**19 Top Ideas for Education in Drive by Daniel Pink**

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[Drive](http://www.danpink.com/drive" \o "Drive) the Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us. 2009. by [Daniel Pink](http://www.danpink.com/" \o "Dan Pink)  
  
I finally finished *Drive*, by Daniel Pink. Since I had read so many reviews about the book, seen the video (below), and engaged in many education discussions about motivation, I felt like I knew the book before I started. I am glad that I read the whole book to fill in what I’d been missing. *Drive* contains enough that is important to the current discussions of education that one more blog post about it is worth the effort (if I may say so myself).  
  
Clearly this book has a ton of ideas relevant to education. I’ll start by repeating Pink’s own twitter summary of the book:   
  
“Carrots & sticks are so last century. *Drive* says for 21st century work, we need to upgrade to autonomy, mastery & purpose.” (p 203)  
  
In this era of education reform focused on carrots and sticks (seems like mostly sticks right now), I wish more ‘edreformers’ would listen to this idea.  
  
(At the end of this post, I embedded a nifty video from [RSA Animate](http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/videos/" \o "RSA Animate) that does a wonderful job summarizing the book.)  
  
A large section of the book focuses on how goals work in the age of creative thought-based tasks. I have culled out a few nuggets followed by my commentary (page numbers refer to 2009 hardback).  
  
1. “Routine, not-so-interesting jobs require direction; non-routine, more intersting work depends on self-direction.” (p 32)

Obvious education connections.

2. “An incentive designed to clarify thinking and sharpen creativity ended up clouding thinking and dulling creativity. Why? Rewards, by their very nature, narrow our focus.” (p 44)

How many times have we educators offered more points on an assignment to those students who will be creative in their project. Maybe we shouldn’t.

3. “By neglecting the ingredients of genuine motivation — autonomy, mastery, and purpose — they limit what each of us can achieve.” (p 49)

When we apply these ingredients to students and teachers we get exciting results. We get people who are invested in what they are doing.

4. “The problem with making an extrinsic reward the only destination that matters is that some people will choose the quickest route there, even if it means taking the low road.” (p 51)  
5. “The only route to the destination is the high road.” (p 51)  
6. “Goals may cause systematic problems for organizations due to narrowed focus, unethical behavior, increased risk taking, decreased cooperation, and decreased intrinsic motivation. Use care when applying goals in your organization.” (p 51)

Most schools and books about education argue for setting goals. Are we using enough care?

Clearly the current flavor of Ed Reform is using goals to try to get results. Anyone who has been involved in schools in recent years will tell you we also have:

* + a narrowed focus
  + some unethical behavior (cases of cheating or mis-respresenting statistics)
  + a massive decrease in intrinsic motivation – many teachers talk about the joy being tested out of teaching

7. “By offering a reward, a principal signals to the agent that the task is undesirable. (If the task were desirable, the agent wouldn’t need a prod.)” (p 54)

Obvious classroom management and parenting ramifications to this idea. So many of us use complex rewards systems in class. Time to stop.

8. “But introducing an “if-then” reward to help develop mastery usually backfires. That’s why schoolchildren who are paid to solve problems typically choose easier problems and therefore learn less. The short-term prize crowds out the long-term learning.” (p 58)

There are whole districts who use reward systems to boost short-term test scores and claim great success.

Once the reward disappears why continue learning? Are the students really learning anything or just getting good at test-taking?

9. “Positive feedback can have an enhancing effect on intrinsic motivation.” (p 67)

A kind word goes a long way. [Written praise](http://principalspov.blogspot.com/2010/07/written-praise.html) goes even further.

10. “We should focus our efforts on creating environments for our innate psychological needs to flourish.” (p 72)  
  
Pink goes on to discuss the meaning and importance of autonomy and mastery in motivation.  
  
11. “It requires resisting the temptation to control people — and instead doing everything we can to reawaken their deep-seated sense of autonomy.” (p 89)

Most educators that I know are control freaks. Giving up some of that is quite challenging yet so rewarding.

12. “Yet in our offices and classrooms we have way too much compliance and way too little engagement.” (p 112)

[Standards-based grading](http://principalspov.blogspot.com/2010/03/guskey-and-grading-lots-to-think-about.html) should help with this.

13. “In flow, people lived so deeply in the moment, and felt so utterly in control, that their sense of time, place, and even self melted away.”

This sounds like ‘Being There’ from the [Fish Philosophy](http://www.charthouse.com/). When we can be in flow during people focused activities, we will really make those people feel a sense of belonging. There are days in school when I focused so tightly on the students and staff that I was in the flow. I lost all sense of what else could be happening in the world. Often, my wife would call to bring me back (literally) because I lost track of time.

14. “…’Goldilocks tasks’ — challenges that are not too hot and not too cold, neither overly difficult nor overly simple.” (p 118)

We need this in the classroom as differentiated instruction. Maybe technology will help make the workload more manageable. Maybe additional staffing could do it. Maybe a whole new system. We have a lot of work left on this.

15. ”The young people recognized that setbacks were inevitable on the road to mastery and that they could even be guideposts for the journey.” (p 123)  
16. “The best predictor of success, the researchers found, was the prospective cadets’ ratings on a noncognitive, non-physical trait known as ‘grit’ — defined as ‘perseverance and passion for long-term goals.’” (p 124)  
17. “‘Being a professional is doing the things you love to do, on the days you don’t feel like doing them.’  -Julius Erving” (p 125)

I’d add that a pro must also do the things he hates on the day he doesn’t feel like doing them if they are part of the job. As teachers, we could work to eliminate boring, meaningless activities so that students can have an easier time working on things they love.

18. “*Mastery is an asymptote*.” “Mastery is impossible to realize fully.” “Why *not*reach for it?”

First, I love the word asymptote. Cool word. Second, I am reading*[Mindset](http://www.amazon.com/Mindset-Psychology-Success-Carol-Dweck/dp/0345472322/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1294178252&sr=1-1)*[by Carol Dweck](http://www.amazon.com/Mindset-Psychology-Success-Carol-Dweck/dp/0345472322/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1294178252&sr=1-1), as mentioned by Pink, to learn more about how to help people (myself included) want to reach. Third, as soon as we think we have nothing left to achieve, we will start drifting away from mastery. Like Pink writes about famous athletes, we can always get better. This might be most important to the already high achieving schools that don’t seem to want to improve.

19. ”Children careen from one flow moment to another, animated by a sense of joy, equipped with a mindset of possibility, and working with the dedication of a West Point cadet. They use their brains and their bodies to probe and draw feedback from the environment in an endless pursuit of mastery.”

Now, we just have to guide them to the learning and let their natural flow do what it does best.

The last section of the book, the Toolkit, contains several practical steps for individuals, organizations, and schools. I was most interested in the following three toolkit items:

\* Three-part Type I Test for Homework  
\* Autonomy over how and when to do the work?  
\* Does the assignment promote mastery by offering a novel, engaging task?  
\* Do my students understand the purpose of this assignment?  
\* FedEx or 20% time for the students  
\* Offer praise…The Right Way  
\* Praise effort and strategy, not intelligence  
\* Make praise specific  
\* Praise in private  
\* Offer praise only when there’s a good reason

*Drive* is an important look at motivation in a time when those in charge of the education reform discussion are pushing extrinsic motivators that do not work for teachers. I’d like all those involved in Ed Reform to understand the ideas in *Drive*; maybe then, they would change their tunes and begin thinking about what is really good for children.

For a great summary of the book, please watch this video: http://youtu.be/u6XAPnuFjJc