

“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

Australasian Sexual &
Reproductive Health
Conference

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands that we are meeting on today. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We also acknowledge and pay our respects to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/colleagues joining us today.

This artwork, titled Shared Journeys, was created by Charmaine Mumbulla. It features weaving lines of land and waterways found on Country throughout NSW. Together they symbolise connection and togetherness on a shared journey towards sexual health.

The SSHE Project Research Team



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What was the Sexuality and Sexual Health Education: Pre-Service Teacher Training Mapping Study?

Objective 1

Identify and understand how pre-service teachers receive sexuality and sexual health education in NSW (what is available, who delivers it, who accesses it).

Objective 2

Identify opportunities to embed sexuality and sexual health education training within pre-service training for teachers in NSW.

Study methodology:

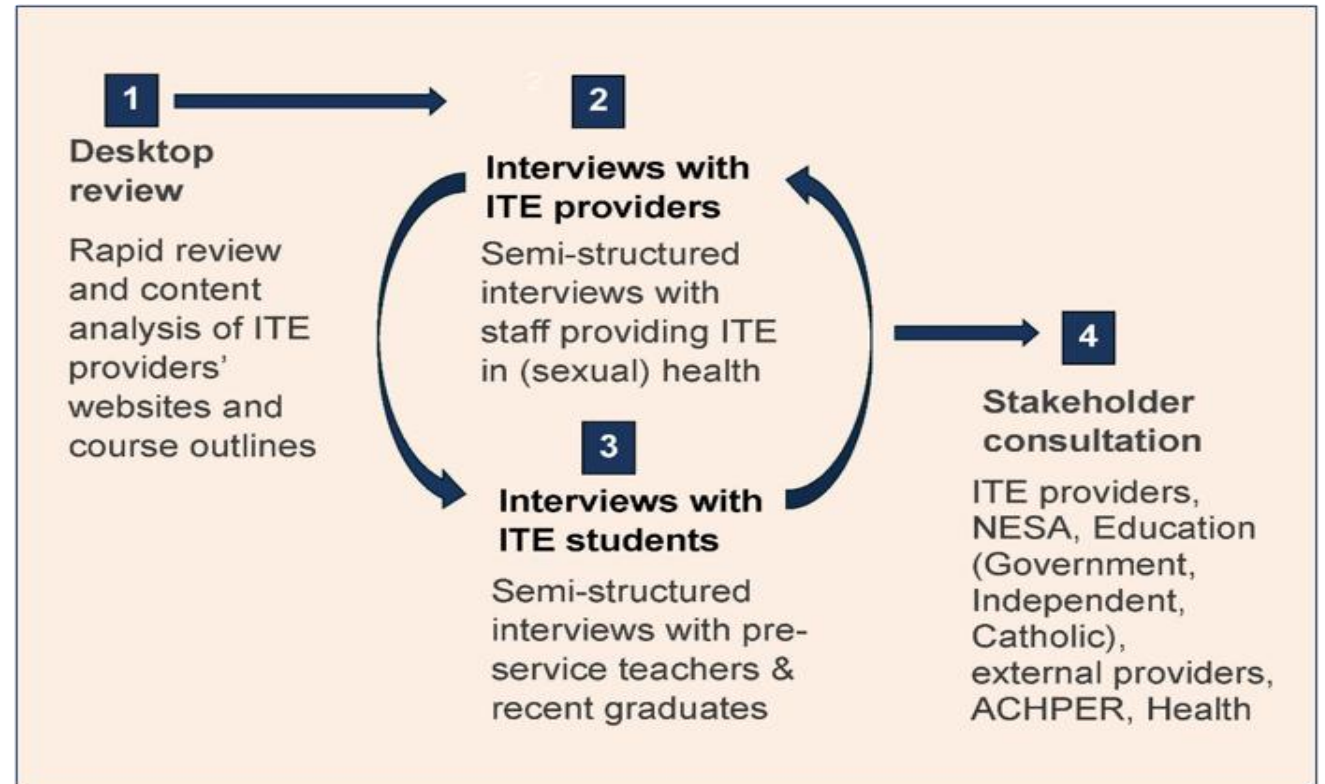
Why do one when you can do four?

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.



Study 1: A desktop review

1 Desktop review

Rapid review and content analysis of ITE providers' websites and course outlines

Searched AITSL website for accredited teaching degrees in NSW

n=109 accredited teaching degrees in NSW across 17 providers

Searched ITE provider websites for corresponding course handbooks

n=111 course handbooks retrieved

Searched course handbooks for units of study on (sexual) health

n=132 units of study identified as possibly including SSHE (any stage)

Read unit outlines to determine Stage & Explicitness

n=115 units of study containing (potential) SSHE

Study 1: Findings

Explicit SSHE content

*sex, sexuality, reproduction,
puberty, consent*

Potential SSHE content

*adolescent development,
bodies, relationships*

Explicit SSHE content appeared in **less than half of all degrees** (48/111, 43%).

