

### Summary and Objectives

This lesson provides an overview of procedures for observing, assessing, and individualizing children's learning experiences in the Early Learning Matters (ELM) Curriculum. The procedures are central to understanding and sensitively responding to differences in children's development and learning. The ELM Curriculum was developed by Purdue University for programs serving children from birth to five years of age.<sup>1</sup>

Assessment of a child's developmental progress is one of 10 standards in the [National Association for the Education of Young Children's \(NAEYC\) program accreditation criteria](#).<sup>2</sup> Thoughtful assessments can contribute to in-depth knowledge of a child that helps caregivers plan appropriately challenging experiences, tailored to each child's strengths and needs. Focused observations are a form of assessment and a common method of assessment in the ELM Curriculum.

At the conclusion of this lesson, you will have a stronger understanding of:

- procedures for individualizing children's learning experiences related to foundation skills promoted in the ELM Curriculum;
- ways to reflect and act on results of observations, assessments, and child responses to a follow-up plan; and
- approaches to working collaboratively with families as part of observing, assessing, and individualizing a child's learning.

This lesson is to be pursued **after** becoming familiar with the ELM Curriculum's *User Guide* that pertains to the ages of children in your room. There is a *User Guide* for children from birth to 36 months and a *User Guide* for children 3–5 years. This lesson builds on essential information offered in the *Guides*. It is not a substitute for the *Guides*. This lesson is to be used with the active involvement of a trainer who is familiar with the ELM Curriculum.

### ELM Resources for Observing/Assessing and Individualizing

#### ELM Guides for Observing and Individualizing

Each guide focuses on one or several related foundation skills. Each guide lists behaviors to observe, suggests observation opportunities, and offers ideas for follow-up learning supports that reinforce or reintroduce a skill(s). There are guides for birth–12 months, 12–36 months, and 3–5 years.

#### Progress Assessments of Literacy and Mathematics Skills (3–5 years)

Six assessments of literacy skills and three assessments of counting skills are provided. The assessments are a sequenced part of the curriculum. Each assessment plan suggests ideas for follow-up learning supports. Forms are provided for recording a child's assessment responses.

#### ELM Snapshot of Child Progress

The snapshot form is an efficient way to record dates of child observations or assessments and briefly describe follow-up plans. The form lists behaviors to potentially observe within a foundation skill and when a skill is introduced in the curriculum. There are snapshot forms for birth–12 months, 12–36 months, and 3–5 years.

## REVIEW

The eyes and ears of staff in high-quality early childhood classrooms get a good workout every day. Effective caregivers continuously tune in to what the children in their care are doing. Paying attention to a child's actions can help caregivers decide how to facilitate a child's participation in an activity. Lesson 2 for direct care staff reviews how the ELM Curriculum helps caregivers make good use of what they see and hear in adapting activities for children.<sup>3</sup>

Effective caregivers also purposefully assess children's progress and achievements. Assessment information, which often is secured through focused observations of a child in the earliest years of development, may be used to:

- develop and implement an individualized plan for supporting a child's progress in developing a particular skill,
- communicate with families about a child's learning and development, and
- identify children who may benefit from further assessment and perhaps special services.

The procedures for observing/assessing and individualizing follow four steps. The steps are summarized in this lesson's box entitled, Summary of Steps for Observing/Assessing a Child's Progress with Foundation Skills, and in the Review section of this lesson.

Examples of all four steps are offered for two children at the end of this lesson: 10-month-old Caydon and three-year-old Sarah.

**Step 1: Selecting a Skill**

Research-informed foundation skills are at the core of the ELM Curriculum's learning activities and assessments, including observations. Solid connections among program goals, assessments/observations, and children's learning experiences are consistent with [developmentally appropriate practice](#). Children's learning experiences support development of the skill being assessed, and assessments provide information that helps direct care staff optimally support children's skill development.<sup>4</sup>

**Summary of Steps for Observing/Assessing a Child's Progress with Foundation Skills**

Step	What To Do
1. Select a Skill	Over time, focus on skills in each area promoted by ELM. Select skills of special interest or concern to you or family members. Select skills that are directly related to a child's interests or emerging abilities.
2. Observe/Assess	Observe/assess a skill after it is introduced and a child has opportunities to use the skill. Conduct several observations of a child's use of a specific skill. Record each observation concisely and objectively.
3. Develop and Implement a Follow-Up Learning Plan	Reflect on a child's observed uses of the target skill. Develop a follow-up plan that reinforces or reintroduces the skill. Offer the plan in one-to-one or small group settings.
4. Document Progress, Determine Next Steps	Summarize the observations and follow-up plan in a child's portfolio. Monitor and document a child's responses to the plan. Phase out, extend, or revise the plan in response to the child's progress.

