

“Sam meets Alicia, falls in love, gets her pregnant, and starts having doubts”

**Dating and sex in English high school textbooks**

Bachelor's Thesis  
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May 2015

**JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO**

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä – Author Tuomas Hanhivaara	
Työn nimi – Title Dating and Sex in English high school textbooks	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatin tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Toukokuu 2015	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 22
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Onnellisuus ja tyytyväisyys elämään ovat länsimaisille ihmisille keskeisiä tavoitteita. Useat tutkimukset ovat toistuvasti osoittaneet että ihmissuhteilla on suuri merkitys näiden tavoitteiden saavuttamiselle. Koulujen oppikirjateksteillä on mahdollisuus esitellä hyviä ihmissuhdemalleja, joita oppilaat voivat halutessaan soveltaa omassa elämässään. Seurustelusuhteiden kuvauksista oppikirjoissa ei kuitenkaan ole tehty selvityksiä, vaikka seurustelu onkin ajankohtainen ja merkityksellinen aihe useille lukioikäisille.</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa selvitettiin miten seurustelusuhteita käsitellään Suomen kouluissa englannin opiskeluun käytetyissä Open Road -kirjasarjan osissa 1–3. Tutkimusmetodina on James Paul Geen kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, jonka mukaan kieli muodostaa todellisuuden eri osia. Tutkimuksessa arvioitiin miten kerätty aineisto rakentaa edellä mainittuja todellisuuden osia.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että tärkeinä seurusteluun liittyvinä asioina kuvataan harrastuksia, yhteisiä mielenkiinnon kohteita, vanhempien mielipiteitä ja neuvoja, omalaatuisia ajatuksia tai harrastuksia, ulkonäköä, sekä todellisen rakkauden tai sielunkumppanin löytämistä. Seurusteluun liitettyjä toimintoja olivat lappujen sekä kirjeiden kirjoittaminen tapaamisen sopimiseksi, rakkauden osoittamiseksi, ajatusten vaihtamiseksi tai suhteen päättämiseksi, päivällinen vanhempien kanssa, ja seurusteluprofiilin avulla seuran etsiminen. Seksi mainittiin muutamia kertoja kevytmielisissä asiayhteyksissä. Rakkaus liitettiin lyhyisiin seksisuhteisiin, ja miehen sukuelinten koko menestykseen seurustelussa. Raskauden merkitys aineistossa vaihteli käytettyjen tehtävien mukaan.</p> <p>Tutkimusta voi jatkaa perehtymällä useampien kirjasarjojen sisältöihin, sekä tutkimalla oppilaiden ja vanhempien kokemuksia tekstien esimerkkien vaikutuksesta nuorten kehitykseen.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Critical discourse analysis, textbooks, dating, sex, relationships, dating practices	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX, Jyväskylän yliopiston julkaisuarkisto	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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## **1 Introduction**

Happiness and satisfaction with life are often the ultimate goals in life for most Westerners. Happiness is also a common topic for discussion and a widely researched area of psychology that has been widely popularized by, for example, Daniel Gilbert, Ph.D. in “Stumbling on Happiness”, and Martin Seligman, Ph.D. in “Authentic Happiness”. Research has constantly pointed out that relationships have a notable effect on life satisfaction. Seligman, for example, found out that a group of “very happy” people was separated from the normal and unhappy people specifically by having a rich and fulfilling social life (2002:50).

The quantity of relationship alone is not as important as their quality in regard to happiness, even though both factor in. On one hand, Wheeler, Reis and Nezlek, for example, found out that the strongest predictor of loneliness was the meaningfulness of daily interaction (1983:950). On the other hand, Sandstrom and Dunn studied the effect of interactions with weak social ties, referring to relationships on the periphery of social networks, and concluded that such interaction did contribute to happiness levels (2014:918).

Ideally relationships would be uplifting, enriching and based on mutual respect, among other modern values and principles, in order to enhance the productivity and satisfaction with life among the students. Communication and dating practices are central in achieving these kinds of relationships, and presented models serve students by offering different option of behavior to choose from. As the closest relationships tend to be significant in their importance to an individual, it is called for to find out what kinds of examples and models are presented in official teaching materials. For this reason, the present study aims to understand what kinds of portrayals of the dating process are included in high school English textbooks.

