

“I was very much thrown in the deep end”: The reality of preparing to deliver sexuality education, perspectives from pre-service and recent graduate teachers

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Background:

High quality initial teacher education (ITE) in sexuality and sexual health education (SSHE) is an influencing factor in successful delivery of quality school-based SSHE. However, within NSW, the provision of SSHE in ITE is historically inconsistent and often leaves teachers feeling unprepared. This study series aimed to understand how pre-service teachers receive SSHE in NSW and to identify opportunities to embed SSHE within ITE.

Methods:

This study involved a series of four NSW-based projects:

- Study 1: Desktop review to map SSHE content in accredited teaching degrees at ITE providers.
- Study 2: qualitative study of 13 interviews with academics from eligible ITE providers.
- Study 3: Qualitative study of 25 semi-structured interviews with pre-service (n=12) and recent graduate (n=13) teachers.
- Study 4: Knowledge Translation forum among stakeholders to identify recommendations for change.

Results:

Studies 1 and 2 found that SSHE training remains highly variable across institutions and significant barriers to SSHE training, including a crowded curriculum and the sensitive nature of SSHE, with ITE providers expressing concerns about real and perceived backlash. Within Study 3, four themes emerged (1) Students often report ‘gaps’ in their knowledge and may not feel adequately prepared; (2) Knowing how to deliver SE came from being ‘thrown in the deep end’ and facing the realities of the classroom; (3) The subject of SE remains highly contested, sensitive and ‘taboo’, and this poses unrelenting challenges for teachers; (4) Teachers are dedicated and passionate about giving students the SE they need and deserve. Study 4 identified clear recommendations to enhance SSHE training within ITE.

Conclusion:

There are critical junctures that can better support teachers through the transition from their ITE training into the classroom. ITE providers play an important role in preparing future teachers not only through their pre-service coursework but in practicum placements and transition programs.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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