TWO-FOR-ONE teaching

Connecting Instruction to Student Values

lauren **porosoff** • jonathan **weinstein**

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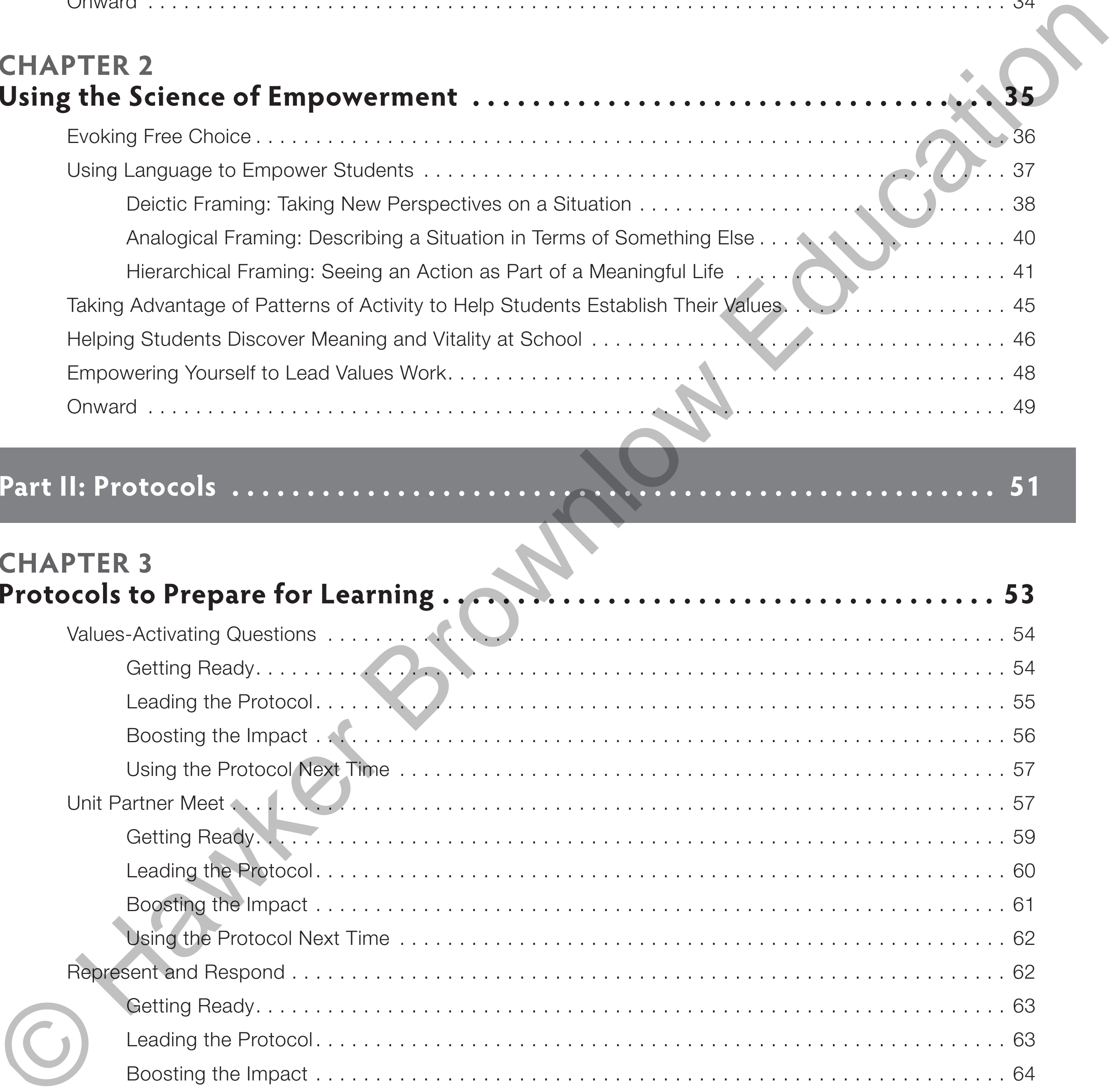
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Introduction

VALUING STUDENTS' VALUES

Let's begin, if you're willing, with you.

Jot down the first memory that comes to mind when you think of each grade you were in, from kindergarten to grade 12. If you can only remember your teacher's name or where you sat, then write that down. All classrooms count—gyms, fields, art studios, auditoriums—but for this activity, don't use memories of special events, trips, lunch, recess, hallways, or anything else that you wouldn't consider a regularly scheduled class. Don't overthink this, and don't cheat.