## 2 The Blind Spot

Definitions of dating are not universal, and attitudes towards different kinds of relationship types vary between cultures, and localities, for example. According to Reis and Rusbult (2004:4), there is a widely accepted definition of a relationship that emphasizes strong and diverse effects people have on each other. Simpson and Tran refer to these effects as interdependence (2006:9). Close relationships have strong interdependence. Furthermore, individuals have different points of view regarding their level of interdependence in a dating relationship. For example, some couples might emphasise attachment before committing to a pregnancy, whereas other couples might accentuate their individual freedoms even within a relationship involving a pregnancy.

The national core curriculum for high schools makes no direct comments about dating relationships (Opetushallitus 2003). Students are to be educated to be responsible and dutiful citizens, and to be instructed in the prerequisites to uphold wellbeing, and equality both in general and between the sexes. In this regard teaching relationship models can be seen as a necessary objective. In the language sections several different communication skills are emphasized as learning objectives, as well as consideration of others and the effect of one's communication, but dating relationships and sex are specifically mentioned only in the health education subject. Students are also to be instructed in the discussion of both personal and societal ethical questions. Learning goals do not, however, specifically include any aspects of dating relationships.

In her master's thesis, Keisala looks into how high school English textbooks display different kinds of relationships and what related values and attitudes have influenced the texts (Keisala, 2010). Keisala analyzed two chapters from the *In Touch* -textbook series that concern dating, considered separate from cohabitation and marriage. She discovered that there are different individual points of view to what exactly constitutes dating, and that individuals appear to have varied attitudes towards certain dating events. Dating is analyzed only briefly, while most attention is given to marriage and discovered values. She uses critical discourse analysis and its means to find ideological implications, values and attitudes from the text.

Laakkonen has likewise looked into the contents of Finnish EFL textbooks. Her point of view is gender representation and while her findings show that both men and women are displayed in diverse settings (Laakkonen 2007: 60), none appear to be related to dating. There are a few mentions of women as mothers and daughters; however, family relationships as separate from dating are unrelated to the present study. Her findings on sexual intimacy were “non-existent”.

**According to the critical discourse analysis method** of James Paul Gee, speech and writing construct seven areas of reality, called building tasks, which are analyzed in a given study. The six tools of inquiry are the thematic areas where one can ask questions about the building tasks. Therefore, there are at least 42 questions that can be used to analyze a single piece of language.

**Building tasks** are aspects of reality that are created through language. These are (Gee 2011:22) significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections and sign systems. First, some details and events in life are significant by nearly everyone’s standards, but some are given or denied significance through language. Second, practices are combined or connected actions that together are recognized socially and supported institutionally or culturally. Third, through language, roles and identities can be enacted. Even speaking about oneself may simultaneously attribute certain identities to others, creating the building task of identities. Fourth, language is used to build and signal our relationships with all people and groups. Fifth, politics refers to the distribution of social goods by the use of language. Social goods are anything that is desirable. Sixth, language can be used to connect things with each other, and make them relevant. Connections can also be broken with language. Seventh, there are different languages and systems of communications, such as Spanish and Morse code. Likewise, there are different types and categories of knowledge. These can be emphasized or privileged.

**The tools of inquiry** (Gee 2011: 28, 65, 69) are social languages, Discourses, Conversations, intertextuality, situated meanings, and figured worlds. First, social languages are different styles of varieties of language for different purposes, for engaging different building tasks in different settings. Second, Discourses, written with a capital D, in this context are the varied details that constitute identities, activities and other than language, such as behavior, opinions, feelings, use of symbols and appearance. A piece of language can be a part of these

Discourses. Third, conversations as a tool of inquiry refer to ongoing debates and discussions concerning a theme or topic in a social group. Sometimes these Conversations can be global in their scope. Fourth, intertextuality is the allusion or reference to other text, well known or otherwise. Fifth, situated meanings are the meanings words have in context. Particular meanings or the words can be relevant while others are not. CDA is vulnerable to changing context, as meanings of passages are different as the context, or frame, widens. Sixth, figured worlds are abstract models of an aspect of the world. In this style of CDA they bridge the gap between micro and macro levels in relevant meanings. This tool of inquiry can also be called “frame”, “theory” and “story”.

The building tasks in the critical discourse analysis method of Gee are particularly relevant as they relate directly to the research questions of the present study. Likewise, the tools of inquiry are comprehensive to the point of exceeding the possibilities of this study. For these reasons the CDA method of Gee is suited for the present study.

