‘I felt like I was watching porn’: the reality of preparing pre-service teachers to teach about sexual pleasure

Debbie Ollis

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'I felt like I was watching porn': the reality of preparing pre-service teachers to teach about sexual pleasure

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ABSTRACT
Overwhelmingly, school-based sexuality education programmes focus on the prevention of infection, pregnancy and abuse, with little if any attention given to positive views of sexuality and rarely the inclusion of sex positive issues such as pleasure, intimacy and desire. This paper explores the experience of teaching about pleasure to pre-service health and physical education teachers as part of compulsory studies in a unit on sexuality education designed to prepare them to teach sexuality education in secondary schools. Drawing on the aims, theoretical framework, content and pedagogical structure of the unit, and data collected from 42, third-year pre-service teachers (PST) in Australia via surveys and student assessment, the paper provides some practical examples of what teaching about pleasure might look like in practice. It argues that with adequate preparation, a framework to celebrate sex and sexuality, a gender lens to examine normative discourses, and the opportunity for reflection, PST can develop the confidence, skill and willingness to include pedagogies of pleasure in their school-based work.

One of my pre-service health and physical education (HPE) teachers was teaching the rest of the class about sexual pleasure. He was explaining an activity he wanted the other pre-service teachers (PST) to undertake: an activity that required them to explore the emotional, physical and biological responses to sexual arousal. He was asking them to ‘identify the sensory places/areas on the body that stimulate sexual pleasure or cause arousal’. He said think of ‘pleasurable sexual acts such as masturbation’. The PST undertook this teaching with confidence and skill.

Such an account might surprise those researching sexuality education in schools, who rightly point out that much sexuality education often focuses on prevention of disease, pregnancy and abuse, rather than promotion of positive sexualities and pleasure (Allen 2007a; Farrelly, O’Brien, and Prain 2007; Oliver et al. 2013; Ollis 2009). Sexuality education too frequently draws on negative discourses about sexuality (Harrison and Hillier 1999; Ingham 2005; Jones 2011) and rarely addresses issues such as pleasure, intimacy and desire (Allen, Rasmussen, and Quinlivan 2014; Bay-Cheng 2010; Cameron-Lewis and Allen 2013; Ingham 2005).
Recognition of the need to include a focus on pleasure is not a new one: feminist scholars and activists have been calling for the inclusion of pleasure and desire in formal sexuality education for more than 30 years (Clarity Collective et al. 1983; Dailey 1997; Tolman, 1994).

Michelle Fine’s (1988) seminal paper on the ‘missing discourse of desire’ resonates to anyone involved in researching school-based sexuality education. With the exception of some Western European countries such as Sweden, Holland, Germany and France (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, and Knijn 2008; Wiefferink et al. 2005), schools rarely cover pleasure as part of the curriculum (Allen 2007b; Allen, Rasmussen, and Quinlivan 2014; Harrison, Ollis, and Johnson 2014; Tolman 2002). Masturbation, if covered at all, is positioned with regard to promoting safe sex practices to avoid STIs (Harrison 2000) rather than for self or partner pleasure (Oliver et al. 2013).

A gradual shift in focus to include pleasure in sexuality education in Australia can be seen in research, policy and resources for nearly two decades (ANCHARD 1999, 2001; Hillier 2001; Ollis, Harrison, and Maharaj 2013). The new Australian Curriculum endorses the inclusion of pleasure as part of a comprehensive approach (ACARA 2013), yet policy does not match the limited information we have about current practice (Harrison et al. 2014). There is evidence that some schools have programmes that take a broad, inclusive, developmental, sex positive approach that includes pleasure, utilising available resources that have some focus on pleasure (Smith et al. 2011). There are others however that provide little or no sexuality education, or focus only on prevention and/or abstinence (Johnson 2012; Ollis 2009; Ollis, Harrison, and Richardson 2012; Smith et al. 2011).

Programmes are overwhelmingly taught by teachers using resources developed by governments or government-funded agencies, such as those concerned with family planning (Smith et al. 2011). A number of these resources do exhibit some focus on intimacy, desire and pleasure (cf. ANCHARD 2001); nevertheless, there is little evidence of their use in classrooms. A lack of school, community and departmental endorsement, teacher training, confidence and comfort, have all been cited as major reasons for the negative, limited and piecemeal nature of current sexuality education approaches in Australia today (Johnson 2012; Leahy, Horne, and Harrison 2004; Ollis 2010, 2014; Smith et al. 2011). For Oliver et al. (2013, 143), ‘the question remains: if we espouse sexual education that is attuned to pleasure and to the social contexts of young people’s lives, who will teach them and where will they be taught?’

