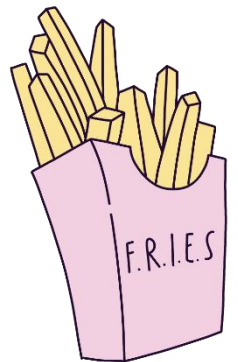


the gist.



A pornography, sex, and relationships education program for young people

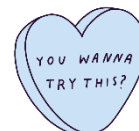
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Phase 2 Evaluation Report

Burnet Institute – Young People’s Health Group

November 2023



Suggested Citation:

Lim, M.S.C, Orozco, A., Turvey, J., & Evans, D. (2023). *A pornography, sex, and relationships education program for young people; Phase 2 Evaluation Report*. Burnet Institute: Melbourne, Australia.

Funding acknowledgement

This research was funded by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.



Acknowledgements

We express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Angela Davis, Dr Cassandra Wright, and Callan Rowe for their invaluable contributions to the development and design of the Gist. We thank Sarah Eddy for help in preparing this report. Additionally, our thanks extend to the exceptional facilitators, Ben Corio, Tameaka Lakey, Maya-Victoria Kjellstrand, Alison Langstone, Will Burns, and Rhiannon Jennings, who delivered the Gist program to the youth sites. Their dedicated efforts have played a pivotal role in the success of the program.

Furthermore, we wish to acknowledge the noteworthy contributions of ShinEn Wong, Viv Mah, Dr. Natasha Castree, Ben Corio, Tameaka Lakey, and Today Design Agency towards the development of the website content and design. Their substantial input has significantly enhanced the overall quality and functionality of the website and lessons.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the schools and youth sites that opened their doors to pilot the Gist program. Our sincere thanks for efficiently coordinating the students and warmly welcoming the team to facilitate the program with their amazing students.

Lastly, we express deep gratitude to the remarkable young individuals who played a pivotal role in the program. Their invaluable contributions and candid feedback were instrumental in making this program a success.

Collectively, their commitment and expertise have been instrumental in the achievements of both the Gist program and the website.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Young Australians report that current sexual health education is lacking and that they rely on the internet and pornography to learn about sex, consent, and relationships (Lim et al., 2017). Online pornography is easily accessible to children and is associated with poor mental health, increased sexual risk behaviours, and attitudes supporting violence against women (Lim, Carrotte, & Hellard, 2016). Marginalised young people, such as those disengaged from mainstream education, are at greater risk of these adverse effects (Davis et al., 2020).

In 2018, Burnet Institute co-designed and tested with young people a digital resource to engage and educate young people who were disengaged from mainstream education about sexual health, relationships, and pornography.

Following evaluation of this program, The Gist was revised and The Office of the eSafety Commissioner funded Burnet Institute to implement the revised program. This project consists of two phases:

- Phase One: Using a co-design process to inform the development of The Gist into an integrated education program comprising a digital tool and in-person education sessions for young people.
- Phase Two: Evaluation of the delivery of The Gist integrated education program to young people.

PROGRAM DELIVERY

In Phase 1 we developed an education package comprising five face-to-face sexual health education sessions in conjunction with a digital resource (thegist.org.au), designed to give young people alternative information about sex, relationships, and pornography. The Gist main content is organised into five sections for easy access.

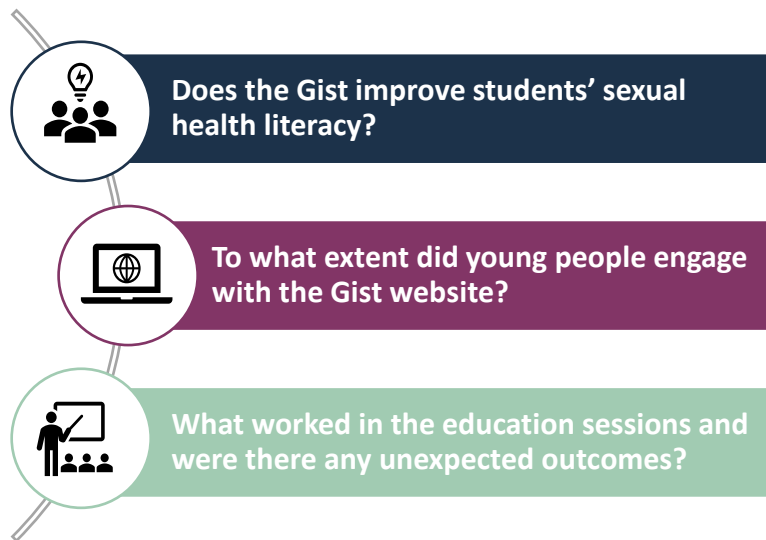


In Phase 2, participants were recruited through existing youth services, for a total of 10 education class groups (four metro; six regional). The number of students per class ranged from between 6-15, with an average age of 17 years.

Lessons were delivered in a series of five facilitated education sessions following the website content format. Sessions were co-facilitated by an experienced relationships and sexuality education provider and local staff from the school or service (e.g., school nurse, health promotion officer). A member of the Burnet research team was also present to take notes and assist.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

The overarching aim of this evaluation was to answer the following questions:



A mixed methods approach was used in the evaluation of this program, drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data sources to help understand the implementation processes and subsequent impact of The Gist on participants. Resources include website analytics, student surveys, participatory workshop activities, researcher observation notes, facilitators reflection sessions, feedback forms, and semi-structured interviews.

RESULTS






Statistically significant changes in young people's sexual health literacy were limited. Notably, there was an increase in participants' confidence in supporting a friend's unplanned pregnancy (from 64% to 70% after The Gist sessions) and a shift in recognising oral sex as real sex (from 56% to 75% post-program). Overall knowledge scores showed a statistically significant increase from pre- to post-program. There was no evidence of a change in pornography viewing frequency before and after the program.

The Gist website experienced limited engagement, with only 346 visits during the evaluation period. User interaction lacked depth, with most visitors only briefly exploring the site.

Several critical success factors contributing to the effective implementation of the Gist Program were identified and grouped into three broad categories: relevant and inclusive content, adaptive program design and delivery, and effective external facilitators.

Relevant and inclusive content	The Gist content was seen as highly relevant to the sexual health needs of students, and inclusive of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Teaching staff suggested that this played a pivotal role in facilitating strong student engagement and participation.
Adaptive program design and delivery	Intentional design efforts were taken to ensure the Gist program was flexible and able to cater to the needs of both schools and students. Visual content and interactive activities were particularly successful in engaging students, while teaching staff were highly appreciative of the flexible workshop delivery.
Effective external facilitators	External facilitators were able to foster a safe and inclusive classroom environment in which students felt comfortable to explore sensitive sexual health topics, leading to high levels of student engagement and learning.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve website integration & engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate the Gist website into workshop activities & lesson plans • Create promotional materials directing students to the website • Have teaching staff champion the website as an educational resource • Promote the website to the wider community
Provide expanded video options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a greater variety of educational videos & visual learning materials • Need to consider diverse range of ages, sexual experiences & learning styles
Support greater program flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide greater guidance to facilitators within lesson plans and workshop documentation • Create a pool of potential substitute activities & discussion points • Introduce a 'traffic light' ranking system to help facilitators know what activities are essential and which can be substituted
Consider avenues for program Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities to increase the financial sustainability of the Gist program • The introduction of small program fee (\$200-500) was seen as acceptable by many schools • Consider the impact such measures would have on low-SES & disadvantaged schools
Explore different program structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate the feasibility of alternative and more sustainable program structures • Alternative models include train-the-trainer programs, teacher-facilitator hybrid delivery, and one-off lesson delivery

CONCLUSION

The Gist as an education program which is highly appealing and relevant to young people and educators. There was some evidence of improvements in knowledge following the program, and no evidence of harms. Partners and funding for ongoing implementation of the program are now needed.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the evaluation findings of The Gist. The Gist is a program comprising a website and face to face lessons. It aims to improve the sexual health and wellbeing of vulnerable young people, while reducing the potentially harmful impacts of pornography.

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner funded Burnet Institute to develop and implement The Gist, following codesign work funded by VicHealth. Burnet partnered with Today Design and the University of Melbourne Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health to deliver the project.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Violence against women and poor sexual health and wellbeing remain critical problems in Australia. Young Australians report that current sexual health education is lacking and that they rely on the internet and pornography to learn about sex, consent, and relationships (Lim et al., 2017). Online pornography is easily accessible to children and is associated with poor mental health, increased sexual risk behaviours, and attitudes supporting violence against women (Lim, Carrotte, & Hellard, 2016). Marginalised young people, such as those disengaged from mainstream education, are at greater risk of these adverse effects (Davis et al., 2020).

To begin addressing these problems, in 2018, VicHealth funded the Burnet Institute to design and test a digital resource that would engage and educate young people who were disengaged from mainstream education about sexual health, relationships and pornography. A diverse group of young people who had experienced fragmented schooling were engaged in a co-design process to inform the development of such a program (Davis et al., 2020). This was informed by best practice sexual health education and sexual ethics (Carmody, 2015). This led to the creation of a digital prototype of a health education program — *The Gist*.

The prototype of The Gist digital resource focused on changing the conversation about pornography. Rather than focusing on what porn *is* or *is not* (which young people are already aware of), *The Gist* provided young people with alternative representations of sex and relationships which aimed to disrupt problematic messages from pornography. It provided the information that young people need to develop healthy attitudes towards sex and relationships. Embedded in this information was media and pornography literacy education that links directly to the problematic representations of sex in pornography and the potential outcomes of these in real world settings (Davis et al., 2020).

After the prototype was delivered, it was evaluated by the University of Melbourne Department of General Practice to understand whether it was accessible, usable, desirable, inclusive, safe, and relevant for young people. The evaluation also sought to establish the extent to which it influenced young people's knowledge, attitudes, confidence and literacy about healthy, respectful relationships and sexual health and wellbeing; and sought to identify insights for a future scale up of the program.

The evaluation noted the benefits of The Gist and suggested the need for further testing over a longer period prior to wider use. Further, the evaluation recommended that The Gist should be introduced in a small group education setting by a sexual health educator rather than a stand-alone digital app. Based on the learning from the prototype, The Gist was revised and The Office of the eSafety Commissioner funded Burnet Institute to implement the revised program. The aims were:

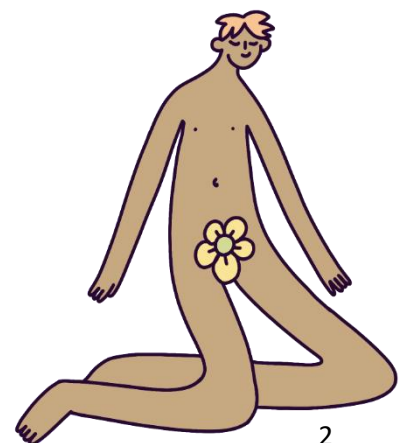
1. To modify and further develop the digital tool.
2. To design and develop an education program consisting of a digital tool and face to face education sessions to be delivered by experienced educators.
3. To deliver the education program in conjunction with the digital tool as part of a multi-modal education package.
4. To evaluate the impact of *The Gist* (both digital and in-person delivery) on young people's knowledge and attitudes towards pornography, sexual health and wellbeing, and attitudes towards violence against women.