### **3 Method**

#### **3.1 The research questions**

The present study aims to find out how dating relationships are portrayed in high school English textbooks in Finland. Central to the study is finding out what kinds of models of dating relationships are presented, and this is answered through these research questions:

- 1) What is presented as important in dating relationships?
- 2) What kinds of behavior models are connected to dating relationships?
- 3) What kinds of meanings are connected to sex in regard to dating relationships?

#### **3.2 The data**

The source of data consists of books 1 to 3 of the *Open Road* -series used in ongoing English courses. Using lower secondary course textbooks was an option, but dating relationships tend to be more relevant to the older students in high schools compared to students in lower secondary schools. This textbook series is an appropriate choice because it is used presently and the content is contemporary.

### **3.3 Method of analysis**

The following section contains an analysis on how the building tasks, presented in section 2, are created in the selected pieces of data. While there is some overlap between different building tasks and my research questions, the first research question is answered mainly by the building tasks significance, connections and politics. The second research question is mostly answered by the building task practices. The third research question, however, relates to several of the building tasks sporadically. The findings are summarised in a separate section. The building task sign systems and knowledge is not relevant to the present study, and the building tasks identities and relationships are used in few instances, although the latter is not analysed under a separate subheading but among the rest of the data. The tools of inquiry are largely irrelevant to a study of this scope, with the exception of situated meanings and Conversations that are used often and in few cases, respectively. The use of tools of inquiry is not explicitly stated in the text.

## **4 Lessons in Dating**

### **4.1 Summaries of texts in the data**

In this section three chapters from the *Open Road* textbooks 1, 2 and 3 are analysed from the point of view of dating relationships. The analysis of the chapters is complemented by the analysis of exercises connected to the main texts. In some instances the exercises have a notable effect on the interpretations of the text. The following summaries are provided to ease the reading of the rest of section four.

In chapter “Love Letters” (McWhirr et. al 2008:22) a teenage couple talks about writing romantic letters. The girlfriend Fleur points to another couple who exchange letters, and asks her boyfriend Nick why he is not writing similar letters to her. Nick begins writing and in the process realises that he does not have much in common with Fleur, and uses the letter to end the relationship. Fleur distributes the personal letter around the school in anger, and as a consequence a classmate called Gilda with similar interests with Nick starts a conversation with him. The chapter ends with Nick asking her to have lunch with him. Exercise H, “Your own story” (McWhirr et. al 2008:28), is an oral exercise involving a dialogue between

characters Adam and Ben, who are discussing dating and how Ben should behave with his girlfriend. Adam is deliberately giving questionable advice to Ben.

In chapter “Same old same old” (Karapalo et al. 2008a:9), a teenage boy talks about having hobbies in order to be more desirable as a potential dating partner. The rest of the chapter is a review of two different kinds of hobbies that can be used as activities on dates. Connected to this chapter is a warm-up text that consists of several brief dating profiles of 17-year-old boys (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8). The reader is asked to choose between the ads which of the boys would be best suited to date Jenny, a 17-year-old girl.

In chapter “A Future of Sorts” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:9), fifteen-year-old Sam is having lunch with the parents and brother, Rich, of his girlfriend Alicia, whom he has fallen in love with and impregnated. The text is an extract from a fictional novel “Slam” by Nick Hornby. Discussion with the parents during the lunch was unpleasant to Sam. The following excerpt is immediately following the lunch.

Excerpt 1.

Afterwards, Alicia and Rich and I went to Alicia's room, and she put a CD on, and she and I sat on the bed, and Rich sat on the floor.

'Welcome to the family, ' said Rich.

'Don't say it like that,' said Alicia. 'I'll never see him again.'

'They're not that bad,' I said, but they were, really. And to be honest it wasn't just Alicia's parents who were getting on my nerves, either. When I left the house that afternoon, I wondered whether I'd ever go back.

In the novel Sam does not know about the pregnancy during the family dinner, but in the textbook excerpt the contrary is implied. This is why the textbook chapter will have a different effect than reading the novel in terms of what kinds of meanings are connected to dating relationships and pregnancy. The analysis here is based on the effect the textbook might have on the reader, rather than the actual novel.