This paper is designed to contribute to the growing momentum in Australia, and elsewhere, of a call to teach sexuality education within a sex positive framework that actively engages with pedagogies of pleasure and desire. It explores current debates about Oliver’s questions of ‘by whom’ and ‘where’ pleasure is taught, but also examines the other important question of ‘how’ it should be taught. It considers these questions through an analysis of the reality, challenge and possibility of teaching about sexual pleasure in pre-service HPE teacher education designed to prepare teachers to teach sexuality education in secondary schools.

The paper draws upon qualitative data collected from HPE PSTs required to undertake compulsory studies in sexuality education as part of their bachelor’s degree in HPE. It utilises post-unit (the term used to refer a semester long study in a university) survey data, a post-activity survey, and student assessment from the first two cohorts of students to undertake the unit as part of their compulsory studies. The paper provides analysis of student reflections on their experience of teaching and learning about how to teach pleasure, and it examines the potential of a sex positive framework as a guiding structure for teaching sexuality education that incorporates pedagogies of pleasure. It argues that with adequate teacher preparation, a sex positive framework, an opportunity for personal reflection, and
a gender lens to examine normative expectations, PSTs can develop the confidence, skill and willingness to include pedagogies of sexual pleasure in their school-based sexuality education programmes.

Teacher education in Australia

The current structure of the new Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2013) means that HPE teachers in Australia are possibly the key to future change in formal sexuality education. Sexuality education is a component of the HPE curriculum area in all Australian states and territories. In 1994, the first National Curriculum was developed (Australian Education Council 1994), which brought together health and physical education (HPE) into one learning area, HPE. This meant that sexuality education, previously taught in health, science, home economics and gender equity programmes, became the responsibility of HPE, with an expectation that specialist teachers would teach it, with or without the teacher education to do so (Ollis 2009).

In 2009, the State of Victoria Health Department commissioned research to map and document the extent and content of current programmes in Victorian universities and make an assessment of how teachers are trained in sexuality education (Carman, Mitchell, and Walsh 2009). This report found that little preparation to teach sexuality education exists for pre-service HPE secondary teachers and even less for generalist primary teachers. In most cases, sexuality education is allocated only a few hours in secondary HPE teacher education courses, and is increasingly being integrated with more general content related to student health and well-being. Leahy (2014) recently mapped health and sexuality education in Australian HPE courses and found that only three universities provided a dedicated unit or course designed to prepare PSTs to teach sexuality education in schools.

Teaching Sexuality in the Middle Years

One such unit is Teaching Sexuality Education in the Middle Years, offered at Deakin University and designed to prepare PST to teach sexuality education in primary and secondary schools. It is delivered intensively, either as 6 consecutive days, plus a follow up assessment day, or as 6 days, 1 day per week. The unit was introduced in 2009 as an elective unit for primary and secondary PSTs.

Its intention is to provide teachers with knowledge, skills, understandings and pedagogical experiences that promote positive sexuality education, rather than purely a focus on disease, risk and harm. The pedagogical approaches focus on inclusion, designed to assist PSTs to explore the ‘connection between who they are as individuals and the structural systems of privilege and oppression’ (Tisdall 1998, 139), particularly in relation to gender and sexualities. The approach is mindful of the emotional and affective dimensions of the challenging work that requires teachers to explore and examine their own subjectivities and the cultural context of their emotional responses (Ahmed 2004).

The literature that scaffolds the unit is deliberately designed to be provocative and attempts to move away from a focus on disease prevention. Instead, the focus is on children’s and young people’s sexual knowledge and challenging the presumption of innocence, sexual pleasure and its absence in sexuality education. In addition, it has a strong focus on the cultural constructions of sex, sexuality and gender, masculinity and femininity, homophobia and normative heterosexuality, sexual violence, sexualisation and pornography.
The pedagogy employed is participatory, activity and discussion based, and designed to canvass a range of viewpoints and challenge preconceptions. The unit has been developed from recent research on young people and sexuality and sexual health and well-being. It also draws on current policy and research on best practice. It critically examines the discourses and frameworks used to teach about sexuality and young people in resources, policy and practice. Foucauldian discourse analysis is introduced as a tool to unpack gender-power relations and challenge students' assumptions about gender relations and normative heterosexuality. Connell’s (2002) theoretical work on gender relations with its focus on structural inequalities and hegemonic masculinity is also used because of its explanatory power and because PSTs generally have little or no experience of post-structural theory or gendered structures of inequality. The unit is developmental and sequential. Each day builds on the previous. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the content.

