

FREE RESOURCE · SOUTH AFRICAN PRESCHOOLS

ELDA Assessment Toolkit 2026

Six domains. Five age brackets. NYA / PA / A rating scale. Observation log.
Comment starters per domain. Inspection readiness checklist. Everything a South African ECD teacher needs to assess and report confidently.

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THE FOUNDATION

South Africa's Early Learning and Development Areas

ELDA stands for Early Learning and Development Area. The six ELDAs are the developmental domains defined in South Africa's National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years — the curriculum framework your registered ECD centre is expected to follow.

What ELDA replaces

The National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) — used widely before the NCF was published in 2015. If your school is still using NELDS, it is time to align to the NCF.

What comes after ELDA

CAPS — the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement — which begins at Grade R. The NCF is designed to lead naturally into CAPS. Children assessed in the Towards Grade R bracket are preparing for CAPS subjects.

Key principle of ELDA assessment

ELDA assessment is entirely **observation-based**. No formal tests. No worksheets at a desk. You watch what children do during play, routines, and daily activities — and you record what you see. The quality of your observations determines the quality of your reports. EarlyTrack captures those observations during the week so there is nothing to reconstruct from memory at the end of term.

NYA

Not Yet Achieved

Skill not yet consistently observed — does not mean the child cannot do it

PA

Partially Achieved

Skill is emerging — seen sometimes, with support, or inconsistently

A

Achieved

Skill consistently observed across different contexts without adult prompting

The six ELDAs cover every area of a young child's development. They integrate with each other continuously — activities rarely develop just one domain. **Laminate this page for the classroom wall.**

DOMAIN 01 · THE KEY ELDA**Well-being**

Physical health, emotional security, forming secure relationships. All other domains depend on this one. Includes gross and fine motor development, self-care, and emotional regulation.

DOMAIN 02**Identity and Belonging**

Sense of self, family, and community. Feeling accepted and valued. Cultural identity and home language awareness. Understanding rules and developing friendships.

DOMAIN 03**Communication**

Home language development, emergent literacy, listening, and expressive communication. Vocabulary, storytelling, print awareness, and early writing attempts.

DOMAIN 04**Exploring Mathematics**

Number sense, shape and space, measurement, patterns through play. Counting, sorting, comparing. Mathematics experienced through blocks, water, sand, and movement.

DOMAIN 05**Creativity**

Art, music, movement, and imaginative play. Representing ideas through many media. Process matters more than product — exploration and expression, not a specific outcome.

DOMAIN 06**Knowledge and Understanding of the World**

Science, nature, technology, time, and place. Curiosity and investigation. Cause and effect. Living and non-living things. Community roles and seasonal change.

Remember: domains integrate

A child building a block tower is demonstrating Exploring Mathematics (shape, balance, quantity), Creativity (design), Well-being (physical coordination), and Communication (if they describe what they are building). Observe holistically — then record the primary domain being demonstrated in each observation note.

ELDA skills are developmentally staged across five brackets. A child in the Young Children bracket (36–48 months) is assessed against different skill expectations than a child in the Towards Grade R bracket. EarlyTrack assigns each child to their correct bracket automatically from their date of birth.

Bracket	Age Range	Typical Setting	Key Focus Areas	In EarlyTrack
Babies	0–18 months	Baby room, creche	Attachment, sensory exploration, pre-language sounds, feeding and sleep routines, early movement milestones	Auto-assigned
Toddlers	18–36 months	Toddler room	Walking and running, early speech, parallel play, independence in self-care, first friendships, simple problem-solving	Auto-assigned
Young Children	36–48 months	Pre-primary, Gr 000	Complex play, growing vocabulary, early literacy and number exposure, creative expression, beginning rule-following	Auto-assigned
Older Children	48–60 months	Pre-primary, Gr 00	Extended storytelling, counting with understanding, group problem-solving, emotional regulation, cooperative play	Auto-assigned
Towards Grade R	60–72 months	Pre-Grade R, Gr 0	School readiness skills, phonological awareness, numeracy consolidation, social competence, Grade R transition preparation	Auto-assigned

Common mistake: wrong bracket assignment

A child rated NYA on a skill that belongs to an older bracket is not behind — they are simply not there yet. Accurate bracket assignment prevents false red flags and protects teachers from unnecessary parent conversations. Always check a child's date of birth before interpreting NYA ratings. In EarlyTrack, bracket assignment is automatic — reducing this risk entirely.



ELDA DOMAIN 01
Well-being

Physical health, emotional security, and the capacity to form secure relationships with caregivers and peers. This is the key ELDA — all others depend on a child feeling safe and settled.