ELM provides guidance for observing specific dimensions of 13 foundation skills for infants and toddlers, such as language skills, gross motor development, and social interaction skills.<sup>5</sup> ELM also provides support for observing or assessing preschool-age children's progress with specific dimensions of 24 foundation skills,<sup>6</sup> such as number and letter knowledge, self-control, and relationship skills. The guidance is offered in the series of *Guides for Observing and Individualizing*.

It is beneficial to observe or assess one or more skills in each of the areas promoted by the ELM Curriculum. Recall there are five areas for infants and toddlers,<sup>7</sup> and eight areas for children 3–5 years of age.<sup>8</sup> Observing skills in only one or two areas provides an incomplete picture of a child's early progress toward later school readiness and life success.

The ELM Curriculum recommends observing or assessing a child's progress with one foundation skill approximately every four weeks. For infants and toddlers, this recommendation means that a skill in each of the five areas promoted by ELM would be observed within the first six months of a child's participation in ELM. For preschool-age children, this recommendation means a skill in each of the eight areas promoted by ELM would be assessed within the first nine months of a child's participation in ELM.

There are more dimensions of foundation skills to potentially observe or assess than can be practically managed. Consider, for example, the *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* focused on an infant's fine motor development. It lists three behaviors that can be observed: reaching, grasping, manipulating. Consider also the *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* focused on a preschool-age child's relationship skills. This *Guide* lists four behaviors to potentially observe: initiating play; sharing, taking turns, and cooperating with peers or adults; solving social problems; and being friendly and helpful.

Observation priorities need to be set for each child, as suggested below:

- Consider a child's developmental progression with a skill. An infant's fine motor behavior in manipulating a toy cannot be meaningfully observed before the infant is able to grasp a toy, for example.
- Observe a skill as it is (1) emerging or (2) being applied to a different situation or (3) when a skill seems difficult for a child to use. Your informal observations of a child and/or family interests can lead to decisions about focused observations. In the example of Sarah offered at the end of this lesson, staff noticed Sarah's difficulty in settling down at rest time.
- Observe a child's actions related to his/her interests. What material(s) or interest area/center seems to be a favorite? You may informally observe a child's interests during play periods or as part of ELM activities.<sup>9</sup>

Staff in rooms serving children 3–5 years of age do not need to select literacy and math skills to assess. Assessments of literacy and counting skills that are strong predictors of school readiness are an integral and sequenced part of the ELM Curriculum. The literacy and counting skill assessments may be supplemented with observations, as described in the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: 3–5 Years*.

### Step 2: Observing/Assessing

Each *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* suggests opportunities to observe the listed behaviors. For example, the *Guide* focused on an infant's fine motor skill suggests 10 opportunities for observing an infant's ability to grasp an object. The opportunities include ELM activities and mealtimes.

A useful record of a focused observation briefly and objectively describes what the child did. The record includes information on what happened, such as an infant smiling in response to a caregiver's smile (see example of Caydon at

the end of this lesson). The activity or setting is described, including any material(s) offered to or used by a child. The observation gives attention to a behavior(s) that might be the focus of a follow-up plan.

Observations and assessments should occur after a child has been introduced to and had multiple opportunities to use the skill that is the focus of the observation. *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* forms indicate when ELM activities begin giving attention to each foundation skill.

The ELM Curriculum suggests conducting at least two focused observations of the same skill, preferably on different days and/or in different settings, such as an ELM activity and during free play or a care routine. A child's behaviors in one setting, or on one day, may not accurately represent a child's mastery of a skill.

It is best to observe a child's efforts with the same skill during a 1–2 week period. A large span of time between observations may not provide reliable information about a child's skill at a given point.