This project consists of two phases:

- Phase One: Using a co-design process to inform the development of The Gist into an integrated education program comprising a digital tool and in-person education sessions for young people.
- Phase Two: Evaluation of the delivery of The Gist integrated education program to young people.

1.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEBSITE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

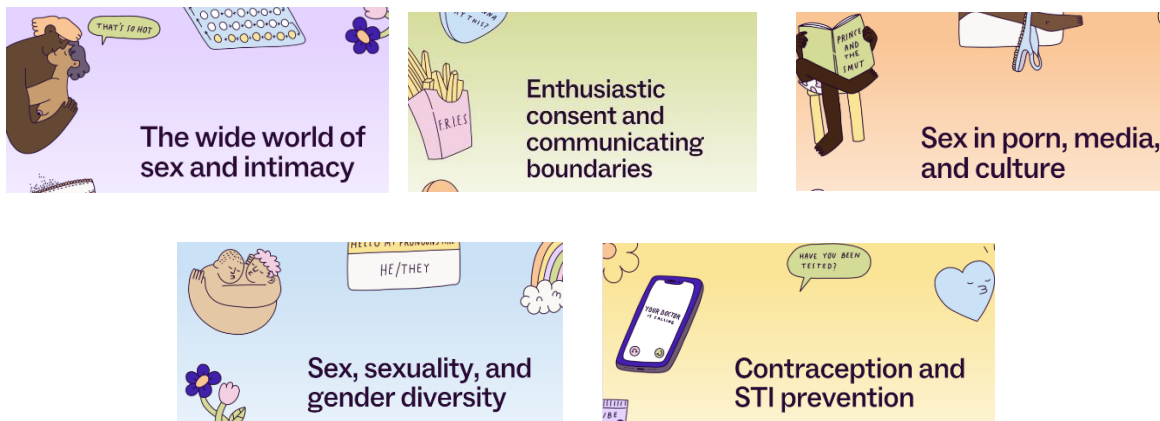
The design phase of The Gist (Phase One) focused on the development of the education package to be delivered to young people who are disengaged from mainstream education. The package consisted of face-to-face health education sessions in conjunction with a digital resource designed to give young people alternative information about sex, relationships, and pornography. This gave participants an opportunity to engage in facilitated discussions about the content of the digital intervention using a range of activities.



1.2.1 WEBSITE

Collaborating with Today Agency, we co-designed with young people disengaged from mainstream schools, a relevant and easy-to-use digital tool catering to their specific needs providing a relevant and accessible resource as they explore the complex world of pornography. The Gist website: www.thegist.org.au.

The website offers a question-and-answer section with expert responses, links to support services, and a series of videos produced by Banalarama Studios, a creative studio in Victoria with a focus on videos. The main content, comprising articles, is organised into five sections for easy access.



1.2.2 Lessons

Working with the University of Melbourne, we developed a series of lesson plans, closely aligned to the website content. These plans can be found on a companion website: www.thegist.org.au/educator-home (See Image 1). The educator website is designed to guide the educator or facilitator in leading sessions with young people. It includes overviews of the five lesson plans, recommended activities with their respective worksheets, and other resources.

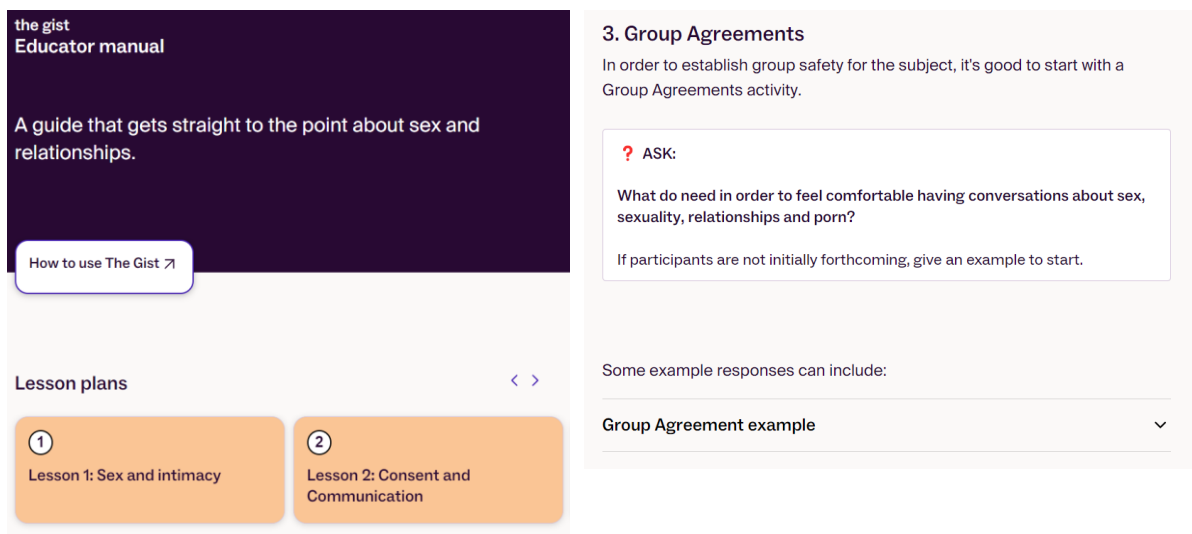


Image 1. Example of The Gist educator website

2 PROGRAM DELIVERY

2.1 PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited through existing youth services, for a total of 10 education class groups (four metropolitan Melbourne; six regional Victoria).

The services identified existing groups or potential groups to be part of the program. These services contain groups of young people with experiences of family conflict or breakdown, fragmented school attendance or disengagement from mainstream education, unstable housing or living in out-of-home care, migrants, and young parents. Participant numbers within groups range between 3–16, with an average of approximately eight young people per group. Participant age was defined by services, who typically work with young people aged between 13–21 years. We obtained informed consent (or parent/guardian consent if appropriate) from all participants.

Partner organisations identified appropriate groups or classes and provide them with Explanatory Statement and consent forms. The partner organisations determined the timing and location of the sessions and scheduled participants to attend. Generally, sessions were held during normal class or group times that the young people would attend.

2.1.1 Demographics

One hundred and one young people aged between 12 and 22 years (mean age = 17 years) attended at least one workshop, 101 completed the pre-program survey, 87 completed the post-program survey, and 27 completed both pre-program and post-program surveys. Of the 101 participants who completed the demographic questionnaire, 44 identified as women, 48 as men, 10 as non-binary, and 3 indicated their gender was not listed. Participants could select multiple genders. About half (n=50) reported they were straight/heterosexual and 45 identified as LGBTQIA+. Table 1 describes student participants' demographics in more detail.

Table 1. Student participants' demographics

Student Demographics	Pre-program n (%) N = 101
Schools	
Regional 1	11 (11%)
Regional 2	8 (7.9%)
Regional 3	13 (13%)
Regional 4	12 (12%)
Regional 5	9 (8.9%)
Regional 6	6 (5.9%)
Metro 1	13 (13%)
Metro 2	6 (5.9%)
Metro 3	15 (15%)
Metro 4	8 (7.9%)
Age Mean (SD)	17 (1.98)
Region	

Metro	42 (42%)
Regional	59 (58%)
Sex at birth	
Male	46 (46%)
Female	52 (51%)
I don't wish to say	3 (3.0%)
Gender	
Men	48 (48%)
Women	44 (44%)
Nonbinary	10 (9.9%)
Gender not listed	3 (3.0%)
I don't wish to say	2 (2.0%)
Sexual identity	
Heterosexual/straight	50 (50%)
Bisexual	22 (22%)
I don't label myself	9 (8.9%)
I don't know/unsure	8 (7.9%)
Gay	7 (6.9%)
Queer	6 (5.9%)
Asexual	5 (5.0%)
Pansexual	5 (5.0%)
My sexuality identity is not listed	3 (3.0%)
I don't wish to say	1 (1.0%)
Questioning	1 (1.0%)
Country of birth	
Australia	100 (99%)
Other	1 (1.0%)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	
No	81 (80%)
Yes, Aboriginal	16 (16%)
Yes, Torres Strait Islander	1 (1.0%)
Yes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	0 (0%)
I don't wish to say	3 (3.0%)
Member of religion group or church	
Yes	10 (9.9%)
No	90 (89%)
I don't wish to say	1 (1.0%)
Note: participants could select multiple options for gender and sexual identity.	

2.2 LESSON DELIVERY

Lessons were delivered in a series of five facilitated education sessions. Each session ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours, depending upon the logistical requirements of the partner organisation. These sessions were co-facilitated by an experienced relationships and sexuality education provider and local staff from the school or service (e.g., school nurse, health promotion officer). Six educational facilitators, working in pairs, were employed across the course of the Gist Program to lead and deliver 50 workshops across the 10 participating school sites. A member of the Burnet research team was also present to take notes and assist with facilitation, logistics, and consent processes as needed. In most cases, the usual classroom teachers and/or youth workers were also present. Typically, sessions took place over one school term.



3 EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

This evaluation sought to identify and explore key insights into the ways in which young people with fragmented schooling engaged with the Gist Program. The overarching aim of this evaluation was to answer the following questions (Figure 1):

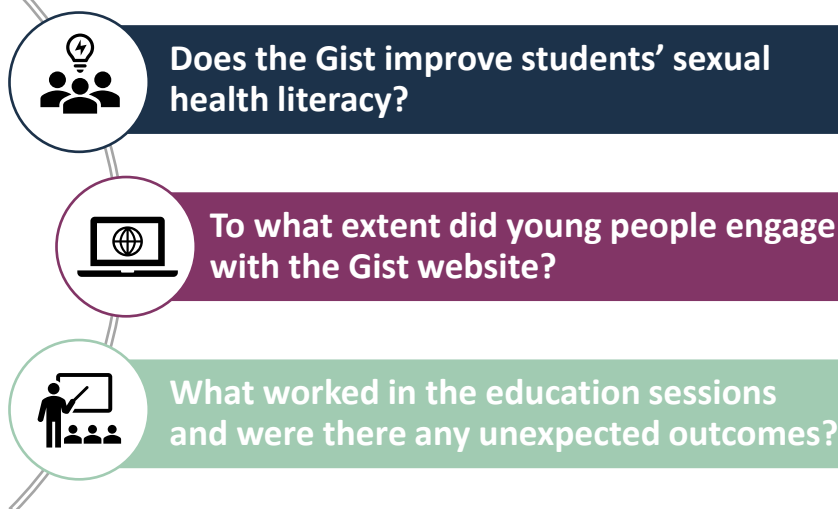


Figure 1: Key evaluation questions

3.1 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

A mixed methods approach was used in the evaluation of this program, drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data sources to help understand the implementation processes and subsequent impact of The Gist on participants. Key data sources are summarised in Figure 2 below.