NYA — SKILLS TO TARGET NEXT

- Struggles to separate from caregiver without extended distress
- Requires constant adult support to manage body in space
- Rarely initiates self-care routines (hand washing, dressing)

PA — SKILLS EMERGING

- Separates from caregiver with reassurance but resumes play
- Completes familiar physical tasks with some adult encouragement
- Beginning to express emotions verbally in some situations

A — SKILLS CONSISTENTLY ACHIEVED

- Settles quickly at school and engages independently with peers
- Identifies and expresses own feelings using words in most situations
- Manages transitions between activities with minimal disruption

REPORT COMMENT STARTERS — COPY, ADAPT, PERSONALISE

NYA — NOT YET ACHIEVED

[Child] is still developing comfort in the school environment and benefits from close adult support during transitions and new activities. Focused attention on building trusting routines is the current priority.

PA — PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

[Child] manages most daily routines with encouragement and is beginning to communicate needs and feelings verbally. Consistent routines and positive reinforcement are supporting steady progress.

A — ACHIEVED

[Child] demonstrates emotional resilience and settles comfortably into school life. [He/She] manages transitions independently, engages in cooperative play, and uses words to express needs and feelings.



ELDA DOMAIN 02

Identity and Belonging

Sense of self, family, and community. Feeling accepted, valued, and included. Awareness of cultural identity, home language, and the child's place in the wider world.

NYA — SKILLS TO TARGET NEXT

- Rarely participates in group activities or discussions
- Does not yet show recognition of own name or image
- Avoids interaction with unfamiliar peers

PA — SKILLS EMERGING

- Participates in familiar group activities with prompting
- Beginning to speak about own family and home context
- Shows awareness of classroom rules with adult reminders

A — SKILLS CONSISTENTLY ACHIEVED

- Confidently shares own experiences in group settings
- Shows understanding of family roles and community helpers
- Demonstrates inclusion by inviting others into play without prompting

REPORT COMMENT STARTERS — COPY, ADAPT, PERSONALISE

NYA — NOT YET ACHIEVED

[Child] is still developing confidence in group settings and benefits from one-to-one interaction with a trusted adult before joining larger group activities.

PA — PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

[Child] is growing in confidence and participates in familiar group activities. [He/She] is beginning to talk about [his/her] family and home, and responds positively to classroom routines.

A — ACHIEVED

[Child] demonstrates a secure sense of self and belonging in the classroom community. [He/She] contributes confidently in group settings, shows awareness of others' feelings, and celebrates cultural diversity.



ELDA DOMAIN 03

Communication

Home language development, emergent literacy, listening, and expressive communication. Vocabulary, storytelling, print awareness, and early writing attempts.

NYA — SKILLS TO TARGET NEXT

- Uses fewer than 50 words or relies mainly on gestures
- Does not yet attend to stories or group discussions for more than a minute
- Shows no interest in books or print materials

PA — SKILLS EMERGING

- Uses short sentences to communicate needs
- Listens to a story with support and answers simple questions
- Handles books correctly and shows some awareness of print

A — SKILLS CONSISTENTLY ACHIEVED

- Uses complex sentences and rich vocabulary in conversation
- Retells stories in sequence using key details
- Shows clear print awareness — directionality, letters vs pictures

REPORT COMMENT STARTERS — COPY, ADAPT, PERSONALISE

NYA — NOT YET ACHIEVED

[Child] is in the early stages of expressive language development. Shared reading, song, and one-to-one conversation are being prioritised to build vocabulary and listening skills.

PA — PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

[Child] communicates needs using short sentences and engages with stories when given support. Vocabulary is growing steadily through daily conversation, songs, and shared book reading.

A — ACHIEVED

[Child] communicates fluently in [home language] using age-appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure. [He/She] retells familiar stories in sequence and demonstrates clear early literacy awareness.

ELDA DOMAIN 04



Exploring Mathematics

Number sense, shape and space, measurement, patterns, and data through play and daily routines. Mathematics is experienced — not taught formally at a desk.

NYA — SKILLS TO TARGET NEXT

- Does not yet count objects with one-to-one correspondence
- Does not sort objects by a single attribute
- Does not recognise or name any basic shapes

PA — SKILLS EMERGING

- Counts to 5 with one-to-one correspondence in a supported activity
- Sorts objects by one attribute (colour or size) when prompted
- Identifies circle and square in familiar contexts

A — SKILLS CONSISTENTLY ACHIEVED

- Counts reliably to 10+ with one-to-one correspondence
- Names and describes properties of multiple 2D and 3D shapes
- Sorts by two attributes simultaneously without prompting

REPORT COMMENT STARTERS — COPY, ADAPT, PERSONALISE

NYA — NOT YET ACHIEVED

[Child] is in the early stages of mathematical exploration. Hands-on play with counting, sorting, and building materials is being used daily to develop number sense and spatial reasoning.