**Methodology**

University ethics approval was granted to collect data on pre-service teachers’ experience of the unit and their preparedness and readiness to teach sexuality education following its completion. All the data reported on here are non-identifiable and pseudonyms are used throughout the paper when referring to student names.

While data have been collected from successive cohorts of PST undertaking the unit for the past four years (2009–2013), this paper only draws on data collected from the first two cohorts of HPE PST (2013/2014) (42, 26 women and 16 men). They had been required to undertake compulsory studies in sexuality education as part of a newly accredited bachelor of HPE. All students were in their third year of study, were predominately 20 years of age, white, middleclass and drawn from the university catchment area.
The pre-unit survey asked questions about students’ experience of sexuality education in schools and university; expectations of the unit; concerns about teaching sexuality education; understanding of sexuality and sexuality education; personal and professional readiness and pedagogies. The post-unit survey covered their experience of the content, structure and pedagogies used; personal and professional reflections on what they learned about themselves; challenges, enablers and readiness; key messages and discourses; additional content not covered; assessment used and their experience of teaching on practicum. PSTs also completed a post-activity survey about their experience of viewing the Swedish resource Sex on the Map. Questions focused on comfort, the sexually explicit nature of the film, and if and how they would use in secondary schools.

Pedagogies of pleasure

A framework

Prior to examining the experience of PSTs to teaching and learning about pleasure, it is important to clarify the framework around which the unit is structured and relate this to what scholars in the field argue is best practice. While it is important to explore the questions of ‘by whom’ and ‘where’ pleasure will be taught (Oliver et al. 2013), equally important is determining how and within what theoretical framework teaching will take place and the potential or otherwise for change. The question of how to include the ‘missing discourse’ of desire in school-based sexuality education has rarely been addressed in the academic literature, however, scholars have developed a number of theoretical ideas that can guide the development of pedagogies of pleasure.

Fine and McClelland (2006) argue that sexuality education needs to focus on what they call ‘thick desire’, which ‘places sexual activity … within a larger context of social and interpersonal structures that enable persons to engage in the political act of wanting’ (11). This should occur ‘inside a stew of desires of opportunity, community, pleasure and protection from coercion and danger’ (11). For Fine and McClelland, the key to success lies in helping ‘young women and men navigate across the dialectics of danger and pleasure’ (2006, 12). Translated into practice, pedagogies in sexuality education involve ‘critical analysis’, ‘trusting conversations’, ‘conversations about sexuality, power and justice’, ‘help seeking’ and ‘negotiating risk and pursuing pleasure’ (12). Other researchers argue that they should also acknowledge ‘pleasure, danger and ambivalence as well as giving space to the naming and discussion of the innumerable possible emotions, sensations, fantasies and evocations that flow from sexually aroused bodies’ (Cameron-Lewis and Allen 2013, 128). According to Bay-Cheng (65), pedagogies should also challenge ‘the use of scare tactics and the silence of existing’ sexuality education ‘around issues such as pleasure and desire’.

Hirst (2014) suggests that to embrace pedagogies of pleasure in sexuality education three aspects should be addressed: a commitment to sexuality education supportive of all sexualities; increasing knowledge of experiencing pleasure and dispelling myths, and an acknowledgement of risks and barriers to pursuing pleasure and practices to avoid or minimise these (41).

Teaching about pleasure in this framework could enable negative and positive aspects concerned with sexuality to be discussed, presenting a more realistic view of the complexity of ‘multiple expressions and dimensions of sexual intimacy’ (Cameron-Lewis and Allen 2013, 12).
In turn, young people should be provided with the tools to negotiate what they do and do not want in sexual relationships, enabling conversations around agency and respectful relationships that can assist young women in developing more positive self-images (Ingham 2005; Oliver et al. 2013). Cameron-Lewis and Allen (2013, 12) argue that such an approach will also enable ‘alternative ways of enacting masculinities and femininities’.

Central to this pedagogical framework is a sex positive approach. This means one that views young people as sexual subjects capable of making informed decisions about their sexual well-being. The notion of sex positivity is however contested and capable of dividing sexuality educators and feminists alike, primarily because its roots are found in debates about censorship and repression in relation to pornography and prostitution. On the one hand, feminists have argued that opposition to certain sexual practices such as pornography, are based on conservatism and morality, and are repressive for female sexuality (Queen and Comella 2008; Rubin, 1984). Others have argued pornography is exploitative towards women and has historically benefited men rather than women (Dines 2010; Greer 1999). This unit uses ‘a sex positive approach’ as one ‘that recognises that sex can be enriching’ rather than dangerous, and one ‘that asserts, at its core, that people benefit from holding positive attitudes about sexuality’ (Windsor and Burgess 2014, 694).