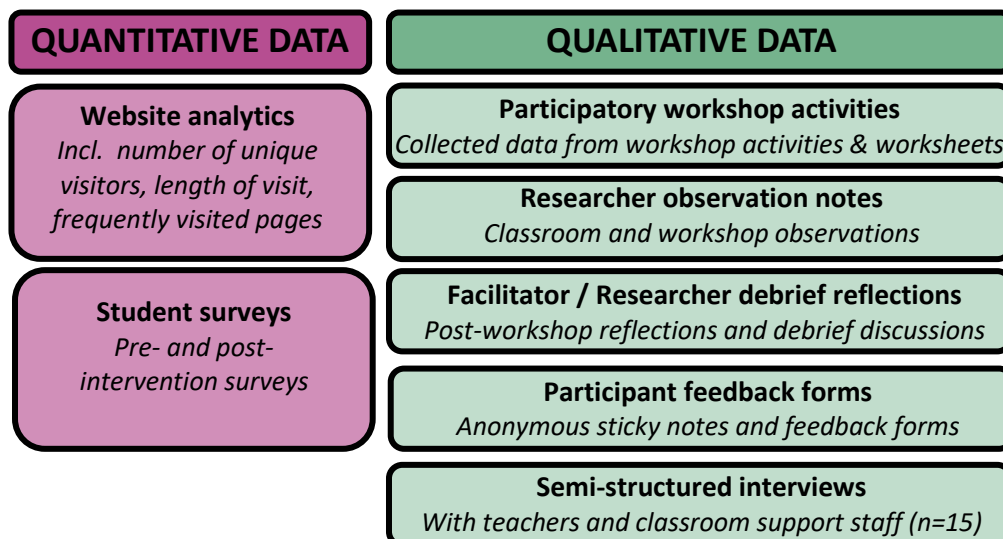


Figure 2: Evaluation data sources

3.1.1 Quantitative Data

Pre- and post-program student surveys

In total, 101 surveys were administered prior to the first education session and 87 following the completion of the education series (pre- and post-program surveys) to understand changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, agency, and self-efficacy related to pornography use, sexual behaviour, consent, gender equality and respectful relationships. Differences in pre and post survey numbers reflect class attendance. Survey questions assessed knowledge, attitudes and behaviours relating to the core concepts of the Gist. They also assessed engagement, relevance, and acceptability of the Gist for participants. Questions were adapted from our previous studies (Davis et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2019) and from other relevant questionnaires (Pantin and Derringer, 2020; Humphreys and Brousseau, 2010; Hoff et al., 2003; Whatley and Brock, 2018).

Participants could complete surveys online (via RedCap) or on paper. Paper surveys were manually entered on RedCap by a member of the research team. At the end of each survey, we asked participants for their mobile number or email address for the purpose of linking pre- and post-program surveys and providing gift vouchers.

Youth participants were reimbursed with a gift voucher to the value of \$20 for the first survey and \$40 for the final survey. To be eligible for reimbursement, participants needed to complete the pre-program survey by the fourth session and the post- program survey within two weeks of the final workshop session.

Website analytics

User engagement data from the Gist website was collected to understand participant engagement with the website, when it was used, and the features of the website with which participants engaged. All data collected was anonymous website analytic data (e.g., number of views, time of use) and participants were not identifiable.

3.1.2 Qualitative

Qualitative methods can elicit participant narratives about ideas, experiences, and attitudes. Various qualitative evaluation strategies were employed to complement the quantitative data described above and gain a deeper understanding about the processes and impact of The Gist. This provided insight into occurrences as the project progressed and addressed any issues that arose during implementation.

Five main approaches were used to collect qualitative data:

1. Data collected from young people's participatory activities during education sessions,
2. Researcher notes collected during lesson observations,
3. Post education session debrief meetings with facilitators and researchers,
4. Feedback provided by participants at the conclusion of the final education session, and
5. Interviews with partner organisation staff who were engaged in the delivery of the education sessions, at the conclusion of the program.

Data from young people's participatory activities

Qualitative, 'game style' engaging and creative activities were included in the curriculum of the education sessions (See Image 2). This provides opportunities for experiential learning, movement, and interaction which are well established social and emotional learning techniques (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

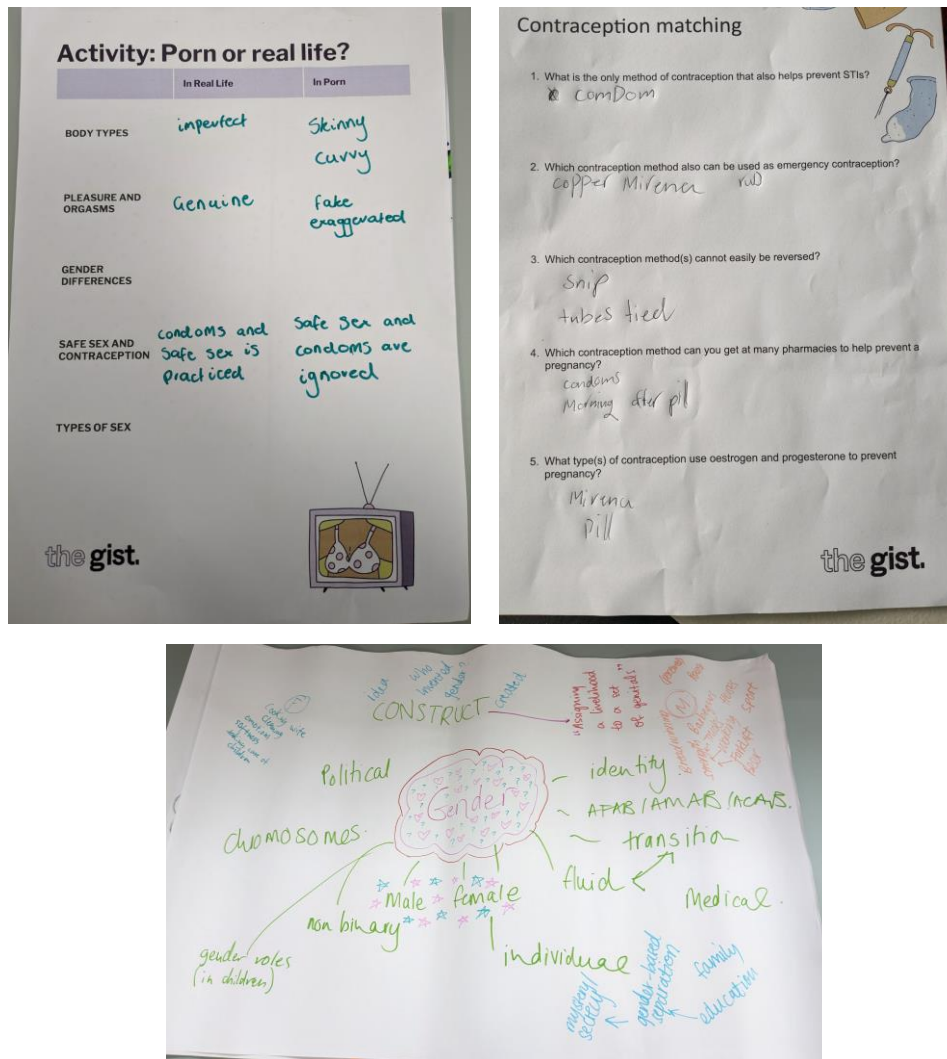


Image 2. Examples of worksheets and activities completed in class

Researcher observation notes

The researcher observers took notes throughout the lessons. They described the activities that were undertaken and any variations on these activities from standard procedures. They noted questions, comments, feedback, and reactions from students to the activities or the topics being discussed. Additionally, they recorded any students entering or leaving the sessions, or any emotional or behavioural issues. Teacher, youth worker, and facilitator comments and actions were also recorded.

Post education session facilitator/researcher reflections on process

After each session the educator/s and researchers convened a post-session reflection discussion to review whether the session has achieved its objectives, what had worked well, and what needed to be changed or modified. These discussions focused on the ways that participants engaged with the education program process, content, and the website. The content of these reflection sessions was recorded through notetaking in Miro board - an online whiteboard (Miro, 2023) — see Image 3.



Image 3. Example of notes from facilitator/researcher reflections sessions in Miro

Participant feedback from education sessions

At the end of each session of the education program youth participants were invited to contribute their thoughts on The Gist through anonymous sticky notes or feedback forms (See Image 4). This provided information about their experience of the program and assisted the researchers to better understand their questions, perceptions, and attitudes.

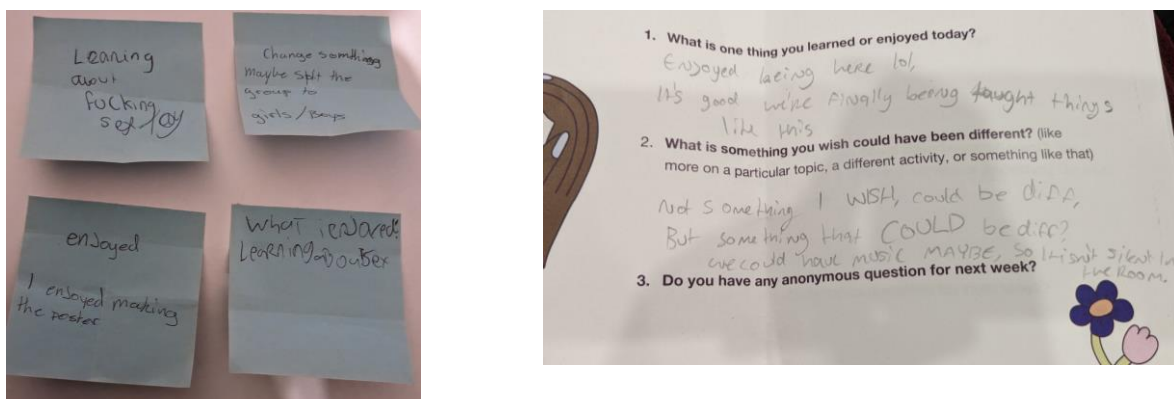


Image 4. Example of student participants' feedback

Interviews with partner organisations

We conducted nine interviews with teaching staff from the partner organisations, approximately four weeks after the sessions were completed. We contacted our primary contacts at each partner organisation via email and invited them to participate. They were eligible to participate if they were employed at the partner organisation in any capacity and were directly or indirectly involved in the delivery of education sessions. Attendance during interviews varied among staff, with some participants present for only a portion of the interviews. This diversity may have resulted in differing levels of exposure to topics.