Themes

1. Explicit SSHE content is not evident within every institution (and it is not always evidence in compulsory units of study)
2. Explicit SSHE is described more frequently in units of study that are only available to students specializing in PDHPE
3. Potential SSHE content is described by most institutions

Study 2: Interviews with academics from ITE



2 Interviews w ITE providers

Semi-structured interviews with staff providing ITE in (sexual) health

Aim

To explore ITE providers' perspectives on the provision of SSHE training in NSW, including the current state of this training and ways it could be enhanced in the future.

Sample

- Purposive sampling using two eligibility criteria:
 - (1) at least two years of direct experience within the institution in SSHE ITE
 - (2) sufficient knowledge of the ITE curriculum relevant to SSHE and its delivery

13 interviews with participants from 11 different ITE providers

Study 2: Findings

Theme 1: SSHE remains marginalised in ITE provision overall, but is championed by individual academics

*“There’s no support here, like there’s no funding... **It’s just me doing it because I believe in it.**”*

Theme 3: SSHE is sensitive and there are genuine safety concerns for classroom teachers

*“Sexuality education is really just taught absolutely terribly in primary schools... because of just **real concerns about potentially teaching things that will upset parents or upset students.**”*

Theme 2: SSHE is driven by ‘immutable’ and therefore ‘safe’ entities: syllabus, accreditation standards & legislation

*“We try to **drown out any of the political noise** in terms of the delivery of PDHPE. And we really try to stick to, **this is what the syllabus is, this is what we’re required to teach, and that’s that.**”*

Theme 4: Society places huge expectations on SSHE

*“We are very good in PDHPE at reflecting on what’s going on [in society]. In fact, if I’m honest, I think **PDHPE is a dumping ground for society’s problems**, and it’s given PDHPE teachers the role to address all of that.”*

Study 3: Interviews with ITE students and recent graduates



Aim

To explore the perspectives of ITE students and recent graduates on the provision of SSHE training in NSW, including the current state of this training and ways it could be enhanced in the future.

Sample

25 interviews: 12 pre-service teachers and 13 recent graduates

School characteristic	n/N
Teaching stage	
Primary	2/15
Secondary	13/15
Education sector	
Government	8/15
Independent	6/15
Catholic	1/15
Location	
Metropolitan	13/15
Regional	1/15
Rural	1/15
Religious affiliation	
Yes	5/15 ⁸
No	10/15

Study 3: Findings

Theme 1: Provision of SSHE in ITE is highly variable, students often report 'gaps' in their knowledge and may not feel adequately prepared

*"At uni, there was really not much [content]. Like **we briefly discussed it** as a 'You will need to talk about this, this and this', but there was no 'These are STI's, this is how you prevent them', **that was all assumed knowledge** or like "You're a PE teacher so you should know about this."*

*"I just think you can read a lot of literature about it but... it's really hard to understand [how to teach SSHE] because each school's really different... **So sometimes you can be learning... something in uni and be like well, I don't know if I could apply this to my kind of school.**"*

Theme 2: Knowing how to deliver SSHE came from being 'thrown in the deep end' and facing the realities of the classroom

Study 3: Findings

Theme 3: The subject of SSHE remains highly contested, sensitive and 'taboo', and this poses unrelenting challenges for teachers

"I was waiting to get called over by the head of department to say I said the wrong thing, or I'd said too much, and being at a Catholic school I shouldn't have 'encouraged' [contraception]. I was trying to use language to say, 'this unit is about empowering you, so you know the choices out there, this is not saying you should do any of this'... having to reiterate that point over and over again to protect myself."

*"That's certainly a concern of mine, **that I want to do the topic well so that children are well informed** and can make positive choices for themselves and know how to keep themselves safe."*

Theme 4: Teachers believe in the importance of SSHE and want to deliver it in the best, most effective way for their students

Study 4: Knowledge translation forum

Aim

To translate the synthesised findings of Studies 1, 2 and 3 into recommendations for action for NSW Health and potentially other stakeholders.

Findings

- Theme 1: The findings are not surprising but the passion of ITE providers, ITE students and early career teachers is encouraging
- Theme 2: SSHE is (still) marginalised, of lower priority and can feel unsafe
- Theme 3: The perceived immutability of the syllabus is striking
- Theme 4: SSHE appears to be taught variably BUT it's possible that it is not explicit enough
- Theme 5: The gender imbalance among ITE providers and teachers is concerning

Implementation plan

1. Dissemination of findings

- NSW Health and Education Ministers
- Branches within NSW Ministry of Health and NSW Department of Education
- Publication and conference presentations
- Stakeholders (ITE, NESA, NSW school sectors, TESA)

2. Advocacy

- Develop statement of support for SSHE for endorsement by NSW Health and the Department of Education
- Develop guidance document for school leaders (Principals, Executive Teaching staff) about transparency and communication about SSHE in their schools
- Increase membership of the NSW Sexual Health in Schools Advisory Committee to include ITE providers

3. Strengthen support for ITE providers, students and educators

- Provide ITE with a comprehensive SSHE resource toolkit that they can provide to students
- Support professional development (enhance relationship with ACPHER, and promotion of funded PL)



Thank you

Questions? rochelle.avasalu@health.nsw.gov.au