The approach adopted is inclusive of all genders and sexualities and recognises that this can help young people feel positive and safe about themselves in the context of normative production and reproduction of gender and sexuality through dominant discourses. It assumes a positive discourse of adolescent desire, yet acknowledges the need for critical, gendered examination of pleasure and desire to deal with the inescapable prevailing discourses of female desire that Fine and McClelland (2006, 2) remind us are ‘splashed all over the media and in every facet of young peoples lives.’

The ‘how’ of pedagogies of pleasure

So how do these concerns manifest themselves in the unit under discussion? Intimacy, desire and pleasure are covered in two ways in the unit. Firstly, they are integrated into a number of the sessions and activities that are designed to engage students in critical analysis of normative notions of gender, power and sexuality. Secondly, there is a direct focus on topics covered for assessment. It is obviously not possible to describe the entire seven-day intensive programme in this paper. Instead, I have selected four activities from the unit that illustrate some of the challenges and possibilities of teaching pleasure in an integrated and inclusive way.

Setting the context for teaching and learning about pleasure

The first activity is one of the introductory tasks that take place in the first session. PSTs here explore the importance of a safe and inclusive classroom by participating in a ground rule setting exercise. Once rules are agreed upon, the activity moves to a positioning exercise that requires the PST to take up a position on a continuum that best reflect their positioning and views in relation to a series of sexuality education-related statements. The activity is carried out for a number of reasons: to provide a framework for class safety, to practice and mirror how to use the ground rules to provide safety and structure, and to provide teachers with a glimpse of the issues that will be explored in the unit. There is a list of 40 statements that can be used for this activity:
• ‘Young people should experiment with sex’;
• ‘I would feel comfortable describing masturbation’;
• ‘Sexual pleasure should be a key element of sexuality education’;
• ‘Pornography is an important sex education medium’;
• ‘Reclaiming words like “cunt” are important outcomes of sexuality education,’ and
• ‘Desire and intimacy are key components of sexuality education’,
are a sample of those statements that make some reference to pleasure.

PSTs are informed there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. The activity is designed to enable participants to start the process of exploring views on sexuality relevant to schools. PSTs struggle with most of the pleasure statements at this stage of the unit, however by day six they understand the rationale for including pedagogies of pleasure.

The one exception we have found concerns ‘reclaiming the word cunt’. The word cunt is such a powerful signifier eliciting shame and disgust that many female students say they could never use it even if it was intended as a positive aspect of female sexuality. Feminists argue that such as response is linked to negative and misogynist views of femininity and female sexuality, with the term being used to either refer to the vagina or as a form of abuse (Hunt 2015). This dualism is discussed in class, as are feminist attempts to reclaim the term and transform the disgust with which it is viewed, to a celebration of its positive power in female sexuality. The ‘Vagina Monologues’ by Ensler (2001), and McCarthy’s (2011) ‘Great wall of vaginas,’ are used to illustrate this. Even so, women PSTs, and a number of men, remain far from convinced, verbalising complete opposition to this agency and any utterance of the word under any circumstances.

Exploring the concept and meaning of disgust as part of this activity may assist PSTs in understanding their reactions and opening up other ways of perceiving and exploring the word and their emotional response to it. Haidt et al. (1997, 127) maintains that disgust is ‘arranged and filtered by culture,’ and results in making us ‘step back and push away’ to protect ourselves. Examining such reactions through cultural filters may shed light on how best to cover this content and assist current and future PSTs to understand what they silence and privilege in the classroom. The work of Ahmed (2004) may further help explain the role of emotion in feelings of disgust and why some feelings ‘stick,’ even following an examination of the cultural context: in this case, the gendered nature of ‘cunt.’ Ahmed maintains that disgust is ‘mediated by ideas that are already implicated in the very impressions we make of others and the way these impressions surface as bodies’ (2004, 83). She also argues that disgust is ‘deeply ambivalent, involving desire for, or an attraction toward, the very object that is felt to be repelled’ (84). So, on the one hand, the vulva and vagina, ‘the cunt,’ is an object of desire, yet as these PSTs demonstrate, cultural filters mean that for most it is also an object of disgust.