PA — PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

[Child] is beginning to explore mathematical concepts through play — counting objects, sorting by colour, and identifying familiar shapes. Targeted activities are building confidence steadily.

A — ACHIEVED

[Child] demonstrates strong foundational number sense and spatial reasoning. [He/She] counts reliably, sorts by multiple attributes, and uses mathematical language naturally during play.



ELDA DOMAIN 05
Creativity

Art, music, movement, and imaginative play. Representing ideas through many media. Process matters more than product — exploration and expression are the goals.

NYA — SKILLS TO TARGET NEXT

- Avoids art materials or uses them without intention
- Does not engage in imaginative or dramatic play
- Does not respond to music with movement or vocalisation

PA — SKILLS EMERGING

- Uses art materials with purpose in structured activities
- Engages in simple role play with familiar scenarios when invited
- Moves in response to music with adult encouragement

A — SKILLS CONSISTENTLY ACHIEVED

- Uses art materials independently to represent personal experiences
- Initiates complex imaginative play with narrative and multiple roles
- Creates own movement sequences in response to music

REPORT COMMENT STARTERS — COPY, ADAPT, PERSONALISE

NYA — NOT YET ACHIEVED

[Child] is in the early stages of creative expression. Open-ended art, music, and dramatic play opportunities are being offered daily to build confidence and expressive range.

PA — PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

[Child] engages with creative activities in structured settings and is beginning to initiate imaginative play. Colour, texture, and movement are being explored with growing curiosity.

A — ACHIEVED

[Child] expresses ideas confidently through art, movement, and dramatic play. [He/She] initiates creative projects independently and uses a range of materials to represent [his/her] experiences and imagination.



ELDA DOMAIN 06

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Science, nature, technology, concepts of time and place. Curiosity, investigation, and making sense of the physical and social world.

NYA — SKILLS TO TARGET NEXT

- Shows little interest in the natural or built environment
- Does not yet demonstrate cause-and-effect reasoning in play
- Cannot identify familiar community helpers by role

PA — SKILLS EMERGING

- Shows curiosity about living things and natural materials
- Beginning to predict outcomes in familiar cause-and-effect situations
- Identifies one or two community helpers by role when shown pictures

A — SKILLS CONSISTENTLY ACHIEVED

- Investigates objects and phenomena independently and persistently
- Demonstrates understanding of time concepts — today, yesterday, seasons
- Uses comparative language to describe and explain observations

REPORT COMMENT STARTERS — COPY, ADAPT, PERSONALISE

NYA — NOT YET ACHIEVED

[Child] is in the early stages of developing curiosity about the world. Nature exploration, sensory play, and investigation activities are being integrated into daily routines.

PA — PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

[Child] shows growing curiosity about living things and the natural environment. [He/She] is beginning to make predictions and describe observations using simple language.

A — ACHIEVED

[Child] investigates the world with genuine curiosity and persistence. [He/She] uses comparative and descriptive language fluently, makes predictions, and shows developing understanding of time, nature, and community.

CHILD NAME

AGE BRACKET

WEEK OF

Record what you observed the child doing — describe the behaviour, not your interpretation. Note the context (where, with whom) and circle the primary domain. Aim for at least one observation per child per week.

Day	Domain	Observation — what the child did, where, with whom	Rating NYA/ PA/A
Mon	WB · IB · CO EM · CR · KW		
Tue	WB · IB · CO EM · CR · KW		
Wed	WB · IB · CO EM · CR · KW		
Thu	WB · IB · CO EM · CR · KW		
Fri	WB · IB · CO EM · CR · KW		
Fri	WB · IB · CO EM · CR · KW		
Fri	WB · IB · CO EM · CR · KW		

TIP: A useful observation note has 4 components

Who (child name + bracket) · **What** (exact behaviour — not an interpretation) · **Context** (where, when, with whom) · **Domain link** (which ELDA skill this relates to)

Use this planner to map your observation focus across the year. You do not need to formally assess every domain every week — but you should have at least three observations per domain per child per term by the time reports are due.