Figure I.1 features the lists we came up with.

Lauren's List	Jonathan's List
K: Total blank. I don't even remember my teachers' names. **1:** I remember wandering the hallways when my class learned letters because I already could read. **2:** Mrs. Strauss told us to be on our best behavior because when people visited our school, what did they see as they walked down the main hallway? Our room—room 2A. **3:** Mrs. Dorros asked us what this year's play should be about. We were studying fables, and I suggested combining them all into one big fable. That's what we did. **4:** Mrs. Kaplan settled a fight between me and my best friend by giving us M&M's.	**K:** Punching J. P. in the face for stealing my chair, thereby excluding myself from the group **1:** Struggling to draw the number 2 **2:** Sitting at desks that faced each other **3:** Mrs. Smith telling me to give up writing in cursive because it was too hard for her to read **4:** Ms. LaSpina telling me to go read ahead in my U.S. history textbook because I was ahead of the class **5:** Moving up from the middle-level mathematics class to the high-level one, but then having to struggle to keep up

Figure I.1: Lauren's and Jonathan's school memories.

continued ⇨

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5: Every time we did something right, Mrs. Freedman gave us points. Did the homework? Ten points. Aced a spelling test? Twenty points. Lined up quietly? Five points. We'd write our points on note cards taped to the corners of our desks. Every week, whoever got the most points got to be top banana. **6:** My teacher was Mrs. Anziska. I remember that I liked her, but I don't remember why. **7:** We all had to get daily subscriptions to *The New York Times*. We brought in our copies every day and felt very grown-up. **8:** We did a project in science where cars dripped water at a fixed rate and we could measure the distance between the drops to calculate the cars' speeds. **9:** My English teacher said that all literature was about only two themes: sex and death. **10:** I drew a lamp in art. My teacher said I exaggerated my shading. **11:** My friend Sara and I took chemistry together. We made fun of words like *stoichiometry* and *spectrophotometer*, but we both secretly loved the class. **12:** My calculus teacher would explain how to do a problem, and then I'd turn to the girl who sat next to me and explain it to her.	**6:** Mr. Stravopolis sitting me in the back corner of the room based on my last name and then fostering competition among us to see who could complete a set number of mathematics problems first **7:** Also sitting in the back corner of the classroom in science and learning about edible plants **8:** Using a microscope to look at a dead fly in science class **9:** Being forced to participate in a one-act scene with another student who was the only other student in class not to find a partner **10:** Working in a small group in English class and being told to read books that were more challenging than the rest of the class's **11:** Being ridiculed by my mathematics teacher for asking how one might use trigonometry in the real world **12:** Watching films by John Kenneth Galbraith in economics, but feeling very little connection between what we learned in the films and their relevance to class

This exercise has limitations. We asked you to write down whatever came to mind first. If you thought more, you might come up with other learning experiences that felt more important in the moment or that matter more now. We also recognize that a lot of meaningful learning happens in spaces we didn't allow you to use for this activity, like the hallway or the bus. We didn't ask about what you learned at home, or in out-of-school activities such as a dance class or religious program. And we didn't ask about the years since high school.

Acknowledging these limits, what do you notice when you look over your list? What themes or connections emerge? What did academic learning look like for you?

In our lists, each memory connects to an emotion. Sometimes that emotion feels nice—excitement in trying something new, pride in a budding talent, joy in connecting with someone. And sometimes that emotion feels not so nice—embarrassment when we struggled to match someone else's expectations, frustration when our needs went unmet, anxiety when school moved too quickly and boredom when it moved too slowly. The emotional content of our classroom memories only sometimes relates to the actual learning or work. Other times, our memories reveal feelings about ourselves, our relationships with peers and teachers, or our world. What emotions would you associate with each memory on your list?

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Any emotion signals that something important is at stake. If you felt excited when your history teacher invited you to read ahead, what might have been important to you in that moment? Or if you felt frustrated that you didn't get to be top banana despite your best efforts, what does that tell you about your values at the time? If you still remember these moments, what might be important to you now? Whether these moments were part of the academic curriculum or unplanned incidents and interactions, what can they teach you about who you were then, what matters to you now, and what you want to stand for in the future?

