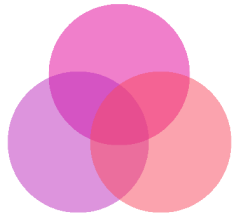


2024 LITERATURE REVIEW

BEST PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

(Early Childhood Developmental Supports)

DR JANE WARREN



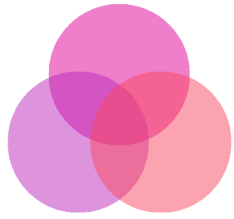
INTRODUCTION

The Best practice in Early Childhood Intervention report (ECIA, 2018) provided recommendations to support early childhood intervention change and growth. Prior to this, the National Guidelines – Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention were developed, with a focus on four quality areas – family, inclusion, teamwork and universal principles (ECIA, 2016). While there is still merit in many of the previous guidelines, the past eight years have seen changes in the sector and increased research, warranting review and update of these to align with more contemporary thinking.

This goal of this literature review was to identify and review current research to provide a foundation for development of the new best practice guidelines, with a 2024 lens on ensuring quality early childhood intervention for all.

“One of the goals of research can be to achieve positive social change”

(Walmsley, et al., 2017, p. 757)



APPROACH

From preliminary discussions with Reimagine Australia, it appeared there were three key areas that continually arose as being important. In addition, quick searches of early intervention research reinforced these areas to be crucial.

These three key terms were used as a basis for initial data searches, with different combinations and other words that arose as relevant -

- Empathy and collaboration
- Child development and approaches to achieving outcomes
- Inclusion and ethical approaches

A number of sub-themes emerged from the literature which provided a basis for further exploration. A table was developed to identify emerging themes within these key areas, with identification of important points within these themes.

Each of the themes will be explored with focus on sub-themes and key messages.

INITIAL DISCUSSIONS

THEME ONE:

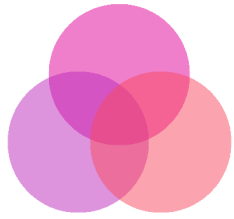
EMPATHY AND
COLLABORATION

THEME TWO:

CHILD DEVELOPMENT
AND APPROACHES TO
ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

THEME THREE:

INCLUSION AND
ETHICAL APPROACHES



EMPATHY, COLLABORATION AND CARE

THEME ONE

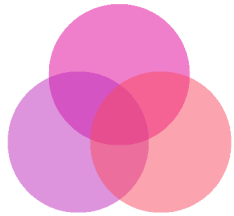
Four sub-themes were identified as significant -

**APPROPRIATE SERVICES AND
SUPPORTS**

**IMPORTANCE OF APPROACHES
FOR FIRST NATIONS AND
CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY
DIVERSE (CALD) COMMUNITIES**

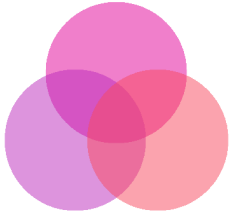
**NECESSITY OF
PARENT AND CARER RECOGNITION
AND INVOLVEMENT AND
EXPERIENCE OF THE CHILD**

**BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE, AND
INCLUSIVE TEAM WITH EACH CHILD**



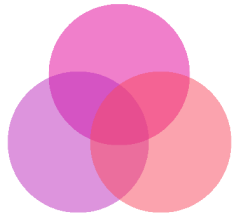
APPROPRIATE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

- A range of models of disability have been a foundation for services and supports, including charitable, ‘inspiration-porn’, medical, social, prosthetic and ecological models. Commitment now to a more accessible model of disability support (Pittman & Brett, 2022) as a foundation for services and supports.
- Lack of funding for disability services often results in inadequate support (Mavromaras, et. al., 2018).
- Disempowerment for individuals with disability arises from an ableist society where differences are a source of discrimination (Bogart & Dunn, 2019)
- Services need people at the centre, where they can make choices over support and their rights are protected (Brian,et. al., 2017)
- Recognising and supporting family engagement within the home is crucial (AERO, 2022)
- Now diversity and inclusivity are recognised, there is a growing need for personalised, tailored support, away from a ‘one-size fits all’ provision (Scope, 2024)
- Personalised support needs to consider preferences, strengths and aspirations, and include holistic support, flexibility, adaptability, cultural competence and diversity (Scope, 2024)
- Benefits or personalised support include enhanced satisfaction and experience of individuals with disabilities, improved outcomes and results, increased efficiency and effectiveness and the ability to build trust and loyalty (Scope, 2024)