It is valuable to conduct more observations of the same skill if two observations provide an inconsistent pattern of information about a child's progress, such as an infant reaching for a toy during an ELM activity but not reaching for an equally accessible toy during playtime. An additional observation(s) can provide more information. Young children's development is uneven and fluid. Multiple observations or assessments can often provide a more complete picture of a child's developmental pathways.

Progress assessments of preschool-age children's literacy and counting skills are a scheduled part of the curriculum.<sup>10</sup> The assessments are brief and support a child's active participation. Materials—such as picture cards, letter cards, and number cards—are used in assessments. Step-by-step procedures for each assessment are described in the

activity plan for the week in which the assessment is to occur.

Each assessment leads to one of three designations: Got It, Getting It, or Not Yet. For example, a child who independently puts together two words (shown on picture cards) to form a compound word, such as “sun” and “flower” for “sunflower,” would receive a Got It designation for blending two words. A child who puts together two words (again, from picture cards) with some staff assistance would receive a Getting It designation. A child who does not put together the two words with staff assistance would receive a Not Yet designation.

### Step 3: Developing and Implementing a Follow-up Plan

This step begins with your reflection on the observations. You may wish to invite a coworker or trainer to talk with you about what he/she notices in the observations.

Look for patterns in the child's use of a skill across observations. The observations described in the Sarah example at the end of this lesson point to the benefits of looking for patterns. Sarah demonstrated good concentration on deep and slow breathing in the group activity (Observation 1) but found it challenging to use this breathing skill in getting ready for a rest (Observation 2). Sarah's caregiver developed a follow-up plan that built on Sarah's skill in breathing slowly and deeply when offered staff support.

Paying attention to a child's interaction with a material may offer insight into possible follow-up support. Consider the example of Caydon at the end of this lesson. Caydon's participation in back-and-forth exchanges with a familiar caregiver differed by type of toy used in the activity. This led to a follow-up plan with simpler toys.

Each *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* offers ideas for follow-up activities focused on the list of suggested behaviors to observe. The activities reinforce or reintroduce the target skill of interest.

Experiences that reinforce a skill are appropriate when a skill is emerging or a child demonstrates full or partial use of a skill, such as Sarah's use of deep breathing. Activities that reintroduce a skill are appropriate when there is no evidence of the skill and the child seems ready to develop the skill.

Follow-up activities suggested in each *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* generally use existing activities in the ELM Curriculum. Sometimes adaptations of existing activities are suggested.

Follow-up plans generally involve one-to-one interactions or activities. A gathering of 2–3 children may be appropriate for supporting some social interaction and self-regulation skills. Also, it is efficient to form a small group when 2–4 children are to be offered the same type of support for a skill.

Plans should be clearly written so a staff member who did not generate the plan can follow it. A follow-up plan should be entered on a child's *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress*, a form described in this lesson's box entitled, ELM Resources for Observing/Assessing and Individualizing. The *Snapshot* form has a column for a brief description of a follow-up plan.<sup>11</sup>

An individualized follow-up activity should also be included in the *ELM Planning Form* for the week(s) in which the activity is to be offered. For infants and toddlers, a child's initial and the words *Follow-up* should be entered under the day the activity will be provided.<sup>12</sup> For classrooms serving children 3–5 years of age, a follow-up activity

and child's initials should be entered in the form's section entitled Tailoring Learning Supports.<sup>13</sup>

See the Caydon and Sarah examples at the end of this lesson for illustrations of entries in these two forms.

#### Step 4: Documenting Progress and Determining Next Steps

A child's portfolio or similar type of record is a good place to record results of observations and assessments, and to describe follow-up plans. See the Caydon and Sarah examples at the end of this lesson.

It is important to closely monitor a child's responses to follow-up activities. Mid-plan adjustments should be made if the activities do not appear to be helpful to a child. A child may not be ready for some aspect of a plan.

In general, a child's responses to a follow-up plan lead to one of three possibilities: phase out, extend, or revise. Many plans can be extended through opportunities offered to children as part of a typical day. Revisions of follow-up plans are appropriate when there is limited progress with the target skill. Paying close attention to a child's participation in follow-up activities can often provide clues to use in the development of a revised plan.