In exercise F, “Learn from the past, prepare for the future” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:15), students act out discussions between different characters involved in the text, including Sam, Alicia, both sets of parents, and Rich. Exercise H, “Golden rules” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16), includes three different writing tasks. Task A is about giving advice to a nervous teenage boy

about the meet the parents of his date for the first time over dinner. Task B is about writing a list of advice to parents in order to guide them how to avoid embarrassing their teenage child in front of a dating partner. Task C is about writing a letter to a 17-year-old friend, living abroad, who is becoming a parent. In Exercise “A Stroke of luck” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:70), a boy has an incident with his bike and his female classmate fixes the bike. They go to a coffee shop and chat, and later the boy muses about having found “a soul mate”.

## **4.2 Significance**

In “A Future of Sorts” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:9), dinner and pregnancy, at least, make Sam a part of the family in the eyes of Rich. It is not mentioned how long Sam and Alicia have been dating, nor is it mentioned how far the pregnancy is, nor what plans Sam and Alicia have in terms of starting a family. Being part of the family has negative connotations to Alicia in this case, because she is worried of Sam's response. She seems to think that her family made such an impression that if Sam considers being part of the family, he will run away. Also, it seems that dating does not make one a part of the family, as the parents appear to know Sam only superficially at best, while his relationship with Alicia has already progressed to the point of pregnancy.

In “Learn from the past, prepare for the future” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:15) relationships are considered, at least to some extent, a family matter, as parents of both teenagers discuss the relationship on their own. This establishes the importance of dating relationships as parents are showing concern about its success. Both sets of parents talk about their child’s dating partner and their views about the relationship, but at least in this point the parents do not meet. This indicates the level of connectedness between them, considering the stage of the relationship. They may not see the need or may not see meeting as necessary.

Teenage, sex and pregnancy are connected topics practically in any human society. Chapter “A Future of Sorts” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:9) can be seen as an ideological choice of content meant to inspire discussion on these matters, especially in the light of the tasks following the text. The questions in exercise B (Karapalo et al. 2008b:11) ask the readers to consider what they think of the situation. The questions are mainly in regard to career choices and the relationship Sam and Alicia have. The following questions are of interest to the present study:

Exerpt 2.

What did you think of the extract you just read?

Do you empathise with Sam? Why?

What would you like to happen to you in the future?

What do your parents expect from you?

Do you ever get the feeling that everything goes wrong in your life? What do you do then? Who do you turn to when in trouble?

There is a strong implication that the situation of Sam is undesirable, as the questions specifically ask about empathising with Sam, the reader's future plans, and feelings of things “going wrong” in the reader's life. Furthermore, exercise F (Karapalo et al. 2008b:15) includes acting out dialogues connected to the text. These dialogues include Sam and Alicia talking about their future and both Sam’s and Alicia’s parents talking about the teenagers’ relationship. Depending on whether or not the exercises are used in class, and what kind of exercises the teacher chooses to use, the relationship models displayed in the chapter can clearly vary, as Sam can either be seen as ending a relationship that did not have much importance or having discussions about the future of a relationship before making an important decision.

In “Golden rules”, part A (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16), the reader is asked to write advice to a character who is nervous about meeting the parents of their date. This task creates significance for the meaning of the parents of a date in regard of the relationship, as people are not nervous without reason.

The set-up of the dating adverts exercise (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8) connected to “Same old same old” creates dating culture in itself. While teenagers commonly date, dating profiles are a tool associated with people who are seriously looking for a relationship. This exercise establishes the fact that a group of 17-year-olds are seriously looking for “*soulmates*”. Their young age is related to the Conversation about the age in which people are old enough to look for a relationship or know themselves well enough to be able to find a suitable relationship. This exercise does not take issue into consideration in any way. On another note, one of the profiles uses the term game, which has the related meaning of methods of finding relationships, sometimes with unethical practices and the term is often associated with overtly sexual behavior.

In “Golden rules”, part C (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16), the reader is asked to write a letter to a friend who is about to become a parent at the age of seventeen. This task does not mention a dating relationship, which can be interpreted in two ways. First, the friend may be in a relationship, and this letter is about parenthood. Second, the friend may have become pregnant or impregnated someone by accident, in which case this letter is not only about parenthood, but also about judgment in sexual activity. This task hints sex to be ambiguous in terms of whether or not it is practiced only in a relationship by omitting the mention of a relationship.

In “Love Letters” (McWhirr et. al 2008:23) Nick severs a dating relationship by writing a letter in which he says that he thinks they should “*call it off*”. Here, a significant decision regarding a relationship was taken alone, without consultation with the dating partner. These instances establish the importance of a dating relationship as significant, or rather, insignificant enough that it is severed by a letter, and also the importance of having enough in common, as that is the reason for the decision.