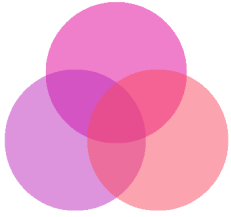
IMPORTANCE OF APPROACHES FOR FIRST NATIONS AND CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) COMMUNITIES

- Family-centred care means we must consider each family's sociocultural expectations of both development and participation (Drew, et. al., 2014).
- Weiss and Theadore (2011) believed conversations must be guided by cultural values and norms, and families need to be involved. Open-ended enquiries can provide learning opportunities, discussing families' expectations are crucial and we need to avoid stereotyping families (Drew, et. al., 2014).
- Vesely (2023) identified that cultural sensitivity and awareness around language will strengthen relationships between service providers and families (Archambault, et. al., 2020).
- Cultural considerations and respect for diversity are essential in any support services (Scope, 2024).
- Disability services are not always accessed by First Nations families, as they do not reflect Indigenous values, needs, or social practices, impacting accessibility (Puszka, et. al., 2022).
- Disability diagnosis has been reported as distressing and confronting for First Nations people as it can conflict with their identities and values (Puszka, et. al., 2022).
- Accessibility barriers may also exist for some families, particularly in remote areas. Barriers include eligibility criteria definitions, cost, transport and complexity of pathways ((Puszka, et. al., 2022).
- To engage Indigenous families, consider the inclusion of extended family members, community and the role of a 'yarning circle' (Department for Education and Child Development, 2015)



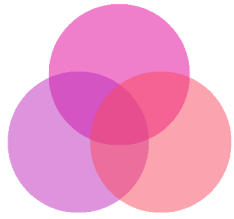
NECESSITY OF PARENT AND CARER RECOGNITION AND INVOLVEMENT AND EXPERIENCE OF THE CHILD

- The experience for children and families at the first point of entry will impact on the overall experience (Brien, 2014b).
- Families need to be supported through family choice and participation (Brien, 2014b).
- Including a decision aid could help families navigate the web of choices available to them (Hebert, 2014).
- Key factors in inclusion-based approaches that fit into the family priorities need to include empowering families, facilitating family support, interventions being focused on the needs of children and families, collaborative goal setting, and sharing community-based supports and services (Drew, et. al., 2014).
- ‘Collaborative planning and problem-solving between families, educators, teachers and service leaders can improve children’s early learning and development. This approach also helps share the responsibility for decision-making and learning and helps ensure that everyone is using a consistent approach for addressing a child’s unique learning and development needs.’ (Drew, et. al., 2014, p. 4).
- Parents express the negative emotional impact (stress, exhaustion, anxiety and disempowerment) some parent-professional interactions have when parents feel they are fighting for services (Ryan & Quinlan, 2018).



BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE, AND INCLUSIVE TEAM WITH EACH CHILD

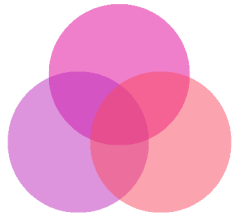
- Early Childhood Intervention Australia NSW/ACT in 2018 stated that a key strategy to promote equitable access to services required training and capacity-building for ECEC services and other community services to identify and support children with developmental delay and disability (Mozolic-Staunton, et. al., 2021).
- Positive relationships between educators in ECEC services and providers of ECI are crucial to ensure quality of learning outcomes and inclusion for children with disabilities. They need to work together with families to provide children with appropriate and relevant experiences and opportunities (Brien, 2014a).
- Key principles of a 'Team Around the Child' strategy must be underpinned by positive relationships and connections. Children and families are at the centre, families experience a coordinated and streamlined service, positive engagement is promoted, and outcomes are important (Department for Education and Child Development, 2015).
- Wong, (cited in Cologon & Mevawalla, 2023) identified benefits of inter-professional practices including children's experience being child-centred, play-based, and rights-focused; experiences and expectations being predictable and consistent; increasing parent confidence and capacity; and, aiming to reduce family stress and isolation).
- Maintaining more of a 'silo' approach results in a fragmentation of services, and a confusing lack of coordination (Cologon & Mevawalla, 2023).



