

Key: A holistic view. (Well-being, linkedness and involvement based on Belgian practice)

One of the six keys in this model that leads to successful inclusion of young children is “a holistic view.” In inclusive education, we consider ‘how do we know which children are at risk in their development?’ In the traditional way of thinking the focus is mainly on children’s achievements. Children that show some lag in development will be labelled as ‘at risk’ and will be subject to additional interventions. In the traditional way of thinking, we mainly focus on the product.

Well-being, linkedness and involvement

In inclusive education, the key questions are different. We do not focus on what the children have learned or not. Here we focus on the **process within the child** and on the level of the child. We focus on how the children experience their stay in the setting. You try to find out ‘how the children are doing’. In fact, we ask our self:

- How the children are feeling (well-being);
- How engaged they are in their activities (involvement) and how is their relation with others and the context (linkedness)

When these conditions are fulfilled, we know that both the social-emotional and cognitive development of the child is secured. Alongside this development, we also see other levels of development benefit from the well-being and involvement. The levels of development are not the first indicators considered because ‘a lag in development’ or ‘an excellent development’ does not necessarily imply that the child is not getting what it needs to develop.

In relation with a holistic view on the child

Firstly, we have a look at the well-being and the involvement and linkedness of the child. Secondly, we focus on the competences of the child. What about the levels of development? For ‘a lag in development’ does not necessarily imply that the child is not getting what it needs to develop, while being ‘ahead in development’ equally does not imply that the child’s development is not endangered. It is very important to see the child in total from a ‘holistic’ perspective. In ‘experiential learning’ we address nine areas of development that ‘process orientated learning’ see as essential when it comes to defining the kind of outcome education should strive for. Competences are not taken separately as a set of isolated skills. It considers them as a complex entity, and therefore offers educators, teachers and parents a framework to identify talents in children and support deep-level learning.

The nine areas are emotional health, gross motor development, fine motor development, language and communication, artistic expression, understanding of the physical world, understanding of the social world, logical and mathematical thinking and self-organization and entrepreneurship. In these areas it is important to remember that development can be different from child to child. It is important to look at the level of the child and stimulate well-being and involvement related to their level of development. We used to focus on subjects; now our daily challenge is to focus on the child as the child is and how it is related to his culture and background. This approach is less in line with a ‘curriculum’ perspective and more ‘holistic’ in nature. It is good to distinguish basic competences when you observe children. In this way you recognise talents of the children.