Domain	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Well-being	Settling in, routines, attachment security	Physical development, self-care independence	Emotional regulation, peer relationships	Readiness review, transition planning
Identity and Belonging	Name recognition, family awareness	Cultural sharing, community roles	Group belonging, inclusive play	Social competence, leadership in play
Communication	Vocabulary, listening, shared reading	Storytelling, print awareness	Early writing, rhyme and phonological play	Language consolidation, second language
Exploring Maths	Sorting, counting objects, shape names	Number recognition, patterns, measurement	Problem-solving, data, spatial reasoning	Number operations, Grade R bridge skills
Creativity	Exploratory art, music, movement	Dramatic play, representation through media	Collaborative creative projects	Self-directed expression and presentation
Knowledge of World	Nature exploration, living/non-living	Cause and effect, simple science	Time concepts, seasons, community	Technology, environment, consolidation

Minimum evidence per term

Aim for at least **3 observation notes per domain per child per term**. In EarlyTrack, voice-to-text capture makes this achievable during the school day — teachers speak the observation aloud and the system links it to the correct skill. No after-hours writing required.

A single NYA rating in one domain in one term is normal. A red flag is a pattern — a child who is NYA across multiple skills in the same domain for two or more consecutive terms, especially in Well-being or Communication.

What is a red flag?

NYA across 3 or more skills in the same domain for 2 or more consecutive terms, particularly in Well-being or Communication. A child who cannot access learning because their basic well-being needs are not met should never be marked NYA in cognitive or language domains without first addressing Well-being.

Check Well-being first

When a child is NYA across multiple domains, the Well-being domain is almost always the root. A child who is unwell, insecure, or hungry cannot demonstrate skills in Communication, Maths, or Creativity.

Response steps

- Document the pattern** — dates, specific skills, contexts observed
- Check bracket assignment** — confirm the child is being assessed against the right age bracket
- Speak to the principal** before raising with the parent — the principal must see the evidence first
- Parent conversation** — start with strengths, describe the pattern without clinical language, agree a next step
- Targeted support plan** — document what the school will do differently next term
- If pattern persists** — refer to speech therapist, occupational therapist, or educational psychologist
- Record all conversations** — date, who was present, what was agreed. This is your protection.

What EarlyTrack does automatically

EarlyTrack flags children who are consistently NYA across multiple skills in the same domain with a red flag indicator on the principal's dashboard. The principal sees the pattern before reports are written — not after. This gives time to investigate and respond before the parent conversation happens.

Use this checklist before a DSD or Bana Pele inspection. Every item should have a clear answer — either the record exists, or you know where to find it in under 60 seconds.

Assessment Records

- ELDA assessment records for all enrolled children — current term and previous terms
- Each child assessed against the correct age bracket
- Observation notes on file with dates, domain, and child name
- Signed assessment reports sent to parents each term
- Principal approval records for all reports
- Red flag documentation and parent communication records

Attendance Records

- Daily attendance register — current term, printed or digital
- Absence notifications to parents — evidence of communication
- Child-to-staff ratios maintained — daily records available

Staff Records

- Qualification certificates on file for all teaching staff
- First aid certificates — valid and not expired
- Child Protection Register clearances for all staff
- Clock-in and work hours records — current month

Incident Records

- DSD incident forms completed for all incidents — current year
- Three-signature chain complete on every form (teacher, principal, parent)
- Sequential incident register maintained and numbered
- Body map documentation for any physical injury incidents
- Parent acknowledgement records for all incidents

Registration and Compliance

- Current DSD registration certificate displayed
- Health and safety inspection compliance — current year
- Child admission records — date of birth, emergency contacts, medical information
- Authorised pickup records and parent ID documentation
- POPIA compliance — data sharing consent from parents

EarlyTrack: all retrievable in seconds

Every item on this checklist — assessments, incident forms, attendance, staff records — is stored digitally in EarlyTrack and retrievable instantly from the principal dashboard.

EarlyTrack was built specifically for South African preschools. ELDA is not an add-on or a template you import — it is built in from day one.

964

ELDA skills pre-loaded

All six domains across all five age brackets. No building. No importing. Day one ready.

2

Languages for AI comments

English and Afrikaans. Per child. Per domain. Per term. Principal reviews and approves.

R299

Per month, Standard plan

One flat price per school. No per-child fees. Includes ELDA, Grade R, DSD, attendance, staff records, parent portal.

Without EarlyTrack

- X Rebuild ELDA framework in spreadsheets every term
- X Write observations in a paper book, transcribe at report time
- X Write comments from memory at the end of term
- X Print, sign, and file paper reports
- X Chase parents for signatures on incident forms
- X 2-3 full days per teacher per term on reports

With EarlyTrack

- ✓ ELDA framework ready on day one — never rebuilt
- ✓ Voice-to-text observations captured during the school day
- ✓ AI drafts comments in English and Afrikaans — teacher reviews
- ✓ Principal approves, PDF generated automatically
- ✓ Parent portal — digital delivery with read-confirmation
- ✓ Half a day per teacher per term on reports

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R299

Standard /
month
Up to 30
children

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