KEY TAKEAWAYS

THEME ONE

- For services and supports to be relevant and meaningful to individuals, there needs to be a personalised approach.
- Service providers need to be culturally curious, and respectful to cultural diversity.
- Relationships are the foundation, and services need to be ‘humanised’.
- When working alongside First Nations families, be aware your service may not reflect Indigenous values, needs, or social practices.
- Parents, carers, and families need to be involved as collaborators and partners.
- Service providers need empathy, and to consider the emotional impact of navigating difficult systems.
- Family experience at entry to services will impact the overall service they receive and their capacity to trust and respond.
- Collaborative approaches, (also known as Team with the Child/Inter-professional collaborations, etc.) are the most effective, providing consistency, predictability, more seamless transitions, and can increase parent confidence and capacity.



APPROACHES AND OUTCOMES

THEME TWO

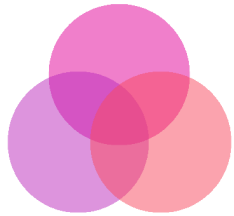
Four sub-themes were identified as significant -

**SETTING GOALS AND NURTURING
OUTCOMES**

**WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN
EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTS**

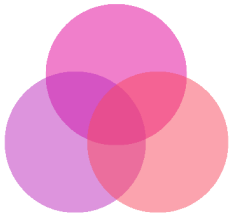
STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES



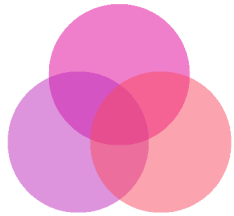
SETTING GOALS AND NURTURING OUTCOMES

- In 1993, Bastiani developed a theory of parent-professional partnerships which identified key considerations which are still relevant and important today – sharing power, responsibility and ownership; listening and responding to each other; and, having shared aims and goals (Brien, et. al., 2017).
- Family priorities must be reflected in goals. Hjørngaard, (2011, cited in Drew, et.al., 2014), identified the importance of families deciding on the purpose and objectives of intervention.
- A family strengths-based approach recognises capabilities and competence rather than problems or deficits (Drew, et. al., 2014).
- In 2010, Epley, et. al., found individualised family services was the least-often described explicitly in literature, with an infrequent mention of parent support groups, parent education, service coordination, respite care, counselling or support meetings (Drew, et. al., 2014). This has hopefully improved now in 2024!



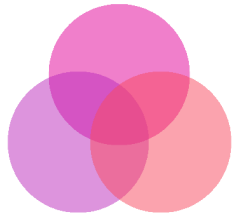
WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTS

- A range of elements in the National Quality Standard (2018) support the importance of children working in everyday environments, for example –
 - 1.1.3 - ‘All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child’s learning’;
 - 3.2.1 - ‘Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child’s participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments’;
 - QA5 - includes relationships between educators and children, positive educator to child interactions, dignity and rights of the child, relationships between children, collaborative learning, and self-regulation (ACECQA, 2018).
- Early childhood educators recognise and respond to barriers children face, then can make decisions to ensure inclusion and participation in ECE services (Mozolic-Staunton, et. al., 2021).
- Several researchers (cited in Brien, et. al., 2017), identified that the most effective practices, that enable families and children to have choice and control, occur within the family home and the ECEC service.
- Everyday settings provide opportunities for children to build on their strengths (Brien, et. al., 2017) and align with expectations of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF V2.0) to support ‘developing autonomy, interdependence, resilience and agency’ (AGDE, 2022, p. 31).
- ‘Promoting the active, meaningful participation of children with disabilities in their everyday environments and promoting their engagement in and benefitting from educational opportunities is linked to the five learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework’ (Brien, 2014a, p. 9)



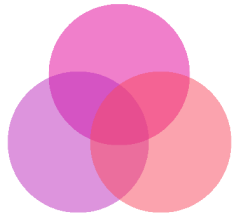
STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES

