

Continuing professional development

Using objective observation skills to support teaching and learning

The importance of making objective observations

Research shows that learners benefit from constructive feedback that reflects what they actually did rather than from feedback based on opinion. Objective observations provide the evidence that learners need to help them progress. Objective statements help teachers, tutors and trainers to plan learning strategies that are specific to individual learners.

Hints for facilitators

1. Familiarise yourself with the distinction between subjective and objective observations by working through the card-sort activity.
2. When you are running the activity, display definitions of subjective observations (observations that include interpretations, opinions and assumptions) and objective observations (observations that state only what can be seen or heard) throughout as a reminder to participants.
3. Keep participants to the point. Watch out for deviations in the form of:
 - discussing whether something might be true or not
 - inventing a context for a particular item in the card sort and using this to influence their assessment of the item.

Activity

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- completed a card-sort activity about differentiating between objective and subjective observations
- discussed the need to make objective observations, and the possible negative effects of making subjective observations
- reflected on the potential application of the activity to support teaching and learning in their curriculum area.

Materials needed

- One set of generic observation cards per group.
- Template for the card sort.
- One set of observation cards presented in the context of health and social care (this is optional.)

Instructions

The purpose of the task is to decide which statements on the cards provided are objective observations and which are subjective observations.

1. Invite participants to work in groups of three or four. Ask the participants to discuss each statement and place it under one of three headings: objective observations, subjective observations, not sure.
2. When the sorting is complete, invite each group in turn to contribute three cards in the objective category. Check for agreement as the items are offered. Discuss those that trigger disagreement.
3. Continue going round the groups until all the objective items have been agreed.
4. Repeat step three with the subjective items.
5. Discuss any items that remain in the 'not sure' category.
6. Extend the discussion with the participants to consider how the learning in the session can be transferred into professional practice, for example, when providing feedback to learners to negotiate individual learning plans (ILPs).

Extension activity

1. Share with participants, the card activity to develop observation skills with Society, health and development learners.
2. Ask participants to consider the value of adopting a similar approach with learners in their curriculum areas.
3. Ask participants to work in groups of three to four (you may wish participants from the same curriculum area to work together or you may want to mix the groups) and produce three objective and three subjective observation statements that are specific to their curriculum areas.
4. Ask each group to share their statements with colleagues.
5. Discuss how participants would adapt the activity to support the development of objective observation skills with their learners.

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE STATEMENTS

Study the statement on each card carefully and place it under the most suitable heading in the table below.

| Objective observations (Observations that state only what can be seen or heard) | Subjective observations (Observations that include interpretations, opinions and assumptions) | Not sure |
|---|---|-----------------|
| | | |