You may wish to report a child's responses to a follow-up plan in his/her portfolio. See the portfolio entries in the Caydon and Sarah examples at the end of this lesson.

## REFLECT

Focused observations require concentration. What practical steps might you take to reduce distractions or other interferences with your efforts to pay close attention to a child's actions?

There are three primary ways to use information from observations and assessments: to create and implement an individualized plan to support a

child's progress in developing a particular skill; to communicate with families about a child's progress; and to identify children who may benefit from further assessment that may lead to special services. Which of these three uses of observation/assessment information is the most challenging for you? Why? What might you do to make the task less challenging?



## EXTEND

This section offers some questions and suggestions for strengthening your understanding and use of assessments and observations. You are encouraged to consider these questions and suggestions with the active involvement of a trainer.

## Selecting a Skill

- The ELM Curriculum suggests observing a skill as it is (1) emerging or (2) being applied to a different situation or (3) when a skill seems difficult for a child to use. What examples of these three observation possibilities have you noticed among children in your room?
- The observation possibilities listed above plus other priorities described in this lesson do not support the idea of selecting skills you know a child has already mastered. Why?
- Prepare for a meeting in which you talk with a child's parents about their interests in skills that might be a focus of your observations. Plan to describe how focused observations and assessments are conducted and used in your room. Secure a list of foundation skills<sup>14</sup> and a blank *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* that you can share and discuss with parents during the meeting. Determine questions you can ask of parents to learn some specifics of their interest. Describe or practice your meeting plan with a trainer or coworker.

## Observing/Assessing

- Casual observations of a child's behaviors are helpful for a quick check on whether a child is safe, comfortable, and engaged. Casual (vs. focused) observations cannot be used reliably to offer or strengthen meaningful learning experiences, however. Why not?
- In the example of Sarah included at the end of this lesson, Sarah's skill in breathing slowly and deeply was observed in two settings: (1) a group activity focused on breathing and (2) getting ready for rest time. How did observations in two different settings contribute to the caregiver's follow-up plan? What is your experience in informally observing the same child's use of a specific skill in different settings or situations?

- The following descriptions of observations of Caydon and Sarah, the two children featured in this lesson, offer limited information for developing follow-up plans. What is missing in each description?
  - *Caydon smiled and looked at me while playing with a toy. There were long pauses each time I invited him to play with the toy.*
  - *Sarah had trouble settling down for rest time each time I observed her this week.*

## Developing and Implementing a Follow-up

## Learning Plan: Meet Maddie and Tonia

- The balancing skills of four-year-old Maddie were observed three times in response to family concern about leg muscle development. Here are the observations:

**Observation 1** (during Week 8, Day 4 Physical/Health activity): *Maddie stood on her right foot and held up her left leg for about 20 seconds. She put her hands out slightly to the side. Maddie stood on her left foot and held up her right leg for about 10 seconds. She wobbled some trying to maintain her balance and put her hands out more in this position than when standing on her right foot.*

**Observation 2** (during center activity for Week 8, Day 4 Physical/Health): *Maddie tried three different balancing positions, all the result of her rolling the balance game cubes: head and foot, foot and elbow, and knee and hand. Maddie was able to balance her body for 15–20 seconds each*

of the two times she used her foot. She was able to balance her body for a few seconds, before falling over, when she used her knee and hand. Maddie and a friend laughed when Maddie fell over, and Maddie tried again. The result was the same.

**Observation 3** (outside, day after Observations 1 and 2): Maddie and a friend decided to “dance” using the *Balancing Act* song on the *Kids in Motion* CD.<sup>15</sup> Maddie balanced her body with all motions that involved having both feet on the ground (arms low and neck up high, legs spread high and hands up high, face down and grab feet). She was able to balance her body for much less time when an action involved one leg off the ground. Usually she put both feet on the ground to avoid losing her balance.

**Your reflections:** (1) What seems to be Maddie’s attitude toward and interest in using her body to practice balancing? (2) What part of Maddie’s body and balancing positions appear promising to include in a follow-up plan focused on balancing skills? (3) How are each of the observations helpful in understanding Maddie’s skills in balancing?

- A caregiver noticed that recently 26-month-old Tonia is showing interest in puzzles during play periods. The caregiver conducted two observations.