- While there has been a limited focus on assessing and intervening to promote strengths in the disability sector, this strength-focus has received attention in the field of positive psychology (Niemiec, et. al., 2017).
- Shifting the focus to strengths-based approaches allows celebration of strengths and can be embedded into self-determination interventions through either the setting of the goal, or the pathway identified (Niemiec, et. al., 2017).
- Focusing on strengths leads to minimisation of barriers, where people can be more independent and have choice and control over their lives (Donaldson, et. al., 2017).
- One way to build inclusive education settings and maximise performance is through training students in growth-mindset – moving away from deficit thinking to strengths-based thinking (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019).
- As Gutshall, 2013 identified, we can overcome deficit thinking when teachers have high expectations for students and teach them to have a growth mindset (cited in Garwood & Ampuja, 2019).
- Inclusive education provides opportunities for people to see humanity in others rather than fearing difference. Teachers must have an active role in providing these opportunities (Kewanian, et. al., 2021).
- In developing IEPs, strengths-based writing practices are important for children to see themselves as capable contributors. Both educators and service providers need to think about how to recognise abilities and strengths as a basis for interventions (Elder, et. al., 2018).



TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

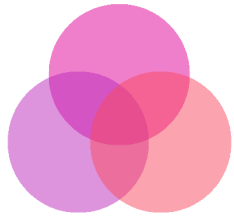
- The experience families have at intake can set the foundation for participation within the service (Brien, 2014b).
- In 2001, Harris & Fallot (cited in Leverington, 2023), identified that there had already been two decades of momentum building around trauma-informed care (TIC) internationally.
- We now understand the prevalence of early and persistent traumatic experiences, and the impact these have on wellbeing across the lifespan (Leverington, 2023).
- Bassuk, et. al., 2017 identified that TIC can enhance person-centred care by promoting collaboration between care providers and people who use these services, resulting in shifting the imbalance of power. (Leverington, 2023).
- Various researchers (cited in Leverington, 2023), have identified people with developmental disabilities are disproportionately affected by traumatic experiences, and there has been an increase over the past decade.
- Trauma-informed interventions within school interventions would benefit students with autism (Berger, et. al., 2021); but there is a need for more explorations around how to deal with trauma for students with autism (Faccini & Allely, 2021).
- Using trauma-informed perspectives to explore individual and organisational factors and quality of life would be beneficial (Keesler, 2017), as well as the relationship between trauma-informed organisational culture and quality of life for direct support professionals (Keesler, 2020).
- Specific populations have been the focus for some researchers around TIC - e.g ADHD (Lohr & Jones, 2016) and Spina Bifida (Meneses & Cruz, 2017).
- TIC training for care staff can increase their self-awareness and improve their ability to meet the needs of those they support (Rye, et. al., 2021).



KEY TAKEAWAYS

THEME TWO

- Families are crucial in goal setting for children with disabilities and developmental delays.
- It is essential children can participate in their everyday environments where they are comfortable and feel a sense of belonging.
- Engaging additional services and support into these everyday environments is a positive way to increase choice and control for children, and maximise outcomes within their likes, interests and preferences.
- Strength-based approaches are essential to building capacity in all individuals.
- A growth mindset needs to be nurtured across the community, so deficits are not the focus for people with disabilities and developmental delays.
- Trauma-informed practices are now recognised as essential.
- With the increase of children having early, or persistent trauma, sensitivity to approaches can alter the trajectory for a child.



INCLUSION AND ETHICAL APPROACHES

THEME THREE

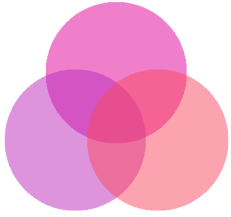
Four sub-themes were identified as significant -

**EMBRACING AN ANTI-ABLEIST AND
NEURO-AFFIRMING APPROACH**

**ENSURING QUALITY, EFFICACY
AND SAFEGUARDING**

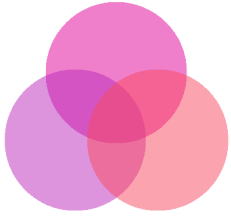
**UPHOLDING ETHICS, EVIDENCE,
RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**ADVOCATING AND PARTNERING
TOWARDS EQUITY AND JUSTICE**