**Pleasure: it’s all in the positioning**

Similarly, another activity, ‘It’s all in the positioning,’ requires critical analysis of the cultural and discursive context of sexuality in schools and is designed to explore how young people and their behaviour is positioned in relation to cultural norms about sex, gender and sexuality. Using statements such as, ‘Girls who talk about loving sex,’ ‘Boys who use porn to learn about sex,’ ‘Girls who use porn for sexual stimulus,’ ‘Students who talk openly about sexual pleasure,’ PSTs negotiate their placement on a continuum from ‘acceptable’ (innocent) at one end to ‘unacceptable’ (deviant) at the other. They are asked to consider how the culture of the school community would position young people and/or the sexual behaviour.
The activity is a stimulus designed to encourage PSTs thinking about the way normative sexuality discourses impact on the development and implementation of school-based programmes. Overwhelmingly, many of the statements about young women and sexual pleasure end up in a contested pile in the middle of the continuum. At the acceptable end, are statements about prevention and health promotion, such as ‘Young people whose sexual activity has only been kissing’, ‘Students who are not sexually active’, ‘Students who have sex for the first time’, and at the unacceptable end are behaviours that schools generally deal with as welfare and individual discipline issues, such as ‘Student to trade sex for drugs’, if at all.

The activity opens up a great deal of scope to discuss the ways in which many of the behaviours, and therefore young people, are represented in binaries of deviant or innocent, rather than acknowledging these as behaviours and practices characteristic of the diversity of the students in schools. PSTs then examine how the continuum is represented in the context of current sexuality education programmes. For example, most programmes in schools focus on issues at the prevention or ‘innocent’ end. Discourses around female desire and pleasure are, as Michelle Fine would say, ‘missing’ and invisible, whilst behaviours at the deviant or unacceptable end, are understood within an individualised welfare and discipline framework. Borrowing Tolman’s (2002, 192) words, in sexuality education programmes, ‘the simple act of talking in positive ways about adolescent girls’ sexuality is easier said than done’.

This activity can elicit strong reactions from PSTs as they grapple with normative discourses and limited subject positions of females in relation to pleasure in school programmes. It often leads to discussion about how to mobilise positive discourses to provide a more inclusive approach. It illustrates the way that pleasure can be explored with students in a context of the ‘thick desire’ envisaged by Fine and McClelland (2006), as it requires PSTs to explore sexual behaviours within a larger context of social and interpersonal structures such as schools, culture, gender and morality, that privileges male desire and problematises female desire. Students come to see the normative way in which male sexual desire, arousal and pleasure through practices such as masturbation and watching pornography are positioned at the ‘acceptable’ and ‘normal’ end of the continuum, whilst corresponding behaviours that reflect active female desire and pleasure, such as using vibrators and liking sex, are positioned in a difficult middle space far closer to the ‘unacceptable’ or ‘deviant end’ of the continuum.

This activity is an important aspect of building ‘the gender lens’ that enables PSTs to recognise the contradictory way in which gender and pleasure are understood and enacted through discourses of male sexual assertiveness and female sexual passivity (Hillier 2001).

Pleasure and bodies

The third example is an activity that uses large body maps as a teaching and learning strategy. PSTs work in groups of about five. One student has their body outline traced on a large piece of paper. The group then represents, by drawing, words or pictures, etc. the changes that take place during sexual arousal. At the end of the activity, they describe these changes to the whole class. The paper is turned over and the same activity is conducted but this time the focus is on the changes that occur when someone is feeling uncomfortable or scared, such as during cases of sexual abuse or violence. During the debriefing process, students explore the similarities between female and male responses, and between fear and arousal responses, including the physical responses that can occur during both, but are generally thought of as sexual, such as erections. The exercise aims to illustrate what Carmody’s calls...
‘ethical erotic’ education, which ‘provides space to acknowledge both pleasure and danger in sexual intimate relation’ indicating the multiple and dynamic nature of sexual negotiations (quoted in Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 125).

There is often discomfort when PSTs draw on their body maps and report back to the class on sexual arousal; discomfort that is not evident when talking about the body’s reaction to fear. Yet, teaching about sexual abuse is an area of discomfort for teachers (Johnson 2012). Perhaps, part of the answer lies in the embarrassment of displaying their own sexual knowing. It illuminates the complexity of acknowledging the ‘stew of desires of opportunity, community, pleasure and protection from coercion and danger’ (Fine and McClelland 2006, 11), which PSTs will have to navigate when including pedagogies of pleasure in sexuality education in schools alongside danger.