### **4.3 Practices**

In “Love Letters” (McWhirr et. al 2008:23) Nick severs a dating relationship by writing a letter in which he says that he thinks they should “*call it off*”. Here, the relationship is changed by written words, displaying how language shapes social connections. On another note, this choice was not mutual or discussed. Nick thought about his girlfriend and after realising how little they had in common, he decided to end the relationship unilaterally with a letter. This reflects the individuality of Nick, and perhaps explains why Fleur was more expressive emotionally after the break-up. In other words, a significant decision regarding a relationship was taken alone, without consultation with the dating partner. Also, writing a romantic letter is considered a method of proving one's feelings of love, or, in the case of Helen and Clive, simply something someone does in a relationship. Notes are also used to set up a lunch date between Nick and Gilda. She makes a comment on something Nick has done and Nick does the same, followed by an invitation.

In “A Future of Sorts” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10), the comment 'Welcome to the family' clearly points to an activity that resembles a rite of passage to the family. In Rich's eyes the family dinner with Sam appears to be such a rite; however, the actual inclusion to the family may have happened earlier, depending on how the reader interprets the story. At the beginning of the chapter Sam says to the reader “At that family lunch, when I was invited because I was part of the family...” which indicated he became part of the family before the invitation. Therefore, dating may be reason enough for Sam to be a part of a family on one hand. On the other hand, attending the lunch would signify a threshold according to an interpretation of the words of Rich. Alicia does not claim Rich's statement is false in any way; rather, she is concerned of Sam's response, thus validating the relevance of Rich's statement.

Talking frankly is usually considered a notable part of dating relationships. Sam's thoughts at the end of the excerpt reveal that he is not open about his feelings to Alicia and Rich in this setting. This has different optional interpretations. First, it may be that candor is not part of the relationship between Sam and Alicia. Second, in the presence of Rich Sam may behave in a different manner. The first interpretation seems more likely because there is no indication in the text that Sam would have had a frank discussion with Alicia before he left the house and wondered if he would be coming back. Discussions are evident, however, in the following exercises.

Exercise “Golden Rules”, (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16), along with the previous exercise “Learn from the past, prepare for the future”, also displays a practice of meeting the parents of a date for the first time over dinner. The practice of meeting the parents of a date is consolidated. In the dating adverts exercise (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8) hobbies, rather than meeting parents over dinner, are established as a practice in the dating process, either as an activity that is used to initiate a relationship or an activity that is engaged in during a relationship. Furthermore, this exercise makes dating profiles more common as a tool for finding a relationship and, specifically, in the readers' age group.

In “A Stroke of Luck” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:70), the teenagers meet after circumstances have created a situation where they can get in contact. The girl appears to be active since she fixes his bike. Later they go for coffee, and talk for two hours. After this meeting the boy is talking about his feelings of wanting to have a closer relationship with her. Although he does

not explicitly talk about a dating relationship, this is implied as friendship is not mentioned. This sequence can be seen as an example of a beginning of a relationship, even though the story is not continued and no conclusion is revealed.

“Learn from the past, prepare for the future” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:15) is connected to the ubiquitous societal conversations of parents being sufficiently and appropriately involved in the lives of their children. It is not indicated what kinds of discussions either set of parents have had about the young couple before the events in the chapter. The discussions now could therefore be seen as a part of a process of bringing up their children in terms of important matters or, optionally, as an ad hoc -meeting to consider the relationship and pregnancy. In any case, this exercise takes barely any moral stance on the events related to the relationship outside the choice of topics. Perhaps the purpose of the authors has been to allow students to form their own opinions without overtly influencing their train of thought. Nonetheless, the exercise could be seen as creating or upholding a practice of parents advising their children about relationships.

In “Your own story” (McWhirr et. al 2008:28), two students act out a discussion between characters Adam and Ben who are talking about Ben and his girlfriend. Romance is linked with getting a tattoo and displaying feelings publicly on recess. Adam gives several suggestions on how to behave with a girlfriend, and this advice is apparently given with bad intentions. Adam claims that sometimes a girlfriend should be dealt with in a cold manner, and sometimes it would be good to organize a disagreement. Likewise, Adam claims that aloofness makes one more interesting in the eyes of one’s girlfriend. Making one appear popular with other girls is suggested to make a girlfriend jealous, which is framed as a desirable outcome. Meanwhile, Ben is listening to the advice and questions the advice but finally agrees with it. Ben's reactions indicate that these kinds of practices are not easily acceptable.