Interviews were held online and were audio recorded to supplement note taking. Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. Participants were interviewed one-on-one or as a group from a single site. Participants were reimbursed with a \$30 gift voucher for their time. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim by the interviewer.

The interview sought feedback and perspectives on the process and delivery of the program. Participants were asked to identify any process issues or improvements, feedback on the delivery methods of the sessions, and provide perspectives on potential future iterations of the education program.

3.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Quantitative

Quantitative pre- and post- program survey data were analysed using Stata Statistical Software version 15 (StataCorp, 2017), to understand changes in knowledge and attitudes from baseline to after exposure to The Gist program. Frequency, percentages, median values, and interquartile ranges were used describe participants' responses.

We derived four distinct scores by aggregating responses to various survey questions. These scores were designed to assess changes in sexual health knowledge, attitudes, confidence levels, and the personal impact of pornography, as illustrated in Table 2. Note that higher scores correspond to more favourable outcomes within each respective category except in the personal impact of pornography where higher scores signify a greater negative impact of pornography.



Table 2. Questions involved in scoring

Questions and derived scores	
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You don't need to use condoms unless you have a lot of sexual partners* The pill is the best way to prevent STIs and pregnancy If my friend had an unplanned pregnancy, I would know where to get help If someone shared a naked picture without permission, I would know how to get it taken down
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender is complicated, and it does not always match up with biological sex Porn is just entertainment; it doesn't affect real life* In a healthy relationship, you spend all your time together* It is perfectly okay for people to have intimate relationships with people of the same sex Oral sex isn't real sex* If someone is raped while they are drunk or affected by drugs, they are at least partly responsible
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel comfortable talking to my friends about sex I think that asking for sexual consent is awkward I would feel comfortable talking to my partner about what I want to do sexually
Personal impact of porn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think I watch too much porn Porn makes me feel bad about my body
Note: Likert scale values ranged from 1- strongly disagree to 4 strongly agree. *Scores were reversed	

The survey data collected showed an ordinal pattern, not following a normal distribution, and presented difficulties in matching pre- and post- program survey observations. To address this, a Mann-Whitney Signed Rank U test was employed to compare each question and scores derived from pre-program and post- program data related to sexual health, relationships, and pornography. As a sensitivity analysis, we conducted a paired test specifically tailored for non-normally distributed data, utilising the Wilcoxon signed-rank test with the subset of observations that could be paired.

Qualitative

Notes on researcher observations throughout each of the education and reflection sessions and participant feedback provided in the final session were compiled by a researcher. All qualitative materials were reviewed and analysed to identify issues, strengths, or areas for improvement for the Gist program. Notes were thematically analysed with NVivo to identify both process matters, unexpected outcomes, and any changes needed to improve the education program.

4 RESULTS

This chapter summarises the evaluation findings. Data has been synthesised from across the quantitative and qualitative sources, grouping key themes to help address the three overarching questions of the evaluation (presented above in Figure 1).

4.1 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND FIDELITY

Adapting to varying energy levels and engagement, activities diverged across sites. While some facilitators utilised the worksheets provided, others found success in group discussions with visual aids (e.g., whiteboards or butcher's paper). The website served as a supplementary tool in some classrooms, offering information or definitions and fostering discussion, while others opted not to use it.

Videos were often incorporated at the beginning of the lesson; however, videos were not played with all groups. Initially, all sites commenced sessions with name tags, pronouns, and group agreements. Towards the end of the program, as students and facilitators became more familiar, some classrooms ceased introductions and reiterating group agreements.

In general, classrooms with too many teachers during the lesson disrupted students' engagement, creating an imbalance of power. Diverse approaches were taken to collect participants' feedback, ranging from post-it notes and anonymous boxes to formal feedback forms and open class discussions.

Facilitation styles differed between the three facilitator teams. One facilitator leaned more towards in-depth discussions and written responses on whiteboards or butcher's paper, while others favoured a greater use of activities and worksheets. Further detail per lesson is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Description of activity implementation per lesson across the program

1. The wide world of sex

Positive:

- “What is sex” and “sex talk” activities worked well. They were completed in all 10 sessions
- “Values circle” activity was well-liked by facilitators and students
- Reiterating the definition of ethical sex
- Worksheets and available resources
- “Sex Talk” activity used as a reference list of safe words to be used during the program

2. Enthusiastic consent and communicating boundaries

Positive:

- Both videos were played by most sites
- Approach consent with a practical perspective, emphasising real-life experiences rather than solely focusing on legal aspects. However, students expressed inquiries regarding the legal aspect of consent
- FRIES activity and power conversation were completed by all facilitators

To improve:

- Students and facilitators find the activity “may I have your pencil” misleading

-
- Two facilitators noted that “comfort, risk and danger zones” activity may be too complex for some students
 - Insufficient time to run all activities and play both videos

3. Sex in porn, media, and culture

To improve:

- Each site played one to two videos out of three
- Lesson was described as dry by some facilitators as activities were mostly discussion-based
- Only one facilitator completed the frog parable and Tom and Tara activities. Other facilitators suggested these were not suitable due to their negative focus or heteronormativity.

4. Sex, sexuality, and gender diversity

Positive:

- Pronoun badges and pamphlets with further resources

To improve:

- The gender unicorn activity yielded mixed reactions among facilitators. While some favoured its use, others did not, employing various methods such as interactive slides, worksheets, or the whiteboard to capture responses visibly. Other facilitators instead opted for a discussion on the coverage of the gender unicorn and explored language for describing masculinity.
- Pronouns scenario was completed by all regional sites, and only by one metro site. Some facilitators noted that the case scenario was not suitable for their group and needed to be modified.
- Terms and definitions like heteronormativity, queer phobia, and minority stress were too complex for some groups with younger participants. They were only defined in regional sites, as in metro sites many of the students had existing knowledge of these terms.

5. Contraception and STI prevention

Positive:

- The most liked session in most sites
- Hands-on fun activities
- Captions in videos
- Props or examples of contraceptive methods including condoms and dental dams
- Referral to local services

To improve:

- Use of other websites to show examples of contraception methods
 - Divide session in two; 1) Contraception, 2) STIs
-

4.2 DOES THE GIST INCREASE STUDENTS' SEXUAL HEALTH LITERACY

"I found it helpful because I learnt about things that I did not know." – **Student**

"I'm learning so much, I was so clueless before" – **Student**

Sex, relationships, and pornography

Bar graphs in Figure 3 illustrate the frequencies of student responses to key questions around sex, relationships, and pornography. This comparative analysis delves into participant responses both before and after engaging in the Gist lessons.

Following the Gist workshops, an increase was observed in the understanding of condom usage, with 83% of participants recognising the importance of using condoms even when few sexual partners, compared to the pre-program percentage of 73%. Similarly, a higher percentage of participants (66%) demonstrated awareness that the pill is not the best method for preventing STIs and pregnancy, relative to the pre-program percentage of 59%. Moreover, a greater proportion (51%) indicated awareness of how to handle a shared intimate picture without consent, compared to the pre-program figure of 46%. There was a reduction in individuals perceiving that they watch excessive pornography, from 72% prior to the workshops to 65% following. For detailed graphical representations of each question, refer to Supplementary Material Figure S1.

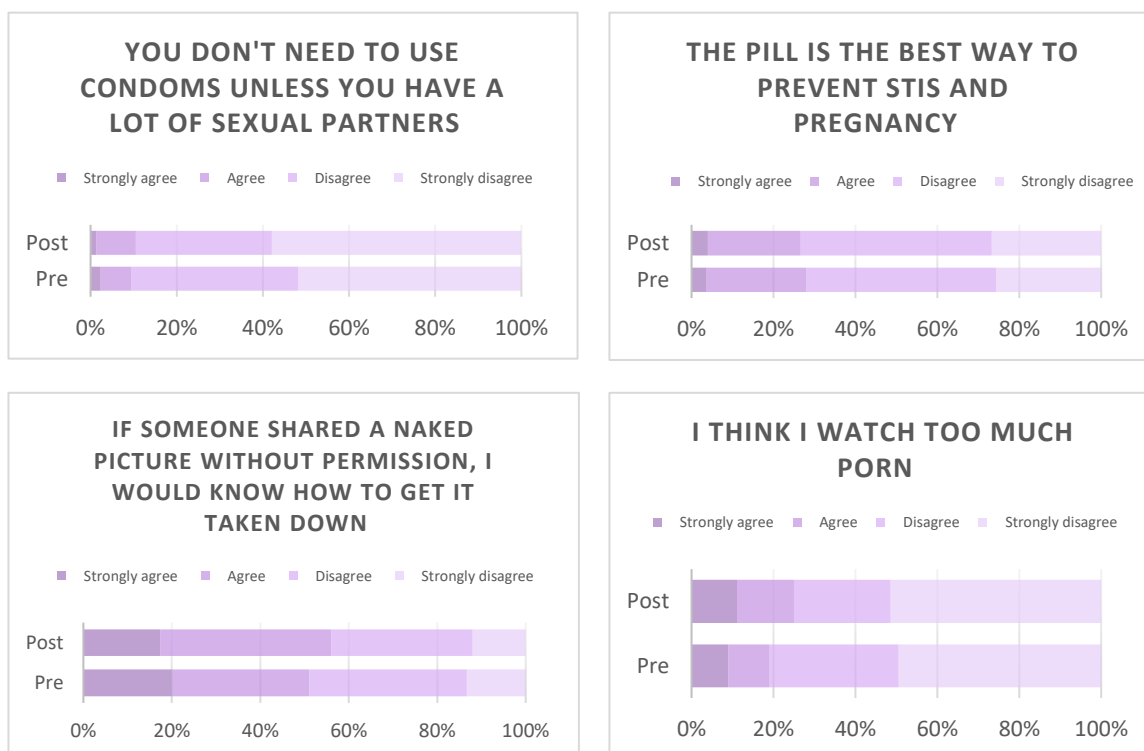


Figure 3. Frequencies of student responses to key questions around sex, relationships, and pornography

Additionally, Figure 4 shows a notable increase in participants' confidence in supporting a friend's unplanned pregnancy (from 64% to 70% after the Gist sessions). It also highlights a shift in attitudes towards oral sex, with 75% of respondents' post- program recognising oral sex as real sex, as opposed to 56% before the session. The Mann-Whitney U signed rank test demonstrated that both changes were statistically significant (See Table 4).