**Observation 1** (during play period): Tonia pulled an animal-themed peg puzzle from the shelf. It has five pieces. She used the pegs to remove three pieces from the puzzle board, one at a time. She looked at the picture of the animal on each piece after she removed it. She put each piece to the side of the puzzle. After several minutes, she left the puzzle board and three pieces on a table and moved to another area.

**Observation 2** (during play period, 2 days later): Tonia pulled from the shelf the same animal-themed peg puzzle she used in my first

observation. Today I talked with Tonia about the puzzle pieces as she removed each piece from the puzzle. For each piece, Tonia pointed to the picture on the piece and I said the name of the pictured animal. I encouraged Tonia to repeat the name of the animal. She said each name. Tonia looked at four of the five pieces, and set each piece next to the puzzle after looking at it. She did not seem interested in looking at the fifth piece on the board but helped me put the puzzle together by handing me pieces.

**Your reflections:** (1) What did Tonia do in these observations to suggest that she may be more interested in the pictures on a puzzle than in how puzzles work? (2) What might you include in a follow-up plan for Tonia to support her interest in naming objects?

### Documenting Progress and Determining Next Steps

- [NAEYC’s program accreditation](#) procedures request evidence of how a program uses information from observations of a child(ren). Here is one of the NAEYC requests: provide two examples of how information from an observational assessment you conducted was used to develop an individualized activity.<sup>16</sup> What types of documentation will you provide?
- A child is about to enter kindergarten after a year of participation in a caregiver’s room. The caregiver looks at the child’s *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* in preparation for a final meeting with the child’s parents. The caregiver notices that, across the year, all observations and assessments have occurred in three of the eight areas promoted by the *ELM Curriculum* for preschool-age children: literacy, mathematics, and physical/health. What are the possible benefits and limitations of this record of information about the child? What might the child’s kindergarten teacher be able to do and not do with this record?

- Prepare for a meeting with a child's parents about their child's progress with skills promoted in your room. Assemble pertinent examples of the child's progress and work. Generate

questions that respectfully open the door to collaborative support involving your room and family members.

## PRACTICE

The following scenarios describe typical situations in early childhood classrooms. Talk with a trainer about your responses to questions in the scenarios. Also in this section are suggested responses to questions in the scenarios. Talk with a trainer about your reactions to the suggested scenario response.

**Scenario #1:** A family of a child in your preschool-age room wants you to observe and support their child's manners. How do you respond to this request?

**Scenario #2:** An individualized follow-up plan for two-year-old Natasha focused on her language skills. Activities in the plan worked! Natasha offered more utterances and words during the follow-up activities than she usually communicates. The follow-up plan can be phased out. But Natasha's caregivers want to ensure she continues to be supported in language use. What are some ways the staff can encourage Natasha to verbally communicate during their everyday interactions with her?

### Suggested Responses to Scenarios

**Scenario #1:** It is important for observations of a child to focus on a program's goals for children and learning experiences. You can assure the family that their interest in manners connects well to the ELM Curriculum's foundation skills related to social interaction skills and appreciation of diversity. You

may wish to describe some of the learning activities related to manners, such as asking to play, sharing, being helpful, being friendly, offering compliments, and taking another person's point of view. Activities also give attention to appreciation of individual and family diversity. (The weeks in which these topics are emphasized in Social-Emotional and Social Studies activities can be readily seen in the Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals chart in the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: 3–5 Years*.) Use the *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* form for the family's child to point out the attention to relationship skills and individual and family diversity. There are *Guides for Observing and Individualizing* focused on relationship skills and on individual and family diversity.

**Scenario #2:** In the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months*, the Areas Promoted by ELM section on Communication/Language ends with suggested practices for promoting communication and language (see Building on the Activity Plans).

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This lesson was written by Douglas R. Powell, with contributions from Kathy Broniarczyk and Chanele Robinson-Rucker. The current version is the first revision of the lesson. For information about the ELM Curriculum, contact: [elmcurriculum@purdue.edu](mailto:elmcurriculum@purdue.edu).



