Handbook for Assessment in the Service of Learning Series Preface
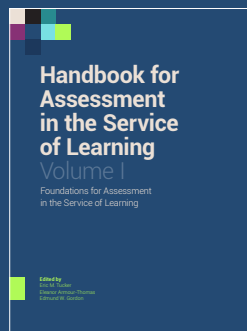
Edmund W. Gordon, Stephen G. Sireci, Eleanor Armour-Thomas, Eva L. Baker, Howard T. Everson, and Eric M. Tucker

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Handbook for Assessment in the Service of Learning
Volume I
Foundations for Assessment in the Service of Learning

Edited by
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Objective

How might educational assessment become a catalyst for learning and human development? This question lies at the heart of the *Handbook for Assessment in the Service of Learning* series, Volumes I, II & III. This series provides a research-based introduction to the theory, design, and practice of assessment in the service of teaching and learning (Gordon, 2020; 2025). The Handbook echoes the call of the *Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education* to repurpose assessment from merely certifying 'what is' to illuminating how learning happens and how it can be improved (Gordon Commission, 2013; Gordon, 2025). The three volumes presented here respond to that call.

Description

The three volumes in this series offer a contemporary view of a range of theoretical perspectives, scholarship, and research and development on innovations with the potential to enable assessment to enhance learning. Across the volumes, contributors explore the central theme of transforming assessment design and development to better support teaching and learning. The three volumes draw on the sciences of learning, measurement, pedagogy, improvement, and more—to inform this charge. We asked authors to anchor chapters in one or more of the design principles for assessment in the service of learning (Baker, Everson, Tucker, & Gordon, 2025). The chapters probe longstanding assumptions, and they explore how to weave a focus on learning into the fabric of educational assessments. The interested reader will find working examples that illustrate what these emerging approaches might look like in practical contexts, from classroom assessments that empower student agency, to larger-scale assessment systems that, by design,

integrate with curriculum and instruction, to applications of data analytics and AI-powered learning platforms that personalize assessment and promote learning. Together, these contributions reflect a common inquiry regarding the design, development, and use of assessment not merely to certify what students know and can do, but to illuminate and support how learning happens and can improve, for every learner (Gordon, 2025; Gordon & Rajagopalan, 2016; Shepard, 2019). From the learner's perspective, well-crafted assessments catalyze and cultivate the very understanding and performance they elicit. Accordingly, the goal is to design educational assessments to nurture productive struggle and growth in the learner.

Audience

This Handbook is intended for a broad audience, from test developers, assessment researchers, and learning scientists to educators, policy makers, and designers. It is a resource for anyone interested in using assessment to help learners learn.

Organization

This Handbook for Assessment in the Service of Learning series is organized into three volumes, each focusing on a critical dimension of assessment in the service of learning. The series includes:

- Volume I: Foundations for Assessment in the Service of Learning
- Volume II: Reconceptualizing Assessment to Improve Learning
- Volume III: Examples of Assessment in the Service of Learning

Together, the volumes present a holistic picture of what it means to redesign assessment in the service of learning—from high-level design frameworks down to concrete tools and practices, and from classroom-level interventions to system-wide exemplars.

Rationale

Too often, assessments have been treated as end-of-learning verdicts—snapshots of what students have achieved—rather than as integral parts of the learning process (Pellegrino, 2014). Meanwhile, important domains of student ability (complex skills like critical thinking and collaboration) have been poorly captured by conventional tests that focus narrowly on easily measured skills (Gordon, 2020).

This Handbook responds to Gordon's charge for assessment innovation. By showcasing successful exemplars, these volumes help define and shape the field that has emerged in the years since the Gordon Commission. Assessment in the service of learning represents a shift in perspective that views assessment, teaching, and learning as inseparable, entangled processes. It envisions a future where every learner is understood, appropriately supported, and sufficiently challenged (Gordon, 1996; Goldman & Lee, 2024). When assessment becomes a partner in the pedagogical aspects of curriculum and instruction, it can enrich and improve teaching and help every learner thrive (Armour-Thomas & Gordon, 2025; Hattie, 2009; Ruiz-Primo & Furtak, 2024). This is the promise of assessment in the service of learning: to not only reflect where learners are, but to actively help them get to where they need to go next. The message of this Handbook is clear: it is time to embrace a future where to assess is to teach and to learn.

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