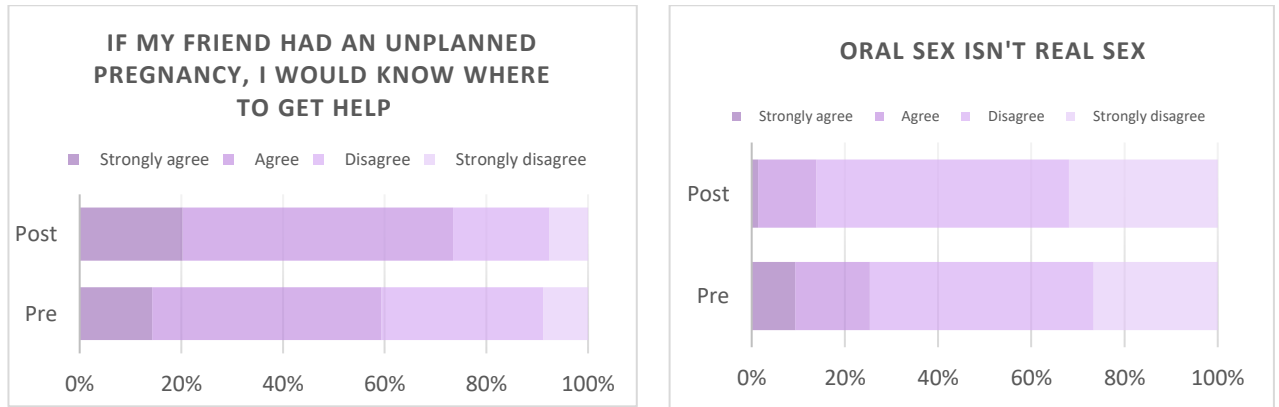


Figure 4. Key questions around sex, relationships and pornography

We derived combination scores for Knowledge, Attitudes, Confidence, and Personal Impact of Pornography. Knowledge was the only metric that demonstrated a statistically significant increase from pre- to post- program (See Table 5). The sensitivity analysis, with the available matched data (n=27) showed no statistically significant differences between any of the derived scores (Refer to Supplementary Material Table S1).

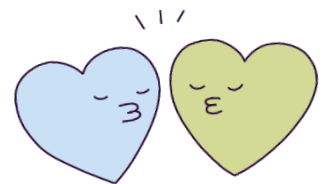


Table 4. Mann–Whitney U signed rank test between pre- and post- program questions on sex, relationships and pornography

Question	Pre-Program (n=101)	Post-Program (n=87)	p value
	Median (IQR)	Median (IQR)	
I feel comfortable talking to my friends about sex	3(1)	3(1)	0.38
I think that asking for sexual consent is awkward	2(2)	2(2)	0.34
You don't need to use condoms unless you have a lot of sexual partners †	4(1)	4(1)	0.15
The pill is the best way to prevent STIs and pregnancy	2(1.75)	2(2)	0.40
Gender is complicated, and it does not always match up with biological sex	3(1)	3(1)	0.45
Porn is just entertainment; it doesn't affect real life †	3(1)	3(1)	0.88
If my friend had an unplanned pregnancy, I would know where to get help	3(1)	3(1)	0.03*
If someone shared a naked picture without permission, I would know how to get it taken down	3(1)	3(1)	0.52
I would feel comfortable talking to my partner about what I want to do sexually	3(1)	3(0)	0.86
In a healthy relationship, you spend all your time together †	3(1)	3(0.25)	0.10
I think I watch too much porn	2(1)	1(1)	0.92
It is perfectly okay for people to have intimate relationships with people of the same sex	4(1)	4(1)	0.15
Oral sex isn't real sex †	3(1.5)	3(1)	0.01*
Porn makes me feel bad about my body	2(2)	2(1.2)	0.26
If someone is raped while they are drunk or affected by drugs, they are at least partly responsible	4(1)	4(1)	0.74

Note: 4 represents strongly agree and 1 strongly disagree; † reversed scores; * $p < 0.05$.

Table 5. Mann–Whitney U signed rank test between pre- and post- program knowledge, impact, attitude, and confidence scores

Score	Pre-Program (n=101)	Post-Program (n=87)	p value
	Median (IQR)	Median (IQR)	
Knowledge	10(3)	11(3)	0.03*
Personal impact of pornography	3(3)	3.5(3)	0.46
Attitude	17(4)	17(6)	0.70
Confidence	8(2)	7(2)	0.99

Note: * $p < 0.05$. Range of scores: Knowledge (4–16), Personal impact of porn (2–8), Attitude (6–24), and Confidence (3–12).

Pornography viewing and connection to others

Table 6 shows participants reported pornography viewing frequency and perceived connection to others. There was no statistically significant change in pornography consumption from before to after the Gist workshops. Additionally, there was a slight decrease in participants' perceived connection to others, yet these findings did not show statistical significance. These results remained non-significant in the sensitivity analysis.

Table 6. Participants reported pornography frequency views and perceived connection to others.

Characteristic	Pre-program (n=101) n (%)	Post-program (n=83) n (%)
How often did you view pornography?		
Not at all	47 (47%)	33 (40%)
Once or twice	16 (16%)	12 (14%)
About once a week	8 (7.9%)	12 (14%)
A couple of times a week	9 (8.9%)	5 (6.0%)
Almost everyday	4 (4.0%)	1 (1.2%)
Daily	1 (1.0%)	4 (4.8%)
Multiple times a day	3 (3.0%)	2 (2.4%)
I don' wish to say	13 (13%)	14 (17%)
I feel connected with others		
Strongly disagree	8 (7.9%)	10 (12%)
Disagree	6 (5.9%)	3 (3.6%)
Mildly disagree	5 (5.0%)	7 (8.4%)
Mildly agree	29 (29%)	18 (22%)
Agree	12 (12%)	15 (18%)
Strongly agree	9 (8.9%)	3 (3.6%)
I don't know	25 (25%)	20 (24%)
I don't wish to say	7 (6.9%)	7 (8.4%)

4.3 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGE WITH THE WEBSITE?

4.3.1 Website Analytics

Website analytics were recorded across a four-and-a-half-month period between the 1st of May and 17th of September 2023 (see Figure 5). This period reflected the time between the start of the first Gist session, and two days following the delivery of the final session.

Overall, engagement with the Gist website was low, with just 346 visits during the evaluation period. Of these, 310 were from unique users which includes access from students, facilitators, researchers, and other members of the general public. The highest number of daily visits to the website was recorded on the 24th of May 2023, with 19 active users following Gist workshops at two separate school sites.

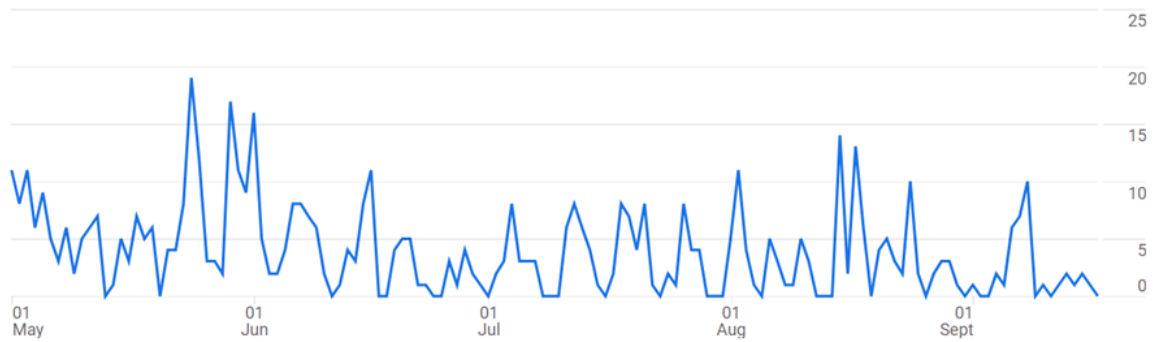


Figure 5. Daily Gist website views from May 1st to September 17th, 2023

A large majority of users accessed the Gist website directly through supplied links, with a small majority accessing via search engines such as Google. Users spent an average of 4 minutes and 15 seconds on the website, with the most frequently viewed pages being the home page, followed by content pages for lessons on contraception and STI prevention, consent, and sex and intimacy.

This data indicates that not only was user engagement low, but lacked significant depth, with a limited number of users spending only a brief amount of time exploring the Gist website and interacting with other valuable available features and resources. The reasons for poor student patronage are varied, with some of the primary reasons explored below.

4.3.2 Website engagement and feedback

Students primarily engaged with the Gist website during classroom sessions. However, due to the nature of the workshops’ design and the unique learning needs of the student cohort, greater priority and emphasis was placed on facilitating meaningful classroom discussions and practical in-person activities. Consequently, this meant that the Gist website did not feature in many of the workshop sessions as prominently as originally intended, with facilitators using it sporadically as a supplementary tool to assist with student learning and classroom delivery (see examples below in Box 1). Furthermore, the decision on how and when to utilise the Gist website was largely left to individual facilitators. Use was dependent on factors present on the day, including available classroom facilities, time constraints, and student receptiveness. This led to a noticeable difference in how some school sites interacted with the Gist website, with some regularly using it during workshop sessions, while others had little to no engagement with the website at all. This disparity is highlighted by the teacher reflections below.

“Yeah, we just went with the flow of the class a little bit, we didn’t really use [the website] at all.” – Teacher, School 1

“We definitely had the website up, it’s got some good videos on there, and good information and resources.” - Teacher, School 2

Primary uses of the Gist website during workshop sessions

- Accessing supportive material to explore, list, and explain complex topics in greater depth (such gender and sexual identities).
- Presenting specific visual learning materials, including images of contraceptive products, and sexual health videos.
- Utilising additional tips and information for classroom discussion prompts (particularly common for the consent and safe sex topics).
- To refer students to additional information and resources.

Box 1: Key uses of the Gist Website during workshop sessions

When asked to reflect on their student’s engagement with the Gist website, several teachers cited the lack of facilitated website-based workshop activities as a key reason for poor uptake. Without a dedicated activity that enabled students to familiarise themselves and actively engage with the website content during classroom sessions, it was suggested that students were unlikely to seek out the website in the future. As such, several teaching staff expressed a desire to see a better integration of the website into workshop sessions, with more fixed workshop activities that allowed students to actively explore the site’s content and solidify their learning.

“[The facilitators] referred to the website and it was only really used in that one class session. That was another thing was, like, they just put the link up and said ‘here’s the link’. There wasn’t actually a session that involved the kids getting on to the website to then utilise the website and you know, then apply that.” – Teacher

This notion was particularly prominent amongst staff members who were already aware of the Gist website and saw it as a valuable resource for their students yet felt that its absence from the workshops was a missed opportunity.

