

# Drive: Putting Students at the Wheel with Agency, Identity, and Altruism

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## Plenary Presentation Abstract

I will start with a big anthropological story (as Daniel Pink does) of the evolution of humanity's drives (motivations) but with a few interesting twists and turns that even Pink has not put together yet, supported by research from John Schumann's UCLA laboratory. I will then bring it all down to the classroom level and ask what this tells us about facilitating learning in our classrooms and out.



*Agency*, the capacity to control at least some of your actions and your world) is an exciting elementary drive that has pushed us from the beginning of our species. Agency and autonomy exist in most animals on the earth, but they have special dopamine connections to our development of pleasure and meaningfulness. As a species, we love to learn to do new things, and it increases our ability to control what we do. It is the answer to: Why is a turtle trying to fly more beautiful than a bird sitting in a tree?



*Identity* has to do with our ability to identify others and then identify with them in order to get a sense of belonging and community that are also powerful drives. Identity and community feed *altruism* in that once you identify with others, you tend to feel what they feel (with our mirror neurons) and want to help them if at all possible. Mirror neurons have speeded the advancements in civilizations, increasing adoption of new forms of behavior and technologies, i.e., massive imitation. Here culturally developed senses of autonomy and difference may also clash with desires for altruistic actions through identifying. But in general, our brains function to get excited about learning and improving, and there is evidence that at least some of the species are getting more and more altruistically excited about the development of others and enabling others (often what teachers do) rather than fighting for a piece of the ground.

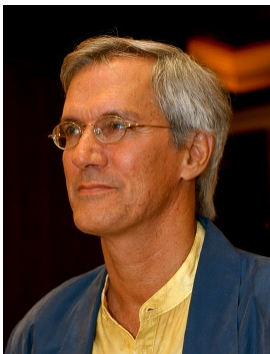
In our classrooms, all these drives are present, and the tone set by teachers can often determine the atmosphere. I will demonstrate several everyday activities that hopefully help us to use these motivations in proactive ways. Angeles Arrien has said, "I think the human spirit always wants to make a contribution. And I don't think there are enough invitations" (Briskin et al., 2009, p. 156). One of our main jobs is to assure there are enough invitations to help others in our classes.

Briskin, A., Erickson, S., Ott, J., & Callanan, T. (2009). *The power of collective wisdom and the trap of collective folly*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Pink, D. (2006). *A whole new mind*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York: Riverhead/Penguin.

## Biographical Sketch



**Tim Murphey** (PhD Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland) is editor of TESOL's *Professional Development in Language Education* book series and co-author with Zoltan Dörnyei of *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom*. He has studied and taught in Europe for 15 years and in Asia for another 15. His research interests at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan include Vygotskian socio-cultural theory (SCT) with a transdisciplinary emphasis on community, play, and music. Several of his books, *Teaching One to One* (1991, Longman, 1991), *Music and Song* (1992, OUP), and *Language Hungry!* (2006, *Helbling Languages*) have been widely cited and used, as have his numerous book chapters and articles (<http://web.me.com/murpheytim>). Dr. Murphey also has about 50 short video clips at the National Foreign Language Resources Center, University of Hawaii (Tim Murphey Tips, [http://www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=274902FC5BDAAA30](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=274902FC5BDAAA30)) and 10 freely downloadable presentations. Dr. Murphey's new novel, *The Tale That Wags*, is about the university entrance examination system in Japan. Email: [mitsmail1@gmail.com](mailto:mitsmail1@gmail.com)