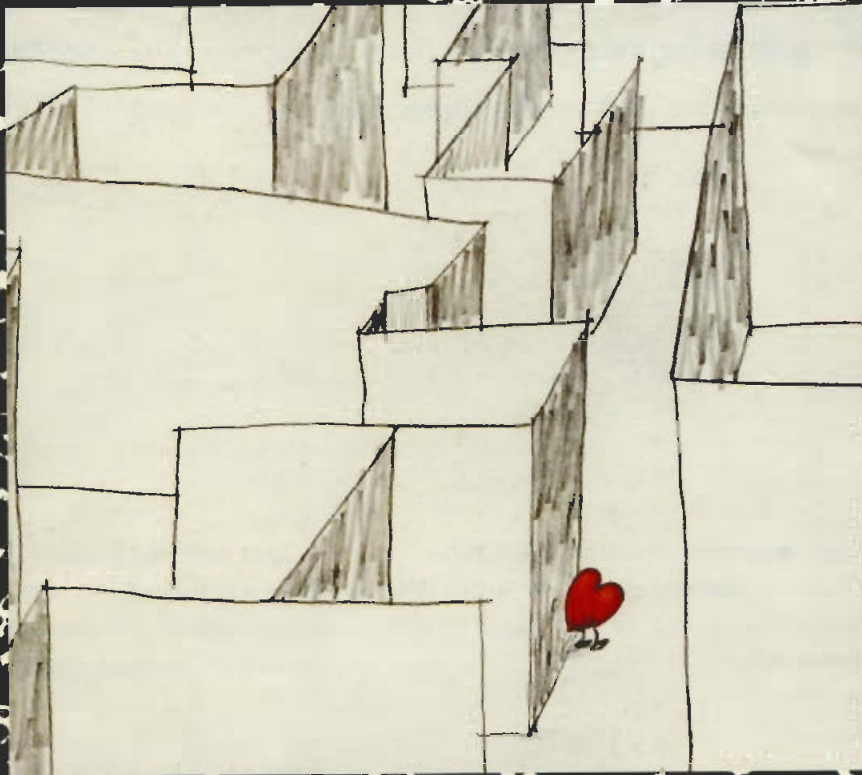


A Report to the Nation
Dana Mack, Principal Investigator

Hungry Hearts Evaluating the New Curricula for Teens on Marriage and Relationships



Institute for American Values

This report stems from, and helps to inform, two on-going areas of investigation by the Institute for American Values. The first is the status and future of marriage, including how marriage is currently taught to high school and college students. The second is the state of courtship in the U.S. and its relationship to marriage. Dana Mack, this report's principal investigator, is an affiliate scholar at the institute and the director of its project on childhood and adolescence. The Institute is grateful to Maggie Gallagher, Don Browning, and Arthur E. Rasmussen for their scholarly and editorial contributions to this report, and to the W.H. Brady Foundation and the Achelis Foundation for their generous financial support. The contributions of other supporters are also greatly appreciated.

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The Art of Loving Well

Description

Currently, one of the best-known programs overall is Boston University's *The Art of Loving Well* (1993), an anthology of readings, discussions, and activities designed to foster reflections on love and family life through the use of literature: poems, plays, myths, short stories, and literary excerpts both ancient and modern.⁷⁷ These selections include work by such authors as Shakespeare, the Brothers Grimm, Tolstoy, D.H. Lawrence, S. I. Kishor, Maya Angelou, Victor Frankl, John Updike and many more. According to author Nancy McLaren, *Loving Well* has sold about 1,300 curricula; it appears to be one of the more widely used programs among those examined.⁷⁸

The Art of Loving Well was originally conceived as a character education and pregnancy prevention program, designed for use in 8th and 9th grade English classes. But its emphasis on the journey through family love to romance, and from romance to marriage, makes it a natural fit for the newer field of marriage and relationship education. According to its authors, *The Art of Loving Well* uses "literature as a means to develop values and attitudes...conducive to responsible sexual behavior in adolescents."⁷⁹

The program's premise is that "the best way to gain knowledge about [love] is by promoting conversation and reflection about our common human experience...By reflecting on the actions and decisions of characters in literature we can be better prepared as we face similar situations in our own lives" (p. 5). The readings are divided into three sections designed to correspond to the "three stages on the journey toward real love and intimacy" — early loves and losses, romance, and commitment and marriage.

Several themes predominate: "One is that we learn to love from our families and communities...Many of the stories in this book describe loves and losses that are connected with family life." Another "is that human relationships are complex and that it takes time to nurture true friendships and intimate partnerships. Love offers the potential for our greatest

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happiness but also renders us vulnerable to great pain." A third theme is that "sexual relationships are a big deal and should never be taken lightly...; unless they are in the context of a deeply intimate and committed partnership, sexual encounters usually complicate problems rather than solve them." Finally, this course teaches students that "growth and change are possible if we are willing to take the time and trouble to learn all that is involved in loving well...It is never too late to take a new direction" (pp. 6-7).

Each lesson consists of reading a short story, excerpt, or poem, followed by suggestions for class discussion and activities. If a given reading is too difficult for a particular class, the text recommends a dramatic out-loud reading.

Evaluation

Does The Art of Loving Well have a marriage focus? Grade: B.