#### **4.4 Identities**

In the dating adverts exercise (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8), all of the teenage characters in this exercise seem to identify themselves by their hobbies, whether it is dancing, football, music or computers. Several of them also verbalize their desire to share their hobby with their

romantic interest. Relationships and hobbies are therefore closely connected in these profiles. Furthermore, the boys seem to be giving social goods to exciting hobbies, while the person with intellectual hobbies writes about himself in a slightly dismissive manner. Here, identities seem to be valued according to the level of excitement of one's hobbies.

In “A Future of Sorts”, (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10) Rich's statement gives an opportunity to Sam to take the identity of a family member to a greater than previous extent. Sam ignores this opportunity. Considering that readers have the impression Sam and Alicia are aware of the pregnancy, pregnancy is treated clearly as something that is not very binding, if it is binding at all, as Sam considers leaving Alicia and his new family. Also, he is not sharing his thoughts with his pregnant girlfriend, keeping his thoughts to himself. This part of the text consolidates the identity of Sam as an independent individual rather than a member of a family or a dating partner. In a similar fashion, Nick also establishes himself as an independent individual by not consulting with his girlfriend before severing the relationship (McWhirr et. al 2008:23).

In “Love Letters” (McWhirr et. al 2008:23), Nick severs a dating relationship by writing a letter in which he says that he thinks they should “*call it off*”. This choice was not mutual or discussed. This reflects the individuality of Nick, and offers an explanation as to why Fleur was more expressive emotionally after the break-up. In other words, a significant decision regarding a relationship was taken alone, without consultation with the dating partner.

#### **4.5 Politics**

In terms of social goods, being part of a family seems to have some kinds of negative side effects that are the reasons for Alicia's worry of Sam's response (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10). Alicia grants Sam social goods by worrying about his parting, while Sam denies the same of the others by considering leaving. Apparently Sam and Alicia don't value each other in a similar manner. In other words, Alicia has more at stake, unsurprisingly, considering her pregnancy.

In “Learn from the past, prepare for the future” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:15), the pregnancy is not mentioned in the topics of the dialogues, although it would quite likely come up in the

dialogues themselves. Another prominent point about the exercise is the title: “F. Learn from the past, prepare for the future”. The choice of words clearly imply a past mistake to learn from, as the phrase “learn from the past” is often connected to negative aspects of history. In terms of positive aspects of history, some popular phrases might include “understand the past”, “standing on the shoulders of giants”, but also “learning from the best” etc.

In the dating adverts (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8) the daters seem to be giving social goods to exciting hobbies, while the person with intellectual hobbies writes about himself in a slightly dismissive manner. The discussion task following the profiles asks students to consider if they would like to date someone with the same or different hobbies. While asking this question does not outright give social goods to hobbies with regard to relationships, it is done implicitly, as the question would likely not be asked if hobbies were meaningless with regard to relationships. In “Golden Rules” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16), the plea of the character clearly gives social goods to the parents in the eyes of the recipient. Specifically, the opinion of the parents of one’s date on oneself seems to have an effect notable enough to induce nervousness.

In “Same Old Same Old” (Karapalo et al. 2008a:10), the introduction to the chapter ties a lack of interesting hobbies with compromises in “*dreams of romance*”. Essentially this text affirms the importance of having interesting hobbies in order to have success in romantic relationships. Hobbies are portrayed as something that attracts a relationship, both as an attractive feature in a potential date and as an activity that people can do together while dating. A “*macho attraction*” is rated highly in terms of attractiveness in romance, as the hobby in question is rated 9 out of 10 in “*pull power*”. The review also notes that one needs a break from the freezing water “*before trying to impress anyone with your manhood*”. This expression indicates that the size of one’s manhood is used to increase success in attracting relationships. The phrase above may very well be in jest, but the humor is not made explicit. Readers will have varied senses of humor and therefore varied reactions to the phrase in question. In another review, “*lots of points*” are given for originality, which explicitly makes originality a desirable quality in order to attract a romantic relationship.

Gilda's comment “*I like your style, Nick. You’ve got depth*” (McWhirr et. al 2008:24) gives social goods for depth of thoughts. These social goods are in the form of attractiveness as a date or as a personal preference of Gilda. On one hand, Fleur gives value to a letter to a great

extent, as she seems to require love letters as a proof of love. On the other hand, Nick says he loved Fleur because she was “*spunky*”, or good-looking, and because “*all the guys thought so too*”. Furthermore, social validation of her looks is given value, because Nick lists that as a reason to love her.