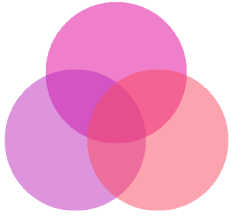
EMBRACING AN ANTI-ABLEIST AND NEURO-AFFIRMING APPROACH

- Macy, et. al., 2014, identified that early intervention for children with autism has been widely accepted as being cost-effective and optimises outcomes. However, barriers still exist across Australia and internationally (Mozolic-Staunton, et. al., 2021).
- The Council of Australian Governments in 2015, reported that the ECEC sector needs to monitor development of young children, provide inclusion support and reasonable adjustment, as well as build capacity of services to include all children (Mozolic-Staunton, et. al., 2021).
- ‘There is increasing global awareness of the value of educating children inclusively in heterogeneous classrooms with regard to race, gender, social class, religion, disability, or other identity markers’ (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019, p. 87).
- In ECEC services, the range of human difference should be reflected and valued (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019).
- Baglieri & Shapiro (2017, cited in Lalvani & Bacon, 2019) identified, ‘Ableist cultural beliefs surround us; young children internalize negative messages about disability as undesirable or pitiable through media, literature, educational practices, and cultural discourses’ (p. 89).
- A systematic review was conducted using PRISMA guidelines in autism research from 2021 – 2023 to consider use of neuro-affirming language (NAL) or traditional medical language (TML). Unfortunately, TML continues to largely dominate language choices in autism research, with an emerging shift toward NAL in recent literature (Bottini & Morton, 2023).
- ‘Neurodiversity provides a framework for many key principles that support a strengths-based approach to partnering with the autism community’ (Donaldson, et. al., 2017, p. 58).



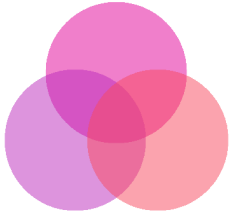
ENSURING QUALITY, EFFICACY AND SAFEGUARDING

- ‘Commissions of inquiry, legislators, and regulators, both in Australia and overseas, have been giving increasing attention to the role of boards of disability service providers in governing for quality and safeguarding. However, there is a lack of evidence about how disability service provider boards might influence quality and safeguarding’ (Hough, 2023, p. 38).
- Improving safeguarding is an important issue with real consequences for people with disabilities, therefore, it is necessary to develop a research, evidence base for strategies that will have the most impact’ (Hough, 2023).
- Some identified limitations in systems currently being assessed within the disability sector is that there appears to be a strong focus on procedural aspects of service quality, and not enough on the service users (McEwen, et. al., 2020).
- ‘The challenges in getting the regulatory mix right in disability support services have been usefully illustrated by Hough (2021) in his examination of the design choices underpinning Australia’s National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)’ (Marsh, 2021, p. 111).
- Further regulation of disability service providers is needed to ensure no further abuse or neglect of people with disabilities occurs (Hough, 2021).
- ‘As the area of regulating disability service provision is under-researched, there are numerous issues that would benefit from investigation. For example, there is scope for developing a comprehensive research agenda about the regulation of disability service provision, including by using systematic reviews of the existing empirical research’ Hough, 2021, p. 107).
- In 2023, a literature review was conducted which determined a lack of evidence regarding how boards of disability service providers were governing for quality and safeguarding (Hough, 2023).



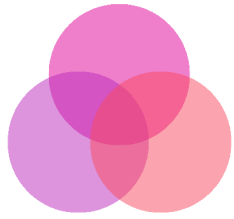
UPHOLDING ETHICS, EVIDENCE, RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) state that children and young people with disabilities have the right to express their views on matters affecting them (Byrne & Kelly, 2015).
- Lundy (2007, cited in Byrne & Kelly, 2015) identified four key factors underpinning children's right to participate – space (physically and emotionally safe); voice (to express views); audience (views must be listened to); and influence (where children's views are acted on as appropriate).
- 'Within this approach (social justice), the rights and capacities of disabled children and young people are recognised and respected, alongside greater access to information, choice and support for disabled children and young people' (Byrne & Kelly, 2015, p. 199).
- Findings from a 2021 study identified that despite improving capacity for people with disabilities to be heard at a global level, there are still low levels of participation at a national level in many countries (Eaton, et. al., 2021).
- 'In all areas of disability practice and research, attention should be paid to ensuring that this historically neglected area is now able to make full use of this essential global mechanism for accountability for the rights of people with disabilities' (Eaton, et. al., p. 188)
- A rights-based approach to disability is driven by dignity and freedom, seeking respect, support and celebration of human diversity, allowing meaningful participation by a wide range of persons, including persons with disabilities, allowing them to defend their rights through accessing justice (UN, 2014).
- A major success in the field of international human rights is the development of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Stein & Lord, 2023), including usability and opportunity for participation through initiatives such as Universal Design (Lid, 2014).



