

Krissy

Kristen arrived home one afternoon full of gloom when she was in third grade. She said she knew we were going to be angry with her. She presented us with a sheet of paper—the third-grade size with the wide lines. On it, she had written a story. Her assignment was to write about someone or something she cares about deeply. She wrote of Tiger, a tiny kitten who had come to be part of our family, but who had to return to the farm after two weeks because of allergies. Tiger's departure had been like the loss of a family member.

On the sheet of paper was an emergent writer's version of this story—not sophisticated, but poignant. Krissy's recounting of events was accurate and her story captured her very strong sadness and disappointment at losing her new little friend. She did a pretty darn good job of writing, for a beginner.

At the bottom of the page, below the story, was a big red circled "F"! We asked her why, and she told us that the teacher said she had better learn to do it right or she would fail. Questioning further, we found that her teacher had said that students were to fill the page with writing. Krissy had used only three-quarters of the page, so she hadn't followed directions and so deserved an F.

When she had finished telling us this story, Kristen Ann put the sheet of paper down on the kitchen table and, with a very discouraged look, said in an intimidated voice, "I'll never be a good writer anyway," and left the room. My recollection of that moment remains vivid after 20 years.

In fact, she had *succeeded* at hitting the achievement target. She produced some pretty good writing. But her confidence in herself as a writer was deeply shaken because her teacher failed to disentangle her expectation that students comply with directions with her expectation that they demonstrate the ability to write well. As a result, both the assessment and the feedback had a destructive impact on this student. Without question, it's quite easy to see if the page is full. But is that the point? It's somewhat more challenging to assess accurately and to formulate and deliver understandable and timely feedback that permits a student to write better the next time and to remain confident about her ability to continue to grow as a writer.

Source: Reprinted with permission from R. Stiggins, J. Arter, J. Chappuis, and S. Chappuis, *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing It Right—Using It Well* (Portland, OR: ETS Assessment Training Institute, 2004), p. 9.

What problems do you see in Krissy's experience? What did her teacher do that made it difficult for Krissy to achieve the learning goals?

What are the essential differences between Emily's and Krissy's experiences?

How did assessment affect motivation in these two students' experiences?