When your students look back on your class, what do you want them to remember? What do you want them to have learned about themselves, what matters to them, and what they will stand for? What if, in addition to ensuring that "students graduating from high school are prepared to take credit bearing [*sic*] introductory courses in two- or four-year college programs or enter the workforce" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], n.d.), we could also make school a place where students discover and do what matters to them? That's what we mean by *two-for-one teaching*: it's using academic instruction as a context for students to explore and enact their values.

This book shows you how to turn academic units into opportunities for students to notice what matters to them, choose to do what matters, and accept the struggle inherent in that choice—which we call *values work*. This isn't an added thing; it's a different way to do *the* thing, academic instruction, and have students bring their values to their academic learning.

But before we discuss why, where, and how to do values work in school, we'll first define what we mean by *values*.

A Definition of Values

Our definition of values comes from Contextual Behavioral Science (CBS), which seeks to "alleviate human suffering and advance human flourishing by developing basic scientific accounts of complex behaviors" (Villatte, Villatte, & Hayes, 2016, p. 4). Psychologists who practice CBS distinguish between pain, which is an inevitable part of life, and the suffering that results when efforts to control, minimize, or avoid that pain are unsuccessful (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012). These psychologists help people become aware of their values and choose to do what matters—not what's easiest or most fun, not what makes them look cool or sound smart, and not what relieves them from unpleasant feelings like anxiousness, embarrassment, or frustration—so they can live more fulfilling lives (Hayes et al., 2012). Contextual behavioral scientists define *values* as "freely chosen, verbally constructed consequences of ongoing, dynamic, evolving patterns of activity, which establish predominant reinforcers for that activity that are intrinsic in engagement in the valued behavioral pattern itself" (Wilson & DuFrene, 2009, p. 64). Let's break down this definition.

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- **"Freely chosen":** In this book, anytime we mention *values*, we don't mean a set of values that a teacher or school espouses. We mean values students choose for themselves. The teacher's and community's values will certainly influence students, but so will their families, friends, communities, cultural and religious backgrounds, and activities. Moreover, when schools adopt a set of core values or a values program, the students don't get a meaningful choice in whether they endorse those values. We're not arguing that schools shouldn't stand for and teach certain values; we're distinguishing between instilling certain values in students and inviting them to discover their own.
- **"Verbally constructed":** Values aren't physical, tangible things like a tree or a house; they're abstractions like courage, creativity, and excellence. We label these abstractions with words—we verbally construct them—and talk about them as if they were things, but they're not. You can't draw courage, hold creativity, or point to excellence. You *can* draw a courageous leader, hold a creative painting, or point to an excellent meatball. Leaders, paintings, and meatballs are concrete, but courage, creativity, and excellence are abstract. You cannot observe or measure them until you translate them into something concrete—like schoolwork.
- **"Consequences of ongoing, dynamic, evolving patterns of activity":** Your values come from how you interact with the people, things, and events around you, as well as the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories inside you. Over time, you develop a set of approaches—a pattern of activity—that you call your *values*. Students might find new ways to act on their values throughout their lives, but they don't need to wait until they're older or ask permission to start building a meaningful pattern of activity. They can start living by their values right now.
- **"Which establish predominant reinforcers for that activity":** Values aren't the same as goals or preferences. Goals help us focus our actions but only feel good when we get the outcome we want: the paper is written, the laundry is folded, the laps are run. If we don't complete our goals, we might forgive ourselves, but we don't feel satisfied. With a goal, the thing we're working for—what behavior scientists call the *reinforcer*—is the outcome, not the action itself. With a preference, the reinforcer *is* the action itself: we eat our favorite ice cream, watch our favorite show, or go on a dream vacation because it's fun. The problem with preferences is that they often aren't accessible—the ice cream shop runs out of pistachio, the television network cancels *My So-Called Life*, the trip to Australia costs too much money. But a value, like curiosity or kindness, is always satisfying and always available. You can be curious and kind even if you fail to finish your paper, fold your laundry, and get your favorite ice cream—or any ice cream at all. And if curiosity and kindness matter to you, living your life curiously and kindly becomes a source of meaning and satisfaction in and of itself.
- **"That are intrinsic in engagement in the valued behavioral pattern itself":** Although people talk about values as if they were things, they're more like approaches—*how* you choose to work, play, relate to others, take care of yourself, and otherwise live your life. For a student,

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