“Yeah, we didn’t get into the app or the website, and I know a fair bit of work has gone into that so yeah, it would have been nice to have a look at that.” - Teacher

Similarly, another staff member reflected that while both the Gist website and the facilitated workshops were great resources for young people to improve their sexual health literacy, they were seen as siloed in their approaches to engaging and educating students. With *“no artefacts left behind after the workshop delivery”*, the website was quickly forgotten once the workshops concluded, and without a reminder or prompting material, students were unlikely to visit it outside of the classroom setting.

Unsurprisingly, survey data indicates that student engagement with the Gist website outside of the workshops was also limited, with 66% (n=53) of participants indicating that they had not used the website following the workshop session. Just 16% of students (n=13) reported using the website ‘once or twice’ outside of class, 6% (n=5) reported using it ‘a few times’, and only 1% (n=1) of students reportedly used the website ‘a lot’. Of those students who had used the website more than once (n=19), the majority visited the Gist website to ‘just check it out’ (63%, n=12) and only one third (32%, n=6) reported using the website because they had a question and wanted additional information (Refer to Supplementary Table S2).

Nevertheless, feedback on the Gist website from students who did engage with it was largely positive, with majority agreeing that the site is ‘fun’ (84%, n=16), ‘helpful’ (89%, n=17), ‘inclusive for everyone’ (84%, n=16), and ‘easy to understand’ (84%, n=16). Almost 85% (n=16) indicated that they would also share the Gist website with friends (see Supplementary Table S3). This suggests that while students are supportive of and receptive to the Gist website as a sexual health resource, more coordinated efforts are needed to introduce the website to students and encourage its use outside of the classroom setting.

4.4 WHAT WORKED IN THE EDUCATION SESSIONS AND WERE THERE ANY UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES?

One of the central aims of this evaluation was to identify and explore what key factors worked to support the effective implementation of the Gist as a school-based sexual health literacy program. Through our engagement with student participants and other key stakeholders, we identified several crucial features that were fundamental to the programs’ overall success. These success factors have been grouped into three overarching domains: relevant and inclusive content, adaptive program delivery and design, and effective external facilitators (shown in Figure 6).



Figure 6: Critical success factors of The Gist Program

4.4.1 Relevant and Inclusive Content

Relevant themes and content

The Gist, as both an online resource and educational package, has been developed through an extensive collaborative design process, with significant input from experts in the fields of public health, sexual health education, and youth-based content development. Further involvement and co-design contributions from young people themselves has ensured that the topics and issues explored in the

Gist program are highly relevant and tailored to the contemporary sexual health information needs of participating students.

This was reflected in the highly positive feedback received from students, with approximately 88% (n=70) reporting that they found the Gist workshops to be helpful. In addition, 85% (n=67) of students agreed that the workshops were easy to understand, and 78% (n=62) felt that the workshops were an enjoyable learning experience (see Supplementary Table S4). Further still, numerous students expressed to the research team that they:

“Loved the classes and wish they share this out with other schools and teach them about [responsible] consent”. – Student

“I think the program was really easy and helpful”. – Student

“I found it helpful because I learnt about things that I did not know.” – Student

Teaching staff were also quite forthcoming with their appreciation for the highly relevant nature of the Gist workshops and frequently detailed the ways in which they met many of the unique social and sexual health needs of their students. Teachers described how classroom discussions were comprehensive and addressed a range of '21-st Century Sex-Ed' issues common amongst their student cohort, including sexting and harmful pornography use. Others detailed how some of the key topics explored in the workshops, such as consent and contraception, were especially pertinent to their students' lives in the context of ongoing issues within their school setting and local community.

“Yeah, and I think they did the consent part pretty well. I think that was good because, I mean, that is a big one too with a lot of our guys...we've got a lot of kids that have had sexual assault issues and stuff like that and it's still something that they don't see role modelled in the community and I think that needs to be addressed.” – Teacher

Additionally, teachers were also particularly supportive of The Gist program being specifically targeted towards disengaged students within the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) environment. Many of these students were perceived to have missed key sexual health information lessons due to their fragmented educational experiences in mainstream school settings, and thus, needed a more comprehensive and approachable sexual health education program.

“[The workshops] held their attention better because it's so relevant to them. And the kids that we've got have missed large chunks of mainstream [school] experiences, and they've missed lots of those health classes so there's huge gaps in their knowledge. So once that started, they were definitely tuned in... and we had lots of relevant conversation that followed. Yeah, it was it was clear that [the workshops] were really relevant.” - Teacher

However, when providing informal feedback, some students expressed that they had already encountered much of the information presented in the Gist before. Indeed, this reflects some of the challenges associated with engaging such a unique student population, with significant variance ages, sexual experiences, and education levels.

“We go from a real spectrum of students who have children, so well and truly know or have an idea what happens with sex, to some that have never even had a sexual partner before, so there’s those kinds of things of varying degrees in our space.” - Teacher

Although teachers agreed that this disparity added complexity to ensuring content relevance, they were quick to offer alternative perspectives, reiterating that:

- Students may have encountered this information in the past, but their learning was fragmented and incomplete,
- students may have misconstrued or misinterpreted the information they previously encountered,
- students may have been engaging with unreliable sources for sexual health information, and,
- the information presented still remains highly relevant and important enough that it bears repeating and continued learning.

Inclusive learning content

The highly inclusive nature of the Gist program and its contents was also perceived to be an additional factor contributing to the high level of student engagement and receptiveness. When surveyed, 92% of students (n=74) reported that they felt that the Gist workshops were inclusive for everyone. This was particularly the case for students with diverse gender and sexual identities, who are often excluded in mainstream sexual education due to overarching heteronormative and cis-gendered constructs.

“I think my students found it particularly beneficial, particularly the ones who are gender fluid. Because that’s not normally or historically been covered in these educational programs.”
– Teacher

“We kind of have a lot of non-binary and queer identifying students as well, so the discussion was really great because it wasn’t just a binary or cis-gendered discussion, and I think that was another reason why our young people were quite pleased to be engaged in [The Gist].”
– Teacher

However, teachers from across multiple school settings noted that students in their class who identified as Asexual initially struggled to participate due to the substantial focus of workshop material on sexual experiences and sex-based activities. While these students were still willing and able to participate, teachers suggested that future iterations of the Gist place greater consideration on Asexual and Intersex experiences, ensuring that these students can equally relate to and participate in the Gist workshops.

“...in my particular class, I have two students who identify as Asexual, and some of those students actually found it to be quite a challenging discussion because they’re like ‘I don’t engage in any of these things because I don’t find it, like it’s not a thing for me’. But they still participated, and they were able to contribute and at least they felt comfortable to state that.”
– Teacher

4.4.2 Adaptive Program Delivery and Design

Interactive activities

As The Gist primarily seeks to improve the sexual health literacy of young people who are disengaged from mainstream learning environments, there are several educational implications that must be considered. While the causes of disengagement are often varied and complex, many students share similar experiences of low school attendance, and difficulties learning through traditional teaching methods. As such, key design choices were made during the development of the Gist program to better support student learning and adapt to the unique learning styles many of the student participants possess.

For example, a significant emphasis was placed on designing interactive group-based workshop activities which were student led and enabled students to choose their own learning pathways. These interactive activities were seen to be more enjoyable learning experiences, which could better sustain attention and consolidate learning amongst those who normally struggled with presenter-led classes. Similarly, activities were also designed to foster organic student discussions, providing greater freedom and flexibility to take conversations in directions they deemed relevant and applicable, albeit, still within the bounds of sexual health. Facilitators were also given the freedom to adapt each workshop session as needed, replacing activities or discussion points with equally impactful alternatives that were better suited to the classroom dynamics and student receptiveness at the time.

These more tailored and flexible teaching strategies have been shown to better support students with complex educational, social, or psychological needs. This replicated similar strategies already used within the flexible learning environments in which the Gist was presented in. Teachers expressed their support for these strategies, whilst also conveying a sense of relief that the Gist, as an external provider program, did not seek to use traditional teaching methods that are often employed in more mainstream school settings.

“Look to be honest I think [the facilitators] did a pretty good job because we’ve had other speakers come in the past and it can be real hit and miss with outsiders you know. But this one seemed to work really well... in this type of class those interactive activities, it definitely works.” – Teacher

“This session didn’t use any of the activities in the lesson plan. Facilitator added two last questions and an activity that helped engage students... The improvised activity involved drawing and was based on the room’s energy. It helped to engage students in the conversation and to discuss the concepts outlined in the lesson.” – Researcher observations

Educational Videos

Educational videos were another key design strategy used to better engage participating students in the Gist workshops. A total of 10 videos were produced and embedded throughout the workshop sessions, each covering a range of topics including consent, power, pornography, contraception and STIs. Teaching staff expressed their support for this visual approach, reflecting on how the short video format was well suited to the high proportion of students who were visual learners, and increased overall student engagement.

“Yeah [the students] were receptive, yeah. The majority of our kids are visual learners, so they appreciated the mix of talking and being able to watch things.” – Teacher

“Yep. I think the videos were good. I think they were a good length as well. They were all I think between two to five minutes long at the most, so I think that was really handy because you can’t just put a 15-minute video on there with my kids.” – Teacher

“I think [the videos] worked well. So, for memory they were only these sort of short sort of five-minute things anyway, so that was good. And then the following discussion, we fleshed out the rest of the topic, that was a great approach.” – Teacher

While this visual format proved popular, there was mixed reception from both teachers and students to the overall style and contents of the videos. Of particular contention, were the discussion-based videos in which sexual health experts and individuals with lived experience shared their personal and professional views on various sexual health topics (see Image 5). For some, these videos were well received, and were seen to be offering valuable insight into mature and relevant conversations about sex. However, for many other students, these videos were described as being too monotonous and heavily discussion-based, often losing student attention after several minutes.

“I found my young people were actually interested in the videos, because people were talking about their sex lives. And these were like, adults, you know, like not teenagers, but adults, older people talking about their sex lives. And you'd never see that. right... I paid attention to them when the videos were on to see if they were embarrassed by the conversation or the topic, but no, they were quite engaged by the videos. That surprised me actually.” – Teacher

“I feel like there was probably a few too many personalities involved, and needing to follow the story. Those kind of discussion-based videos are quite high level for young people to follow and we have a lot of kids with like auditory processing issues, so if you have something a bit more visual, then that might aid the ability to understand like the context of what you’re talking about.” – Teacher



Image 5: Screenshot of a Gist workshop video

Interestingly, feedback from facilitators, students, and teachers indicated that age may have been a contributing factor to these mixed responses, with older students seemingly more engaged and affirming of the discussion-based videos. On the other hand, it was noted that younger students were often more likely to disengage whilst watching these videos, with feedback suggesting the perceived age gap between students and actors to be a barrier to younger students relating to the video contents.