**I felt like I was watching porn**

The connection between, pleasure, embarrassment, discomfort and sexual knowing was most evident in the fourth and final example, that required PSTs to watch the Swedish video called *Sex on the Map* (Swedish Education Association of Sexuality Education 2012). This video resource is an explicit look at sex, sexual practices, intimacy and desire as part of a story of young people grappling with a range of sexuality issues. It is designed for grade 9 and 10 students. It is inclusive and sex positive. The cartoon format includes visual scenes of sexual practices including sexual intercourse, digital, anal and oral sex. It shows masturbation, sexual arousal and orgasm. It also covers respectful relationships and gender and heteronormativity. Most PSTs found the video very confronting. They verbalised ‘shock’, and were ‘taken back’ by the video in terms of ‘graphicness’, one saying ‘I felt like I were watching porn’.

I was not surprised by these responses given the taboos women face around articulating desire and pleasure. However, I was surprised by the comment that ‘I felt like I were watching porn’. For me, this film is a very respectful look at sex and intimacy for adolescents and illustrates sexual arousal in erotic and age appropriate ways. The reactions reinforced what others have noted about the lack of comfort with positive portrayals of sexuality and sexual pleasure (Allen, Rasmussen, and Quinlivan 2014). Years of education designed to prevent diseases, infections, sexual activity, pregnancy, and sexual assault makes a focus that celebrates young people’s sexuality, diversity, and pleasure ‘confusing’, as one PST pointed out. Prevention education is more comfortable (Smith et al. 2011) because it involves far less risk and can be taught by information transmission. The video reminds us of the challenge of including pleasure in the way that Hirst (2014) envisages, because this video is factual, age appropriate, presenting sex as normal with the potential to increase ‘knowledge of experiencing pleasure’. Yet it made most PSTs feel ‘awkward’ rather than ‘dispelling myths necessary to embrace pleasure’ (Hirst 2104, 41), a reaction not evident in another activity that examined gender, power and sexualisation in music videos. In contrast, these latter film clips included representations that could be defined as pornographic, many depicting violence against women as normalised and highlighting the regularity of female desire being positioned in passive, objectified discourses of availability.

Perhaps, an opportunity to explore this very contradiction may have enabled PSTs to gain a greater understanding of the impact of their own gendered sexual positioning in the context of cultural constructions of pleasure on what and how they will teach about sexuality to young people in schools. Being able to reflect on their own sexual knowing and the sexual...
knowing considered culturally appropriate for young people may also have shed some light on their feelings of shock at the inclusion of pleasure within the discourses of normality presented in the video. Perhaps, this has the potential to move the field forward and find ways to meet some of the conditions to include pedagogies of pleasure in sexuality education recommended by Hirst (2014, 41). If teachers’ self-knowledge of ‘experiencing pleasure’ is developed through such pedagogies, then perhaps comfort with teaching pleasure can be increased. Comfort has been shown to lead to confidence and a willingness to teach sensitive issues in sexuality education (Ollis 2014).

The importance of reflective reconstruction

These four illustrations highlight the potential power of reflection as a pedagogical tool. The opportunity to reflect and examine their own subject positions proved to have an enabling impact on a number of the PSTs regarding their sense of self and the potential of them including pedagogies of pleasure in their practice.

I used to date a really aggro guy who watched porn (which I hated) and I never understood why I could never be sexy enough or handle his violence (while we were intimate). I held onto this guilt and insecurity thinking that I would never want to like anyone ever again. From this unit, I was challenged to change this disappointment in myself and I now see that this seems to be a culture issue rather than being my fault for not being able to live up to his weird standards. I never knew any different until this unit showed me that it is okay to want someone who is kind, gentle and loving in a range of scenarios (from sexual stuff to how you communicate in everyday life). I thought that what I had experienced was normal and now I can see the importance of sex education and respectful relationships in all contexts. I wish I had had this programme when I was in school. (Grace, Post unit survey 2014)

This response by Grace to the question, ‘what did you learn about yourself?’ highlights the possibility for a sense of agency by providing a space for reflection. The opportunity to examine and discover her wants, desires and sexual needs in relation to others and the broader social and cultural context appears to have given her a feeling of control and agency that was lacking prior to her participation in the unit. Grace has explored her positioning to reconstruct and reposition her subjectivities through a process that Harrison and Ollis (2015, 28) call ‘reflective reconstruction’. This seems to enable her to make the connection between herself and structural systems of gender ‘privilege and oppression’ (Tisdall 1998). Many students commented on how much they learned about themselves and the importance of this for teaching students in schools.

Teaching young people about pleasure also means teaching young people about sexual consent and their right to demand respectful relationships based on free agreement and equality. In Grace’s case, it also built personal confidence, with the logical outcome being a commitment to its inclusion in sexuality education in her future teaching. This personal connection may explain why some PSTs can translate this work into practice against a backdrop of discomfort and opposition in schools.

