

Educators Log On to Learn "Sexuality ABCs"

Ellen Papazian, MA

Katharine Malec, a middle school health teacher in West Windsor, NJ, is just one of 85 teachers to date who have enrolled in an exciting new Online Professional Development (OPD) workshop for educators called "Sexuality ABCs (Abstinence, Birth Control and Condoms)," which was developed by Answer, at Rutgers University. These teachers have joined hundreds of others nationwide who are tapping into the benefits of online professional development.

OPD is a tremendous area of growth for the sexuality education field, and Answer is one of the leading organizations building high-quality professional development workshops online. Part of Rutgers University, Answer is a national organization dedicated to providing and promoting comprehensive sexuality education to young people and the adults who teach them. OPD is part of its highly regarded Sexuality Education Training Initiative, which trains thousands of teachers each year.

Answer launched "Sexuality ABCs," its first OPD course, in January 2008. The course enables middle and high school teachers to take the equivalent of an all-day workshop at their own pace over one month. It uses interactive games, videos, threaded discussions and animation to help them learn the latest on adolescent sexual behavior and contraception. "It was inspiring to imagine the reach we could have. And it was also challenging, because it put us on the cutting edge of innovation by crafting something that's never been done before," says Answer's director of training and education Nora Gelperin, MEd, about developing the course.

Answer is the first comprehensive sexuality education organization in the United States to offer the equivalent of an all-day workshop online. (Other organizations have offered one-hour tutorials or semester-length courses.) The organization is developing a range of online workshops for professionals. Its second, titled "STD Basics," will launch in early 2009.

Teachers who need training in sexual health

yet have busy schedules benefit from the opportunity to take an OPD course from the comfort of their own home or office. Malec, for one, opted to take “Sexuality ABCs” because she “hate[s] missing class time to attend workshops... I figured this would be a great way to increase my knowledge on contraceptives and still be in class... I was also aware of the great workshops that Answer does on a daily basis and thought that this would be another great one as well.”

This was Malec's first year teaching eighth grade health, which is when New Jersey students are learning about contraceptive methods and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). So, she wanted to "increase the tricks that I had in my teaching methods." She added: "I only have two days to spend on STDs and contraceptives and needed something comprehensive, yet fun and informative,"

“Sexuality ABCs” gave Malec a deeper understanding of the topic and activity ideas, like a contraceptive Jeopardy game, that she implemented with students. Like many of Answer’s course participants, Malec is devoted to helping students make sexual health decisions with medically accurate, complete information. “We want young people to abstain from sexual activity—and that’s what we teach them—but we don’t see that they are not abstaining,” she explains. “And then we often force them to make risky decisions, because they are unaware of the consequences and prevention methods. We need to address the sexual behavior of all our students, and not just the ‘norm,’” she adds. “A lot of people feel that teaching students about sexuality is giving them permission to be sexually active, but you are really giving them life tools.”

Educators continue to enroll each week in Answer's OPD course, and it will remain open for years to come. To learn more about "Sexuality ABCs" and to register, log on to Answer's Web site at <http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/training> or call (732) 445-7929.