### Caydon's Social Interaction Skill

#### Step 1: Select a Skill

A caregiver noticed hesitations in 10-month-old Caydon's participation in play that provided opportunities for back-and-forth interaction with a familiar caregiver. This type of interaction is also known as serve-and-return exchanges that are linked to brain development.<sup>17</sup>

#### Step 2: Observe/Assess

Observation 1: *I engaged Caydon in play with the two largest rings of a stacking ring toy.<sup>18</sup> Caydon watched me put a ring on the post. He smiled at me when I smiled at him. I gave Caydon a ring to put on the post. He responded with a long pause that involved looking carefully at the stacking ring and post. Eventually Caydon took the ring, put it on the post, made a big smile, and looked at me while I communicated delight at his actions. This pattern was the same with the second ring and when we played again with the same two rings.*

*I was pleased to see Caydon's big smile and eye contact with me. The long pauses before picking up a ring made me wonder if a less advanced toy would better support back-and-forth interactions.*

Observation 2: *Later in the week I invited Caydon to play with me with a xylophone.<sup>19</sup> I tapped a bar and then invited Caydon to tap a bar. We went back and forth with this play for several minutes. We exchanged a lot of smiles. There were no pauses. He liked hearing the sound.*

#### Step 3: Develop and Implement a Follow-up Plan

The caregiver's reflection on the first observation led to a change in the toy used in the second play session. The xylophone seemed to help Caydon focus on interacting with the caregiver.

The caregiver developed a follow-up plan with Caydon that involved back-and-forth play sessions with simple toys. Here is the caregiver's entry in the *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* for Caydon:

*Encourage Caydon to engage in back-and-forth play with a caregiver focused on simple toys. Use Option 2 in Blocks 8 and 11, Social-Emotional.*

The caregiver also entered the plan on the *ELM Planning Form*, with Caydon's initials in the Who column and the word *Follow-up* in the What column on Tuesday and Thursday in the Social-Emotional column.

#### Step 4: Document Progress and Determine Next Steps

The caregiver prepared the following for Caydon's portfolio:

*We encourage each infant in our room to participate in back-and-forth interactions with a familiar caregiver. This type of interaction is linked to brain development. Recently I played with Caydon using a stacking ring toy. Caydon smiled and made eye contact with me during our play. He paused quite awhile each time I offered him a ring. I changed the toy to a xylophone in a play session with Caydon later in the week. He did not pause while playing with the xylophone. He smiled when I smiled at him! He liked seeing me smile when I smiled at him! We will continue to support Caydon's play with one of us by using simple toys that are of interest to him.*

Caydon easily engaged in back-and-forth exchanges in the follow-up activities. The plan was phased out after one week. Here is what the caregiver prepared for Caydon's portfolio:

*I engaged Caydon in back-and-forth play with me focused on a xylophone on one day and a soft ball and bucket on another day. It was fun to see Caydon smile at me after I smiled at him! Caydon is making good progress in social interactions.*

### Sarah's Concentration Skill

#### Step 1: Select a Skill

Staff noticed that three-year-old Sarah is having difficulty getting settled on her cot at rest time. Focusing on rest time involves concentration. ELM activities related to concentration include breathing deeply and slowly, a practice especially important in calming down for rest.

#### Step 2: Observe/Assess

Observation 1 (conducted as part of a group activity focused on breathing deeply and slowly<sup>20</sup>): *Sarah put her hand on her stomach and took deep breaths in and out as the staff member counted and coached on how to breathe deeply. Sarah relaxed her face after scrunching it up and pretending there was an imaginary butterfly on it.*

Observation 2: *I observed how Sarah got ready for rest time on three different days this week. She did the same thing each day. She rolls back and forth on her cot and then stands up to fluff her blanket. She lays back down and breathes loudly. Then she asks for a staff member to rub her back.*

#### Step 3: Develop and Implement a Follow-up Plan

The caregiver's reflection on the observations led to this insight: Sarah concentrates well on deep and slow breathing in the group activity (Observation 1) but finds it challenging to use this breathing skill in getting ready for a rest (Observation 2). Sarah breathes loudly in her attempts to calm down at rest.

The caregiver developed a follow-up plan to help Sarah use her ability to concentrate on her breathing in one setting (group activity) in another setting (rest time). The plan builds on Sarah's good efforts in breathing deeply and slowly in the breathing activity. The caregiver anticipates that improving Sarah's focus on breathing at rest time may reduce her requests for back rubs.