In exercise H, “Your Own Story” (McWhirr et al. 2008:28), two students act out a discussion between characters Adam and Ben who are talking about Ben and his girlfriend. Romance is linked with getting a tattoo and displaying feelings publicly on recess. Making one appear popular with other girls is suggested to make a girlfriend jealous, which is framed as a desirable outcome. However, popularity with other girls, in the context of the exercise, is also framed in a questionable light.

#### **4.6 Connections**

In “A Stroke of Luck” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:70), the inability of the boy to “*put together coherent sentences*” is commonly associated with nervousness due to romantic interest. Likewise, saying that “The girl was something else.” is a phrase often, although not exclusively, related to romantic interest. A chance encounter on the street and a discussion about “*all kinds of things*” over coffee is then, at least in this case, a sufficient start for feelings to emerge. Different feelings are present in “Future of Sorts”, where Sam considers ending the relationship permanently (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10), apparently due to Alicia and her parents getting on Sam's nerves. In this text both Alicia and Sam imply with their reactions that a relationship involving a pregnancy is something to abandon because of irritation or dissatisfaction with communication, which in turn is an indication of the importance of such a relationship in their view.

In “Learn from the past, prepare for the future” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:15), the discussion between Sam and Alicia could change some of the conclusions made while reading the text, as they have a chance to be frank and honest about their intentions and feelings. Dating is here connected with a shared future, both the relationship and future being connected to further studies. This connection is also consolidated in the discussions in the text itself and the dialogues on the exercise, as future and education are mentioned in all of the six dialogues.

In Exercise H b (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16) the reader is asked to write a list of do's and don'ts for their parents to avoid being embarrassed by their actions in front of a date. This task reveals the ability of the parents to embarrass one in front of one's date. While this ability is commonly known in popular culture, it is further upheld in this text. As in exercise H a, in H b the practice of meeting the parents of a date is consolidated. In "A Stroke of Luck" (Karapalo et al. 2008b:70) over the course of a few hours the boy feels he wants to have a relationship with the girl, and muses that he found "a soul mate". Soul mate is a term usually reserved for an intense romantic involvement in common popular culture, but here one is found, or rather revealed in a classmate, after only a few hours of talking.

In "Love Letters" (McWhirr et. al 2008:22), losing a relationship is connected to not doing what Fleur asks Nick to do. Nick says complying with the request of Fleur makes him "*weakened*". The choice of words could have been neutral, such as "changed my mind", but Nick chose to display tension with his comment. This makes it seem as if there were conflict of power within the relationship. Later, Nick says he loved Fleur because she was "*spunky*", or good-looking, and because "*all the guys thought so too*". This comment connects good looks with love. Furthermore, social validation or her looks also plays a part in love, because Nick lists that as a reason to love her. On the other hand, love is connected to a relationship that can be severed with a single letter, and apparently without any notable emotional difficulty on the side of Nick. Fleur, however, dislikes the letter, rips it to pieces, and later circulates the personal message around the school, apparently as revenge for the decision of Nick.

In "Same Old Same Old" (Karapalo et al. 2008a:9) the narrator is trying to find out what kind of activities could help him "*hook up with the love of my life*". This expression is interesting in two ways. First, the narrator wants to hook up with someone, and this phrase is commonly used to refer to a brief sexual relationship. Second, he specifically wants to hook up with the love of his life, which can be interpreted in at least two different ways. The first interpretation would be that the relationship with the love of one's life could start by hooking up. The second interpretation is that relationship involving the love of one's life is not a long one. Furthermore, this chapter ties a lack of interesting hobbies with compromises in "*dreams of romance*".

## 5 Lasting impressions

### 5.1 What is presented as important in dating relationships?

Several issues have been considered important to dating in the data. The most prominent examples are hobbies and parents. Hobbies are considered as attractive features in a dating partner and appropriate activities on a date (Karapalo et al. 2008a:9-10), and they can to some extent even build the dating identities of a teenager (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8). In both, texts and exercises, the opinion of the parents concerning a dating partner is given some importance, as the parents talk about future plans of their children and invite dating teenagers for dinners (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10,15). This can also be a source of nervousness, indicating further importance of the opinion of the parents (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16). Pregnancy does not appear to be very important, as a character is concealing his feelings from his pregnant girlfriend that concern the girlfriend and her family, and is wondering whether or not end the relationship (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10).

