

Making Ripples

Changing the World with Comprehensive Sexuality Education

by Amanda Bancroft

When we think about making a difference, comprehensive sexuality education does not often cross our minds. Yet research-backed sex ed can reduce unwanted pregnancies, as well as offer hope and acceptance for those struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity. One relatively recent curriculum is causing a hoot especially among some Harry Potter fans. OWL (Our Whole Lives) is based on the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education developed by the National Guidelines Task Force assembled by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. In every category of assessment, OWL meets or exceeds national standards.

Ironically, or perhaps quite appropriately, OWL was created through collaboration between the United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalism. Despite its roots in faith, the curriculum is entirely secular with no references to a deity or creationism and other religious terminology or anti-science stances. Teachers have the option of putting it into the context of religious values through the addition of companion publications built by various religions, but this is not part of standard OWL curriculum.

OWL goes beyond the basics of an anatomy lesson or a simple answer to the question “Where do babies come from?” While these components are a part of the program with age-appropriate instruction, most of the focus is on answering the trickier questions about safe sex, relationships, identity and culture. According to the Unitarian Universalist Association, “Honest, accurate information about sexuality changes lives. It dismantles stereotypes and assumptions, builds self-acceptance and self-esteem, fosters healthy relationships, improves decision making, and has the potential to save lives. Our Whole Lives is used in faith communities as well as by public, charter, and private schools; after-school programs; youth groups; home schools; colleges; correctional facilities; and groups in other settings.”

While it does promote abstinence, it is not abstinence-only curriculum. OWL fully discloses the good, healthy parts of a sexual relationship while also detailing the risks and how to smartly reduce them using birth control and steps to prevent unhealthy relationships. It emphasizes respect for all gender identities and is inclusive for those with disabilities. Instead of shaming participants, it encourages everyone to develop a healthy sexuality and respect their partners. Besides enhancing knowledge on health, participants often find that their social skills, confidence and self-worth improve.

For Northwest Arkansas residents ages 18-35, OWL will be offered at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Fayetteville in a 14-session format that includes chapters on Sexuality, Mind and

Body, Sexual Pleasure, Keeping Your Body Healthy, Exploring Gender, Sexual Orientation, Communication, Relationships, Love & Commitment, Boundaries & Boundary Violations, Family Matters, Sexual Fantasy & Variation, and Advocacy & Education. Class begins Sunday, February 28th from 6 – 8:00pm at the fellowship, 901 W. Cleveland St. near the UA Campus in Fayetteville. For UUFF members, the course is free. For members of the community, the cost is \$50 for all 14 sessions. Scholarships are available. Contact owl@uaa.org for general information, or call UUFF at (479) 521-8422 with questions or to register for the upcoming young adult program, or to sign up for future offerings for other age groups.

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