The caregiver wrote the following entry in the *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* for Sarah and also in the *ELM Planning Form*:

*At rest time, offer verbal guidance on breathing deeply the same way Sarah does in our breathing activities.*

#### Step 4: Document Progress and Determine Next Steps

The caregiver prepared the following for Sarah's portfolio:

*We are helping children learn how to concentrate on their own behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. I observed Sarah during a deep breathing activity led by a staff member. She seemed fully focused on her breathing and relaxing her face muscles. On three different days in one week, I observed how Sarah gets ready for rest time. Each day she followed the same routine (which included breathing loudly) and then asked for someone to rub her back. We are helping Sarah get ready for rest time by building on her breathing efforts. We are offering verbal guidance on breathing deeply, the same way she does in our breathing activities.*

The follow-up plan was phased out after two weeks because Sarah responded well. Here is what the caregiver prepared for Sarah's portfolio:

*I offered Sarah verbal support for breathing deeply and slowly when she gets ready for a rest time. I sat next to her and quietly said "in, out" as she breathed. Sarah responded positively to my help. Within a week she was breathing slowly and deeply at rest time, and now she asks for someone to rub her back only occasionally.*

## Endnotes

- 1 Development of the Early Learning Matters (ELM) Curriculum was supported by the U.S. Department of Defense Child Development Competitive Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), grant number 2013-48762-21537 to Purdue University as part of the DoD-USDA Partnership for Military Families. The ELM Curriculum is based in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-2055. Douglas Powell, Principal Investigator. Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, Co-Principal Investigator.
- 2 [National Association for the Education of Young Children. \(2019\). \*NAEYC early learning program accreditation standards and assessment items\*. Washington, DC: Author.](#)
- 3 In addition to scaffolding tips, ELM activity descriptions often include suggestions for adapting an activity. Also, each activity plan for infants and toddlers includes a What to Look For section that describes how young children may respond to an activity.
- 4 [National Association for the Education of Young Children. \(2020\). \*Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children\*. Washington, DC: Author.](#)
- 5 The ELM Curriculum provides guidance on observing behaviors related to 13 of the 14 foundation skills promoted by ELM. There is not a guide for observing a child's health practices, a foundation skill that is promoted primarily during routine care practices.
- 6 Of the 27 foundation skills promoted by ELM, two creative expression skills are combined for observation purposes. There is not a guide for observing a child's positive sense of self, an important skill that is challenging to assess. There is an assessment procedure but not an observation guide for letter knowledge.
- 7 Communication/language, cognitive, self-regulation, social-emotional, and physical/health. See the Areas Promoted by ELM section of the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months*.
- 8 Language/literacy, mathematics, self-regulation, social-emotional, social studies, creative expression, science, and physical/health. See the Areas Promoted by ELM section of the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: 3–5 Years*.
- 9 ELM Curriculum, 3–5 Years, Week 2, Creative Expression activity plan.
- 10 There are six progress assessments of different literacy skills and three assessments of counting skills. The Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals chart in the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: 3–5 Years* indicates the weeks in which assessments are offered. For example, the Language/Literacy entry for Phonological Awareness during Week 11 lists an assessment of compound words.
- 11 See samples of a completed *Snapshot* form in the appendix of each *User Guide*.
- 12 See sample *ELM Planning Form* in the appendix of the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months*.
- 13 See sample *ELM Planning Form* in the appendix of the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: 3–5 Years*.
- 14 There is a list of foundation skills in each *User Guide*. The *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* can support a more in-depth discussion of skills because it lists specific behaviors associated with each skill.
- 15 ELM Curriculum, 3–5 Years Week 8, Physical/Health, Day 4.
- 16 [Accreditation Assessment Item Number 4D.1 in National Association for the Education of Young Children \(2019\).](#)
- 17 See p. 5 of the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months* for a description of serve-and-return interactions.
- 18 ELM Curriculum, Birth–12 Months, Block 12, Social-Emotional, Option 2.
- 19 ELM Curriculum, Birth–12 Months, Block 8, Social-Emotional, Option 2.
- 20 ELM Curriculum, 3–5 Years, Week 10, Self-Regulation, Day 1.