Looks are given some importance in dating, as a relationship, even love, is based on looks in one instance (McWhirr et. al 2008:23). Common interests, however, are more important as they are highlighted more often, and no common interests can be a reason for a relationship to be severed. Originality is given value, both in terms of having original past-time activities and original thoughts (Karapalo et al. 2008a:10, McWhirr et. al 2008:24). In several different instances, characters talk about finding “*the right person*” (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8), “*the love of my life*” (Karapalo et al. 2008a:9), or “*a soul mate*” (Karapalo et al. 2008b:70; Karapalo et al. 2008a:8). A shared future is connected to the success of a dating relationship, at least to some extent, as future, education, and work are discussed in this context. “Learn from the past, prepare for the future” provides several opportunities for readers to make this connection (Karapalo et al. 2008b:15).

### 5.2 What kinds of behavior models are connected to dating relationships?

The data provided several examples of behavior and activities connected to dating relationships. Love letters were considered means of proving one's love to their partner according to a character. Another character used a letter to end a relationship, after realising

how little the two had in common, without any consultation with the dating partner. Lastly, notes were used to initiate conversation and to set up a date. (McWhirr et. al 2008:22-24.) In another exercise, a third party is deliberately giving advice that is framed in a bad light, including appearing more distant than usual and making the a girlfriend jealous by fabricating evidence of feelings for another girl (McWhirr et. al 2008:28).

Dating profiles are used as means to find a love, or a “*soulmate*” (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8). Hobbies are framed central in this pursuit, in both the dating profile -exercise and the following chapter (Karapalo et al. 2008a:9-10). Hobbies can be both an activity that is shared during a relationship, or an attractive feature that improves the chances of finding a dating relationship in the first place.

In one instance, a character is actively concealing his feelings about the relationship. Whether or not the said character has a discussion with his girlfriend before ending the relationship is dependent on the exercises that are used following the text (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10,15). Dinner with the parents of the dating partner are displayed in a chapter and two connected exercises (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10,15,16). Rather than only meeting parents over dinner, they also have a role as advisors concerning the dating partner and the relationship. Parents also discuss the relationship amongst themselves. In a separate exercise, two teen-agers go for a cup of coffee and talk about many topics for some time, and this event is framed as a potential beginning of a dating relationship (Karapalo et al. 2008b:70).

### **5.3 What kinds of meanings are connected to sex in regard to dating relationships?**

Sex is mentioned a number of times, and in most cases with somewhat lighthearted connotations. The word love is connected to hooking up (Karapalo et al. 2008a:9), which has the obvious meaning of a brief sexual relationship, and the size of manhood is also connected to dating success. The word *game* is mentioned off-handedly in a dating advert (Karapalo et al. 2008a:8), and in a writing exercise a relationship is not mentioned in connection to a pregnancy, which hints sex to be ambiguous in terms of whether or not it is practiced only in a relationship (Karapalo et al. 2008b:16). A relationship involving a pregnancy can be implied as something to be severed with or without consultation with the dating partner depending on how the teacher organises the class exercises. Furthermore, sex life appears to

have been started in a relationship that is apparently emotionally unstable, judging by the behavior of the characters (Karapalo et al. 2008b:10,15).

## **6 Conclusion**

The analysis shows that the models of dating relationships reflect the common realities of modern western teen-agers. Some of the models are ethically questionable in themselves, but when the following exercises and the possible influence of the teacher are taken into account, the impression made by the models on the students can be varied in terms of values and goals of the national core curriculum (OPH 2003:12,18).

While the quality of the dating relationship models presented in the data reflects the values of current society, it would be very difficult to present, in language textbooks, an unambiguous model of dating relationships which all teenagers should follow. This is because there is a considerable variety of opinion among students and, perhaps more importantly, parents concerning an ideal dating relationship type.

Furthermore, the effect of the models presented in the textbooks on the students themselves is inconclusive. This is an obvious and necessary next step in the examination of the topic. Even a praiseworthy model may be futile to present if the students cannot relate to it or do not find it desirable to emulate in any way. It could also be beneficial to consult parents of students and find out what kind of relationship models they would prefer in their children's schoolbooks. This study is severely limited by using only one textbook series as primary data. Further studies could gather a more comprehensive sample of data by using several textbooks series in current use.

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