



# RPDP Elementary Science Newsletter

**Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program**

## Observation—What You See...

According to Webster's Concise Dictionary, the word observe means, "to notice by the sense of sight; to watch attentively; and to make methodical observation of, as for scientific purposes." At every grade level in our Curriculum Essentials Framework, students are asked to *observe*. How do we prepare our students to become keen observers? Why spend so much time on observations?

In *Science For All Americans* it is stated that "the validity of scientific claims is settled by referring to observations of phenomena... Such evidence is obtained by observations and measurements taken in situations that range from natural settings (such as a forest) to completely contrived ones (such as a laboratory). Because of this reliance of evidence, great value is placed on the development of better instruments and techniques of observation..."

Keeping these words in mind, one can see the importance for developing observation skills with children. So how would one develop them? Using objects that are of the same kind such as potatoes, apples, leaves from the same tree, or rocks that are similar will work. If you are thinking about using peanuts, do keep in mind that many people have allergies to them.

For younger students, the teacher can have the children sketch the object and then share words that

describe the object. The words can then be charted. Once the children have described and sketched the object, they can mix the object with others of its kind and see if another student can pick it out from the descriptive words that they used and the sketch that they drew. If not, then they would go back and refine their descriptions and sketches.

This same activity can be done with older students, but they would have their own object. They would describe their object in their science notebooks. Everyone in the class would put their objects in one large pile. Each student, referring to their science notebook, would have to find their own object. Usually they can find their own object. The next step, however gets to be tricky. All the objects are put back into one big pile. Now the students exchange their science notebook with someone else. They have to find the object that is described in the notebook they have. If they think they have found the correct object, they must verify it with the owner. This tends to be a much more difficult task.

After some time, the students are brought back together to discuss what they could do to make the task easier for their partners. Detailed descriptions, drawings, and measurements are suggestions that are often made. Minilessons are perfect for modeling these suggestions.

Observation is not a one time experience. Have your students continue to make observations. Have them share their notebooks with others to see if they are clearly communicating what they are observing. With time and practice, they will become keen observers and good communicators through their writing.

American Association for the Advancement of Science.(1990).*Science for all Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press.

