Death of Insecurity

Sebastien believed that the purpose of life was to have fun while enjoying the fullness of life holistically. After becoming familiar with Battiste’s work around nourishing the learning spirit, he began to think about this autobiographically. He believed that he had a “stronger than average” learning spirit, but that it had been “lessening in strength” gradually over his lifetime. He felt that by understanding his own learning journey better, his job as a high school teacher would be easier as he would understand more about “why, when and how the learning spirit is killed in youth.” Hints of his inquiry were evident in his writing around the Chambers article where he stated that the trick was, “to stay on your path with heart for as long as possible.” His initial question became, “Is it possible to revive the learning spirit, and how might this happen?”

Sebastien believed that having a healthy learning spirit was directly tied to being satisfied and engaged as a learner, and that without it, learning becomes a chore rather than enjoyable. He believed that as a teacher he was “not just simply teaching academics”, but that he had a moral obligation to nurture the learning spirits of his students. He wanted to help his students to invest in their own personal growth and build notions of success from their feelings and beliefs, as opposed to external forces. In addition to self-study, Sebastien interviewed many of his high school friends, some who had gone on to university (mostly in the sciences) and who helped him understand is own views more fully. More importantly, he spoke with friends who had hated high school and this shed light on the thoughts of students who struggled.

One of the biggest problems Sebastien faced in his inquiry was around the broad nature of the topic, as well as its magnitude. In the first mentoring session the idea of creating a mind map was offered as a way to clarify his thinking. He decided to take this up and brought his complex map to the second mentoring session (see attached facsimile). The yellow marks are those of the mentor, added during the discussion. Much of this conversation revolved around the interrelated concepts (stared) of the linear and strict limits of high school structures (including the PLOs) and high school dropouts. This led to discussion around assessment, self-direction and insecurity. At some point, the map was divided in two by a squiggly line. One side represented learning outside of school that Sebastien felt was more conducive to the learning spirit. The role of insecurity in learning became a strong focus as he gained clarity on the web-like structure of his topic and took him into thinking more carefully about something that was not on his map, the role of community in nourishing the learning spirit.

Sebastien was glad to have not followed his initial inclination to gather empirical data of his topic. He wrote, “this was really the first time I was able to do a project that involved thought. Most other projects involve heavy research and ‘facts’, and these do not lend much to the imagination.” His openness to imagining in the mapping process led him to a stronger theoretical understanding of his topic that he
believed gave him a base for practical ways of proceeding as a teacher. Sebastien likened his inquiry to “running around a massive hedge maze. It’s fun, confusing and has many paths.... The end of the maze is really the start of a new one. A stance is a spot to stop and reflect.” Part of his sharing with his peers included the following creative video that describes his stance on learning spirit for that moment in time, entitled, Death of Insecurity (57 seconds, available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnXmEmEy77o)

Video Description:
A young woman happily skips into the frame singing, “la, la, la” and holding a sign that says LEARNING SPIRIT. There is a dark hooded shape lurking on the floor. A crumpled ball of paper flies at her from off set unexpectedly, knocking her sign out of her hands. Opening the ball, she shows us that PLO is written on it in bold letters. “Oh!... she sounds surprised, and then thoughtful, “Hmmm.” She picks up her LEARNING SPIRIT and starts to sing again, only to be hit by another scrunched up message. This one says DISCONNECTION. Now she scratches her head and looks confused as she picks up her LEARNING SPIRIT. She looks anxiously over her shoulder as the dark mass behind her starts to rouse and mutter. She is bombarded yet again! “Oh,” she says, with a frown, FAILURE. The hooded shape rises and begins to whack her on the shoulder with an inflatable bat. His sign says INSECURITY, and he keeps hitting her. She covers her head, yelping as more balls fly at her. Fortunately, as she begins to recoil from the blows, the sword of COMMUNITY enters the scene (front and centre, close up), followed by the shield of SELF DIRECTED LEARNING and HOLISTIC TEACHING. The shield thwarts more incoming projectiles, and a handsome hero with dark glasses (could he be a teacher?!?) attacks INSECURITY with the sword. The LEARNING SPIRIT is restored as the young woman smiles and kicks up her heals.