

Better models of maintenance of competence?

- Self-administered objective tests of knowledge and skill with profile identifying areas of relative high and low performance
- Requirement to generate and justify an annual learning plan based on profile results
- “Guidance counselors” to help incorporate data regarding poor performance into self-concept without loss of self-confidence

Better models of self-regulation?

- Knowing when you are over your head
 - Knowing when to slow down / look it up / refer
 - Shifting from knowing-in-action to reflection-in-action
- Innovating in practice
 - Problem solving as a form of self-directed learning
- Teamwork and shared responsibility
 - For safe and effective practice
 - For “self-regulation” and feedback

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