“The actors are seen as so old by the students. Old people having a conversation they can’t connect to at all... The content is pretty good, but it would be great if they weren’t a thousand years old.” - Facilitator

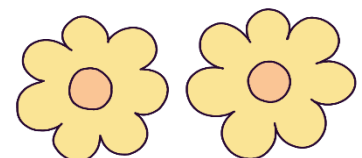
Flexible program structure

Intentional design efforts were also made to ensure the overall structure of the Gist program remained flexible and adaptive enough to sufficiently cater to both student and school needs. While the standard Gist program consisted of five two-hour long sessions typically delivered across five weeks, considerable freedom was given to each school site to adapt the workshop schedule as needed. This was particularly important for school sites with FLO programs which often experience unexpected scheduling interruptions.

Many schools also used this as an opportunity to schedule Gist sessions for periods in which school attendance was generally at its highest to maximise the number of students present. For some school sites, this meant scheduling several sessions back-to-back over the course of two to three days, while other school sites extended the program delivery across several weeks. School sites were also given the freedom to adapt the order of delivery and other key elements of program delivery in order to maximise student engagement and program reach.

“We originally planned to have it over a six-week period, but then with a couple of changes that happened during the school year, it just couldn’t fit in. So [the facilitator] was actually quite willing to just come see how long they could last for and if they were only going to last that hour, she was more than willing to come back. But we took it by how they were engaged, and they all engage. She got through the whole half day of back-to-back sessions, and they loved it. She was really able to read them.” – Teacher

“I think having [the five sessions across five weeks] worked well. It allowed the kids to mull over things and I think once they understood kind of what that structure was, by those later sessions, they were coming in with questions ready... I think if we did longer sessions our kids would burn out. I think that was a good length of time.” – Teacher



4.4.3 Effective External Facilitators

Safe and reliable facilitators

Facilitators were sourced from organisations skilled in the delivery of youth-focused sexual health education, with experience working with vulnerable and disengaged youth cohorts. A particular focus was also placed on ensuring that there was a diverse representation of gender amongst facilitators, as well as experience working in both metropolitan and regional school settings.

Feedback from program stakeholders highlighted the importance of these efforts, with teaching staff all but unanimous in their support and praise for the external program facilitators. There was particularly high commendation for the ways in which the facilitators were able to break down barriers between staff and students, whilst creating a comfortable and inclusive learning environment in which sensitive topics could be openly discussed. Teaching staff appreciated the respectful and student-centred approach that facilitators took, and specifically highlighted the effectiveness of the first workshop activity 'Group Agreements' as an example of this approach in action. This activity tasked students and facilitators with collectively deciding upon classroom values and expectations that would help guide their workshop discussions (see Image 6 below). These agreements were revisited at the beginning of each workshop, and set the tone for many students, creating a relaxed yet educational peer-to-peer environment in which slang words, taboo topics, and pertinent questions could all be openly used and discussed.

“And to be honest I think because they were using the language at the start about what you could say and what you couldn't say, I think that broke the ice a bit with our guys, it definitely set a good tone with them for the rest of the stuff that followed.” – Teacher

“I think our facilitator was really great at responding to some pretty out there comments and opinions and conversations and did really well with sort of just bringing the room back together into those discussions. To be honest, I found the approach really informal, but really informative, as well. And it's got to be a little bit funny but at the same time, there's also a lot of very serious critical information in there, so I think it was very well delivered.” – Teacher

“I found it engaging. It was uncomfortable at the start. The presenters made me feel comfortable”. – Student

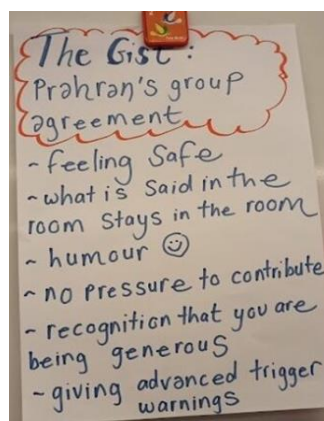


Image 6: Example of a Gist group agreement

Teaching staff noted the beneficial impact that this informal and inclusive approach had on engaging their students, with many expressing surprise at the level of student input and contributions to discussions achieved in many of the workshop sessions.

“It was the longest we’d seen them concentrate. Like, you know, they’ve been with us for six months and honestly, the woman that delivered it was able to engage them for the entire time.” – Teacher

“...there were definitely kids in this group who I wouldn’t have thought would interact at all, who were actually actively engaging with the instructors, which is a pretty big plus from our point of view because a lot of our students don’t like interacting with people they don’t know very well.” – Teacher

“I think it was really good in terms of the amount of discussion that was facilitated. The kids engaged really quite well which was interesting for my class because generally it’s like getting blood out of a stone sometimes... so I think that was a really good thing.” – Teacher

Additional benefits of an external facilitator

There were additional benefits that the external facilitators brought to the delivery of The Gist program. Teachers from across the various school sites reflected on how having an external facilitator eased many of the students’ anxieties around discussing highly personal and sensitive issues such as sex and relationships. It was suggested that this level of social separation between the external facilitators and students helped to promote more candid discussions, and such rich engagement would not have been feasible if the student’s regular teacher had facilitated the program.

“I reckon it’s a very, like, it’s a well delivered program in lots of places. But I think having the external facilitator, well, they hear it enough from us. We’re just like parents that they shut off to as soon as we start talking, and sometimes they’re embarrassed to talk about that kind of stuff with people that they know really well. Having somebody that wasn’t in their town as well was amazing. I think that made them feel more comfortable and they could ask more open questions. The facilitator was just amazing, and I think it all comes down to the facilitator.” – Teacher

Similarly, teaching staff also expressed how having an external facilitator with specific training and expertise in sexual health education added additional credence to the program, with students more likely to trust a younger external facilitator with the relevant experience and knowledge to answer complex questions on young people’s sexual health and development.

“I think it [The Gist] is a good thing for our kids to be involved in, because they’re constantly being put in risk-taking positions, but we’ve got a pretty open conversation policy with our kids but it just takes the pressure off the classroom [teachers] constantly being the only source of truth and I think that’s a positive thing when you’ve got other options of people explaining those things. You know it’s like listening to your mum, mum isn’t always right.” – Teacher

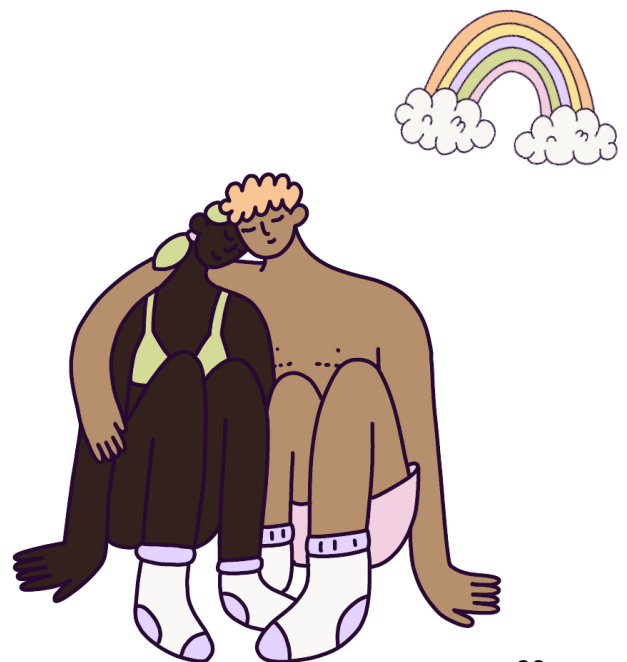
Supported program delivery

Whilst The Gist workshops were primarily led by external facilitators, teaching staff still played an important role in supporting the effective delivery of sessions. Staff members were crucial to maintaining a classroom environment conducive to student learning and engagement, with the mere presence of school staff within the classroom providing a level of comfort, familiarity, and structure to students. This was particularly important during the initial workshop sessions, where students were often slightly unsettled and apprehensive to openly discuss sensitive topics. Facilitators also noted the ways in which teaching staff complimented their workshop delivery, by providing minor prompts and contributions when students were quiet or providing more focused support to less engaged students.

“I felt it was beneficial having teachers present and contributing a little to the conversation by clarifying for students’ different issues, or offering some relevant examples. I found having them there helped to make the students feel safer.” – Facilitator

Teaching staff were also crucial to maintaining classroom order and addressing any behavioural issues or unexpected consequences of classroom discussions. This allowed facilitators to continue with the workshop lessons without any major disruptions to other student’s learning.

“If a student wants to step outside, or if the facilitators had to do all the behaviour management stuff within the program as well, it might just go off course a bit. You know, you want to have sort of a good state of flow, to keep those discussions going. I wouldn’t want to have to interrupt a really good conversation and discussion to manage some behaviours, I guess.” – Teacher



5 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 IMPROVED WEBSITE INTEGRATION AND ENGAGEMENT

As detailed above, the Gist website remained underutilised throughout the evaluation period, with just 346 site visits across the four and a half months. While disappointing, the lack of website engagement is not surprising given the often ad-hoc use of the website during workshop sessions, as well as the limited promotion of the site to students. Proactive efforts are therefore needed to better familiarise students with the website and encourage its use as an effective sexual health learning resource. Strategies to achieve this may include:

1. Integrate the Gist website into formal workshop activities:

Interactive activities that facilitate student engagement with the website should be developed and embedded within lesson plans. Such activities work to not only familiarise students with the website and its available content but can also assist in consolidating ideas already explored during workshop discussions in a more visual and interactive manner. Ideally, students should use their own devices to interact with the website in an individual or group-based capacity, however, given the technological limitations of some classroom settings, activities should be adaptable so that facilitators can still lead the class with limited internet connected devices available (i.e., a projector-connected laptop, or a single iPad shared throughout the room).

Developed activities may include a 'WebQuest' style game, in which students are tasked with navigating the website to locate certain resources and complete a series of online tasks, such as the quizzes and interactive activities already available on the Gist website.

2. Create promotional materials

Teaching staff expressed keen interest in seeing the creation and distribution of various Gist promotional materials including classroom posters, videos, brochures, and single page flyers. It was suggested that these materials contain key workshop takeaways, as well as prominent QR codes and URL links directing students to The Gist website. Such materials could serve as an important artefact to be left behind for students and teachers following the conclusion of The Gist workshops, working to remind students of key discussion points, whilst also prompting them to visit the Gist website for further information.

3. Have teaching staff champion the Gist website

Despite their prominent role in The Gist program, few teachers reported having accessed the Gist website themselves, with even fewer promoting its use to students. Those that had engaged the Gist website however, expressed significant enthusiasm for its further use, describing the website as a highly relevant, accessible, and useful learning resource for both them and their students. Teaching staff have an important role to play in encouraging student engagement with the Gist website and should be used to champion and promote further use.

4. *Promote the website to the wider community*

In the current phase of the Gist, we chose not to promote the website to the wider public beyond those participating in classes. However, the website is a resource that can stand alone and be used by young people across Australia. Future work should incorporate adequate funding for website maintenance, updates, and promotion to broader audiences.