PSTs engage in critical exploration of their own subjectivities and power, and critically analyse gender normativity in relation to sex, sexuality and gender, with the aim of developing skills to enable them to undertake a similar analysis with their future school students. They participate in teaching experiences that they could use, including discussion, debate, scenario analysis, critical media analysis, discourse analysis, resource deconstruction, development and reconstruction activities, attitude continuaums, personal and professional
reflection and peer teaching. This is considered a key component of best practice in teacher education (Freeman et al. 2003; Ollis 2013), because it provides a sense of how students in schools may feel and respond, and gives instruction in often-unfamiliar participatory pedagogies. These pedagogies aim to assist in the development of ‘embodied, realistic, and practical’ approaches (Allen 2005). For Grace, this meant exploring her own embodied understanding of her sexual self whilst critically examining and building an awareness of the structural nature of gender inequality and the need for respectful relationships education. For others, it enabled a space to explore the reality of how to teach sexuality education while still keeping to ‘my personal beliefs’. Some PSTs spoke of being able to ‘speak outside my comfort zone’ and gaining the practical skills to be ‘inclusive’ and present ‘information in more of an exploratory way … best for students to learn’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional feelings linked with sexual pleasure</td>
<td>As a class each student will be given a word describing a feeling or emotion that they will have to place on a continuum between the words ‘pleasure’ and ‘displeasure’. Discuss with students the importance of emotions in relation to physical and sexual pleasure. Also prompt discussions on why certain words were placed where and then ask students in groups of 3-4 to come up with a definition for pleasure and displeasure using the words as inspiration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Pleasure Location on Body Map</td>
<td>In small groups students outline a group member’s whole body on a large piece of butcher paper. Students identify the sensory places/areas on the body that stimulate sexual pleasure or cause arousal. They then show and describe their body map and identified sensory areas to other groups. Teacher finishes by giving a brief description clarifying where on the body sexual pleasure can be stimulated (Planned Parenthood 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Sexual Pleasure Continuum</td>
<td>In groups of 4-5, students are given small cards that they must place in order for the biological response that they believe occurs from the early stages of arousal to the final climax. Students must also place each biological response in the phase that they believe it occurs in. Note: Male, female and both responses are included for sorting through. (WeMD 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The G spot (it’s a thing) - YouTube clip</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz88K2qAlkE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz88K2qAlkE</a> After the video, discuss with students what they were surprised about/did/did not know</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is a male orgasm? - YouTube clip</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnjlG90QaTo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnjlG90QaTo</a> After the video, discuss with students what they were surprised about/did/did not know. Discuss comparisons between males and females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasurable sexual Acts</td>
<td>Students are given a word or definition on a card that describes a pleasurable physical/sexual act. Their task is to find their matching pair by matching the appropriate definition with the appropriate name of a physical/sexual act. Once everyone has found their partner, the teacher will discuss with students the definitions and answers. (Definitions from Government of Western Australia 2012; Planned Parenthood 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical intimacy definition</td>
<td>Students define (in small groups of 3-4) ‘Ethical Intimacy’ in relation to sexual activity. Each group re-states their definition to the rest of the group and students discuss as a large group the similarities and differences between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical intimacy case-study</td>
<td>In the same groups as the previous activity students read a scenario (Cindy and Mark’s case-study), that describes sexual activity between two people. Their task is to discuss whether they thought there was ethical intimacy evident and why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical intimacy role-play</td>
<td>After reading Mark &amp; Cindy’s story, in pairs students (of the same gender) discuss the appropriate actions that should occur to restore the respect within the relationship. Students then role-play dialogue that could prevent the miscommunication and lack of sexual pleasure for future scenarios. This case-study can then be used for an individually assessed homework task.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. ‘Sexual Pleasure’ lesson outline: year 10.
A conscious choice is made to cover limited factual information on issues such as STIs, reproduction, puberty, etc. Instead, the emphasis is on PSTs exploring their own and societal values and discourses for positioning sexuality and gender issues, engaging in activity-based pedagogies, and building a theoretical framework for teaching sexuality education. Many PSTs commented that the unit had given them the 'confidence to teach controversial subjects such as sexual pleasure' and 'an excitement to teach Sex Ed!!'