ADVOCATING AND PARTNERING TOWARDS EQUITY AND JUSTICE

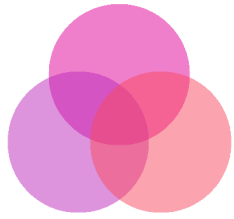
- Responsibility of systemic change to support inclusion of all students with disability in mainstream school should be governmental, not for courts and tribunals (Dickson, 2022).
- In 2015 it was recognised that ‘There is an increasing expectation that children, young people and their parents should participate in decisions that affect them. This includes decisions about their health and social care and collective or public decisions about the way in which such services are designed, delivered and evaluated’ (McNeilly, et. al., p. 266). Nine years later, we are still advocating.
- A comprehensive literature review across UK, USA, Australia showed that participation of children and young people with disabilities in decisions about health and social care is influenced by availability of resources, actions and attitudes of parents and professions, provision of information, and adequate preparation for decision-making and ongoing support (McNeilly, et. al., 2015).
- ‘Given the disempowerment faced by people with learning disabilities, it is arguably crucial that conceptual frameworks consider power and advocate for empowerment in understanding, supporting, and preventing psychological distress in this population’ (Leverington, 2023, p.63).
- While they work towards the same broad end, human rights model is a model of disability policy, and social model is a model of disability (Lawson & Beckett, 2021).
- Parents recognise the need for advocating for their child, using both passive methods and aggressive strategies. However, many also reported the need for someone else to advocate on their child’s behalf (Ryan & Quinlan, 2018).



KEY TAKEAWAYS

THEME THREE

- Barriers to early intervention still exist, despite wide recognition of optimising outcomes.
- There is a need for diversity within education so difference is accepted, reflected, and valued.
- Ableist beliefs surround us in the community. Young children then internalise negative messages, perpetuating further ableism.
- Neuro-affirming language is essential.
- Neurodiversity provides a strengths-based framework.
- There is a need for research around safeguarding as there are real consequences for people with disabilities, and the current approach appears inconsistent.
- A rights-based approach to disability is driven by dignity and freedom, seeking respect, support and celebration of human diversity, allowing meaningful participation by a wide range of persons, including persons with disabilities, allowing them to defend their rights through accessing justice (UN, 2014).
- Human rights model needs development as a foundation for development of appropriate disability policy.
- Parents recognise the need to advocate for their children, but also need support from others to advocate for their child as well.



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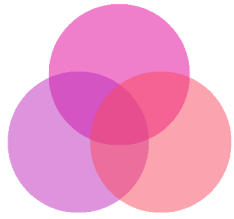
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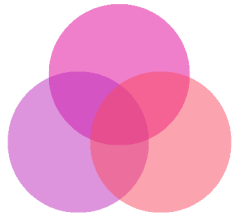
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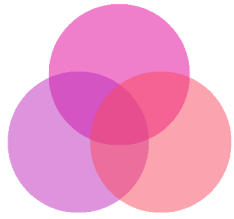
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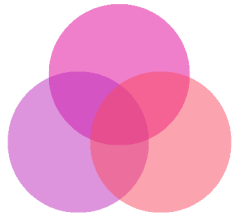
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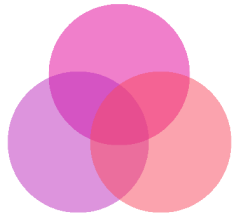
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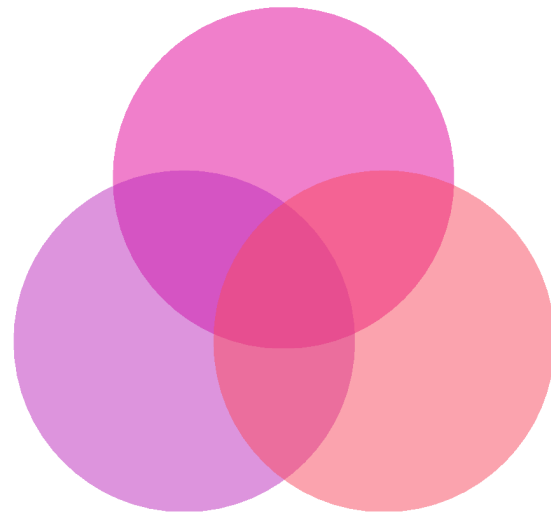


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