The Art of Loving Well was not designed as a marriage education program, and helping students understand marriage is not one of its explicit goals. At the same time, concern for marriage suffuses the program content, and the readings culminate in a comparison of three different marriage ceremonies, plus a mock classroom wedding.

Does The Art of Loving Well convey to students that marriage is beneficial and important? Grade: A.

Loving Well consistently conveys to students that marriage is the ultimate context for loving well, and that within marriage, loving well takes time. "A happy wedlock is a long falling in love," we learn from Theodore Parker. "Young persons think love belongs only to the brown-haired and crimson-cheeked. So it does for its beginning. But the golden marriage is a part of love that the bridal day knows nothing of....Men and women are married fractionally, now a small fraction, then a large fraction. Very few are married totally, and then only after some forty or fifty years of gradual approach and experiment." (p. 290).

Is The Art of Loving Well comprehensive? Grade: B.

The Art of Loving Well contains no explicit instructions in communication skills and no scientific information about the importance of marriage for children, adults or society. Because marriage is portrayed from so many different literary vantage points in literature, however, students are unusually well, if subtly, instructed about a variety of its important dimensions, including its sexual, child-rearing, financial, and spiritual dimensions. *Loving Well* looks at, for example, a daughter's feelings about her parent's divorce and father's remarriage, a young woman's romantic fantasy of "happily ever after", a cohabiting couples' struggle to think of themselves as candidates for permanence, the role even an absent wife can play in giving life meaning under the worst conditions, and how a young unwed father feels when his child's mother marries another man. *Loving Well* thus offers powerful implicit lessons on empathy, seeing the other's point of view, and the importance of viewing one's life and love in a long-term perspective.

Is The Art of Loving Well age-appropriate? Grade: A.

Loving Well demonstrates that it is possible to encourage teenagers to reflect on marriage in ways that are culturally sophisticated, intellectually rich, generous, and life enhancing. A 1992 evaluation of the program for the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs found in four tests that students who had taken the *Loving Well* course were less likely to engage in sexual activity and were more "supportive of delayed sexual activity" than were students in a control group who had not been exposed to the course material.⁹⁰

Students' comments on the program were suggestive: "I've learned that you have to communicate for marriage to work. The other thing is that love takes time, and having sex or getting married doesn't fix your problems." And: "...I learned that life is too short, and you should try once in a while to do something nice for someone." And: "I do not have an average family...and always had trouble trying to deal with things at home, but after being in *Loving Well*, it's helped me get along a little better with my family and the tension at home has decreased somewhat. In my friendships, I can be more trusting of my peers and now I have more people trusting me."⁹¹

Does The Art of Loving Well promote habits of character which are likely to enhance marriageability? Grade: A.

Indirectly but very powerfully, *Loving Well* teaches self-control, empathy, and the importance of responsibility and high ideals. After reading and discussing works of Apuleius, Carson McCullers, John Updike and Charles Perrault, children have by their own accounts come away with the perception that they have better communication skills and a better understanding of their relationships with family and friends, even though they have received

no direct instruction in communications skills or scripts. Nancy McClaren, one of the creators of the *Loving Well* program, says that the program offers students "vicarious experiences under controlled circumstances," experiences that enable them to "prepare...for the 'real life' decisions they will eventually face."⁸²

The Future of School-Based Marriage Education

AS THE HIGH costs of family fragmentation become ever more apparent, interest in school-based marriage education is likely to grow. Support for this trend, however, is not universal. Some educators argue that these new marriage courses, by consuming scarce educational time and resources, may ultimately detract schools from their primary mission of providing students with a basic introduction to the natural and human sci-

A Teacher on the *Loving Well* Program

I use it in my Relationships and Marriage course for 11th and 12th graders and in my Teen Challenges and Choices class for 9th and 10th graders. I was already using literature before I found the program, but this program is ideal. Analyzing literature provides a safe place for kids to examine what their actions and reactions are in different situations. Some of these stories have amazing impact. They meet the kids exactly where they are, and pull them forward in their values and in their higher order thinking skills. I've found the story the kids like best is "Appointment with Love," by S. J. Kishor. It's only three pages long, but it says something so important to kids who are very much in tune with what people look like. It asks the question, "Can we fall in love with people who aren't good looking?" Before reading this story, I always ask the students to list the qualities they are looking for in a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Good looks are always at or near the top of the list. Then they read the story and I have them interview adults about the qualities they think are important. They suddenly realize that other qualities are so much more important.

We prepare students for college and careers, but not for relationships. That's a whole gray area for kids — the question of what is a good relationship I want to empower them to be in healthy relationships. It's hard, since this is the Howard Stern generation. Young people are desensitized. We don't have common courtesy anymore. The talk show hosts get paid more if they are offensive. On TV, [kids] see name calling and smart aleck behavior. I'm teaching them that there is better payoff for good manners in relationships.

Arvada High School has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in our county. I'm an advocate for teen sexual abstinence. I tell kids, "Probably nobody else is telling you to save yourself for marriage, but I am. Your virginity is the greatest gift you can give your husband or wife." I ask kids, "Who's telling you to have sex, and what's their purpose. Maybe it's the TV or movies, or your peers." I ask them "Do the people who are pressuring you to have sex love you?...What about the people who are telling you not to have sex, like your parents. Do they love you? It gets them to stop and think. Getting them to look at their lives now will help kids make better choices later.

-Peggy Calhoun, Jefferson County, Colorado