The importance of practice

On the last day of the unit, PSTs must teach each other a topic they have been allocated. This requires them to develop a lesson sequence and teach 20 minutes of the lesson to their peers. The assessment task was designed to provide PSTs with practice in teaching areas of sexuality education that teachers can find difficult and uncomfortable. The following is the one-page description of a lesson outline two students, one male and one female, completed as part of their assessment (Figure 1).

These PSTs developed a very comprehensive and sequential approach to teaching about pleasure. The approach demonstrates a sound understanding of unit aims and a sex positive approach. The approach is not only consistent with the definition used to guide this unit but also the one used more broadly by other scholars. Dalley, as early as 1997, was calling for a sex positive approach, arguing that this meant emphasising physical and emotional pleasure that affirms ‘the pleasure of touch, the requirement for orgasmic release, or the importance of trust and open communication’ (87). Lyn and Chris covered this content in their lesson sequence. In addition, they demonstrated an example of the call by Cameron-Lewis and Allen (2013) to include a focus on sexual ethics. Using the story in Figure 2, called, The ethical
Intimacy story, they illustrate how ‘pleasure, danger and ambivalence’ in loving relationships can be explored with secondary school students. The story enables a space to name and discuss ‘the innumerable possible emotions, sensations, fantasies and evocations that flow from sexually aroused bodies’ (128), both the negative and the positive.

What this written documentation does not capture is the confidence and skill HPE PSTs displayed as they talked about sexual pleasure, orgasm and ethical sex. The developing Australian Curriculum in HPE means that teachers such as these will shortly be charged with the responsibility of teaching sexuality education. One cannot help feeling some optimism. However, caution is needed and change is slow. Schools and teacher education are still a long way from embracing a sex positive approach that includes pedagogies of pleasure. As such, enthusiasm will have to contend with the realities of practice, of opposition and active resistance in schools.

**Conclusion**

This paper has argued the need for a sex positive approach to sexuality education, one that includes pedagogies of pleasure and desire, as well as an examination of silences in sexuality education such as sexualities, gender, power and gender-based violence. The history of sexuality education in Australia provides an important backdrop to understanding of current approaches and the possibility of change as Australia moves towards the implementation of a national curriculum that endorses sexuality education and expects HPE teachers to teach it.

Teacher education is crucial to implementation and sustainable change (Carman, Mitchell, and Walsh 2009). This paper draws on an example of an intensive unit designed to prepare teachers to teach sexuality education in Australian secondary schools. It is one of only three available in HPE courses in Australia. Although the experience of the PSTs in this paper provides some hope, the unit is limited in its ability to prepare future teachers. The complexity of sexuality issues; the dynamic nature of young people, schools, sexuality education; and changing government priorities and political agendas mean that teachers need on-going education and an opportunity to revisit these issues throughout their careers.

The work described also illustrates one of the key tensions and contradictions that moving to a sex positive approach brings: that is, how to develop the comfort and confidence required to teach about sexual pleasure in a context when there is little opportunity to reflect, explore and engage in pedagogies of pleasure in pre-service teacher education, and when few resources are available to support this practice. More research on what builds teacher confidence and a willingness to translate this into positive sexuality education in the classroom is needed. A number of PSTs were very uncomfortable watching the age appropriate, visual resource, *Sex on the Map*. Although they understood the importance of including pleasure, they struggled with its graphic and sensual nature, saying they were not sure if they could use such a film with the 15–16-year-age group it was designed for.

The study also points to the importance of enabling PSTs to examine these feelings and space to reflect through ‘trusted conversations’ and name what Cameron-Lewis and Allen (2013, 128) call ‘the innumerable possible emotions, sensations, fantasies and evocations that flow from sexually aroused bodies; although the question stills remains about how best to do this. Do we use personal stories and written narratives, or the visual medium that is so embedded in young people’s cultural context? Do shock, shame and disgust have a role to

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play in building awareness and enabling critical analysis? Is it the teacher and/or the peers who create a safe space for this work?

Pedagogies of pleasure sit uncomfortably with the current sex negative approach, making a focus on pleasure risky business for teachers. All teachers need to have opportunities, as these PSTs did, to reflect on and explore these feelings and practice teaching about pleasure in a safe environment; one in which they can be supported to take the personal and professional risks necessary to build comfort, competence and conviction to say 'I do have the confidence to teach controversial subjects such as sexual pleasure'.

Notes

1. By the term framework, I am referring to a set of principles that guide and support, in this case my approach to sexuality education, or the approach taken in my teaching. It is the essential, supporting theoretical and pedagogical structure that can be used regardless of what sexuality education issue is being discussed, taught or researched.

2. Middle school years is a term used in Australia to refer to students in years 5–9, aged 10–15 years.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References