5.2 PROVIDE EXPANDED VIDEO OPTIONS

The extensive use of videos and other visual learning materials within the Gist workshops was widely regarded by stakeholders as an appropriate strategy to engage students across a range of sexual health literacy topics. Nevertheless, stakeholder feedback and researcher observations suggest that the current selection of video materials available within the Gist program remains limited and may not be suitable for all ages, sexual experiences, and maturity levels. To better cater for this, additional video materials should be created utilising different video styles and delivery methods. Teachers and students suggested several alternative video options, including simple explanatory animation videos, or scenario-based role plays featuring teenagers and other young people. By providing additional video options, facilitators, and teachers will have the ability to select the most appropriate visual learning material for each class, and tailor and enhance the student learning experience.

5.3 SUPPORT GREATER PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

The ability of external facilitators to remain highly flexible and adaptive to the needs of each school site and student cohort was a key contributing factor to the overall success of The Gist pilot program. However, feedback from facilitators suggests further support and resources are needed to help them remain agile, and to better respond to changing classroom circumstances.

Specifically, there was a desire for further guidance from within the Gist workshop documentation itself, on how facilitators should navigate necessary changes to lesson structures whilst still ensuring key learning outcomes were achieved for each lesson. During the pilot workshops for example, facilitators often recognised the need to adapt a key element of a workshop session, such as an activity that did not interest students, or a discussion topic that was too high-level. However, many facilitators expressed uncertainty as to which activities or topics from within the original lesson plans were permitted to be substituted out for more effective alternatives, and which were deemed necessary to student learning and workshop outcomes. Feedback from facilitators and teaching staff endorsed a ‘traffic light’ system, in which activities and discussion points in each lesson plan are colour-coded to indicate which activities or topics should remain (coloured red), which may be substituted, if necessary (coloured amber), and which activities or topics are free to change as needed (coloured green).

“We’re trying to get through 110 hours of content, but where are the sacrifices, what are the essential vs the not essential topics? Do they need to know a little about STI’s or mostly the basics?” – Facilitator

Facilitators also expressed a level of uncertainty as to which alternative workshop activity or discussion topics would be best suited to replace the original, and whether this alternative would still appropriately achieve the desired learning outcomes for the that lesson. It was therefore suggested that a pool of alternative workshop activities and discussion ideas be created, with sufficient guiding materials that facilitators could then seamlessly substitute the original for one they deem more relevant and effective for that specific classroom setting.

These structural changes to the Gist program are minor, but offer facilitators significant support and additional guidance, allowing them to better adapt each program to the unique learning and information needs of each student cohort whilst ensuring key learning outcomes are achieved.

5.4 CONSIDER AVENUES FOR PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

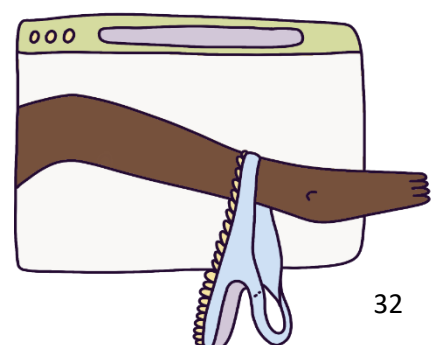
As The Gist continues to evolve and develop, it is important to consider the sustainability of the program, and how it can continue to deliver highly relevant and much needed sexual health literacy content to young people within the Victorian community.

During stakeholder interviews, teachers and school staff members were asked for their views on the feasibility and potential impacts of the introduction of a small program fee (i.e., \$200–500) on both school and teacher receptibility. There was a strong consensus amongst respondents suggesting that such a fee would not be a major concern for them and their school, with many teachers recognising the difficulties external programs like The Gist face with sustainability and ongoing funding.

“I'd consider that, yeah. Necessary and fine and a reasonable thing to expect, yeah. It's great that it was there for us this time in the pilot form, but no, I'd be happy to book that in and pay a fee. It's important.” – Teacher

However, several staff members noted that their school among many other school communities may see this initial fee as a major barrier to participating in The Gist program. Respondents also suggested that these schools were more likely to be in low-socio-economic areas or comprising highly vulnerable population groups, yet likely had the highest need for a comprehensive sexual health literacy program. Thus, it was suggested that should such a fee be introduced, discounts or fee-waivers be permitted for disadvantaged schools to ensure equity in the delivery of The Gist.

“I think some schools will see that as a barrier, so, I think you'd maybe need to look at like a tiered approach to it as well, like if you were wanting to do it in lower SES areas, or into like different providers, you'll find that funding is always an issue, and they are less likely to invest in those things.” – Teacher



5.5 EXPLORE THE FEASIBILITY OF DIFFERENT PROGRAM STRUCTURES

Along similar lines, school staff were also asked about the possibility of adapting the current program structure to allow for more flexible and accessible forms of program delivery. Once again, teachers were understanding of the need to adapt education programs to ensure sustainability, and offered a plethora of potential changes to the Gist that could be made for future iterations. These included:

- Train-the-trainer programs and professional development opportunities for school staff
- One off lesson delivery on specific issues faced by schools (e.g., STIs and contraception)
- A hybrid model whereby external facilitators delivers some of the content, while the schoolteacher conducts follow-up learning and activities the next day
- The potential to hand over The Gist to a local not-for-profit or other sexual health organisation with the motivation and resources to continue the project.
- Provide the Gist content to the public (including schools, teachers, sexual health organisations) as an open resource to deliver as they see fit.

“...regarding best practice to roll out the Gist resource, a train-the-trainer method continues to be my preferred approach for sharing. [Local youth-based health organisation] have well trained and resourced team members that could also potentially deliver this support in the role that they do across the region.” – Facilitator

“The Gist a great start, I would really like for it to be turned into like a full-blown ongoing program. You know, so maybe term one, you deliver Gist one, which we had, and then term two might be something else. And there's always a need to revisit to some of the key concepts.” – Teacher

6 CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the evaluation underscore The Gist as an education program which is appealing and relevant to young people and educators. Quantitative findings suggest some impact of the program on young people's sexual health literacy, in particular increases in knowledge about sexual health. Although website analytics indicated that overall engagement with the website was lacking, those students that did utilise the website rated it positively, as a helpful and accessible resource. Interviews with teachers highlighted the lack of activities directly integrating the website as a barrier to uptake.

Synthesis of qualitative data sources from students, organisations staff, facilitators and researchers highlighted three main domains through which to explain and evaluate the effectiveness of The Gist. Firstly, the program was perceived to be relevant and inclusive in content and design, which was particularly helpful for engaging the diverse sample of students. The program's adaptive and interactive nature was also considered to be a strength, catering for the student's learning needs. The flexibility in program structure allowed schools to maximise attendance and be dynamic in delivery based on classroom receptiveness. Although the short educational videos were helpful and effective for visual learners, in some cases the age discrepancy between the students and actors was perceived as a barrier to learning. Overwhelmingly, the external program facilitators were considered an essential aspect of the workshop's success, providing a safe and relatable space for the exploration of sensitive topics.

The findings of this evaluation highlight recommendations for further development for the program. Firstly, improvements to engagement and uptake of The Gist website could be made through the explicit integration of website materials into classroom activities, as well as through promotion to students and the wider community. Updating and diversifying educational videos, with a focus on increasing representation and involvement of young people, will increase the value and relevance of content for viewers. Given that adaptability has been identified as key to effective implementation, current activities and discussion topics could be expanded to provide facilitators with alternate material to utilise where appropriate. To increase the program's ongoing sustainability, the introduction of a program fee could be considered, as well as the adaptation of the program structure into scalable resources or training modules.

The Gist was a much needed and well-received program in the ten schools who participated. Results suggest that the program would be very desirable to continue to deliver on a greater scale.

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8 SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Table S1. Sensitivity analysis - Wilcoxon signed rank test knowledge, impact, attitude, and confidence scores

Score	T	P Value
Knowledge	268	0.09
Impact	323	0.62
Attitude	398.5	0.56
Confidence	267.5	0.13

Note: n=27

Table S2. Reasons why students used the Gist website

Reason for using The Gist website: n (%):	N=19
Just checking it out	
No	7 (37%)
Yes	12 (63%)
Had a question	
No	13 (68%)
Yes	6 (32%)
To learn more about something from classes	
No	16 (84%)
Yes	3 (16%)
Other	
No	18 (95%)
Yes	1 (5.3%)
I don't wish to say	
No	17 (89%)
Yes	2 (11%)

Note. Among those students who had accessed the website once or more.

Figure S1. Sex, Porn, and Relationships questions before and after the Gist program ($N_{pre} = 101$, $N_{post} = 83$) not including “I don’t wish to say” responses.



Table S3. Feedback on the Gist website by students who have used it once or more

The website was ...	n (%)	N = 19
Fun		
Strongly agree	1 (5.3%)	
Agree	16 (84%)	
Disagree	1 (5.3%)	
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	
I don't wish to say	1 (5.3%)	
Helpful		
Strongly agree	8 (42%)	
Agree	9 (47%)	
Disagree	1 (5.3%)	
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	
I don't wish to say	1 (5.3%)	
Inclusive for everyone		
Strongly agree	7 (37%)	
Agree	9 (47%)	
Disagree	2 (11%)	
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	
I don't wish to say	1 (5.3%)	
Easy to understand		
Strongly agree	5 (26%)	
Agree	11 (58%)	
Disagree	1 (5.3%)	
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	
I don't wish to say	2 (11%)	
Would share with friends		
Strongly agree	5 (26%)	
Agree	11 (58%)	
Disagree	1 (5.3%)	
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	
I don't wish to say	2 (11%)	

Table S4. Final students' feedback on the Gist workshops

The Gist workshops/classes were ... n (%)	N = 80
Fun	
Strongly agree	22 (28%)
Agree	40 (50%)
Disagree	7 (9%)
Strongly disagree	1 (1%)
I don't wish to say	10 (13%)
Helpful	
Strongly agree	35 (44%)
Agree	35 (44%)
Disagree	5 (6%)
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)
I don't wish to say	5 (6%)
Inclusive for everyone	
Strongly agree	37 (46%)
Agree	37 (46%)
Disagree	1 (1%)
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)
I don't wish to say	5 (6%)
Easy to understand	
Strongly agree	28 (35%)
Agree	39 (49%)
Disagree	6 (8%)
Strongly disagree	2 (2%)
I don't wish to say	5 (6%)

***Note:** There were 3 missing observations for each question. Some percentages do not match 100% due to rounding.

Well, I thought the program in its entirety was relevant, enthusiastically delivered and engaging for our current cohort of young people.... the whole program, I just thought it was very targeted and beneficial. – Teacher