

Emergent Assessment

“Assessing by Discovery”

What is Emergent Assessment?

Emergent assessment is a model based on Michael Scriven’s (1967) goal free evaluation model. With emergent assessment, assessment is structured using “effects” rather than learning outcomes. This model honors the idea that you may bias your assessment by specifically defining what you are looking for (i.e. when you focus exclusively on a learning outcome, you may be ‘putting on blinders’ regarding the other things that may be happening with student learning). This assessment model tends to be more qualitative in nature

Why Should I Consider Using Emergent Assessment?

Emergent Assessment addresses concerns about inquiry shared by many disciplines, particularly those disciplines that tend to use more qualitative methodologies. A few examples of these concerns are:

1. There may be differences between explicitly stated learning outcomes and their associated implicit learning.
 - Prevents overlooking unintended outcomes (both good and bad).
 - Focus is on what program actually does, rather than what it intends to do.
2. Does defining learning outcomes in “testable” ways alter the learning outcomes (and not always in desirable ways)?
 - With this type of assessment, the assessment process and learning outcomes are equally subject to evaluation as student learning.
3. Are we sacrificing the roles of assessment for the goals of assessment (are we sacrificing the process for the outcomes – i.e., assigning grades or writing an assessment report)?
 - This assessment method more directly takes students needs into consideration than a more traditional assessment model.

How Can I Develop Emergent Assessment?

Profile the actual effects of instruction or educational program against demonstrated needs of students who complete a course or program.

Step One:

Create a profile of the needs of students who finish your course, graduate from your program (that goes beyond what you intend to deliver).

Step Two:

Identify effects of educational program on students' learning using primarily direct methods, considering

- both intended **and** unintended effects
- both positive **and** negative effects

Step Three:

Compare the information gained in step one with the information gained in step two.

What are Some Emergent Assessment Methodologies?

Methodologies may include anything that includes a global, comprehensive look at student work, behavior, performance, attitudes, and values to determine what affect the academic program is having.

Examples:

- Writing Samples
 - Especially those requiring reflection
- Interviews or focus groups with students
 - Ex. Brainstorming sessions with students
- Ecological observation of students engaged in work in a classroom

What are the Critical Elements I Should Think about when I Use Emergent Assessment?

- Assessors need to be competent in the subject of assessment.
 - Assessors need to "know it when they see it."
- Assessors need to be aware of and conscientious of their bias.
 - Ideally, the assessors would have no knowledge of intended learning outcomes, but this is generally not possible in assessment.
 - Assessors do not look for effects solely through the lens of defined learning outcomes or intended learning based on course/program academic content.
- Need to be Critical!
 - Are you just seeing what you want to see?

What Sorts of Things Should I Consider When I Develop an Emergent Assessment?

First, you should consider the necessarily intrusive nature of this type of assessment. Is this appropriate for your setting (the culture or nature of your course or program)?

Also, this type of assessment can be very time-consuming – both for the faculty/staff and for the students.

There is a need for both candor and honesty with this assessment model, which may not be comfortable for some people.

Assessment with this model needs to be both balanced and unbiased.

- Requires knowledge from the assessors of their natural biases.

Scriven, M. (1967). The methodology of evaluation. In R. W. Tyler, R. M. Gagne & M. Scriven (Eds.), *Perspectives on curriculum evaluation*, (p. 39-83). Chicago: Rand-McNally.