As I am in the midst of writing

My intention is to write a piece that is supposed to be inspirational and perhaps provocative. What I notice as I commence writing is that I begin with a list; an itemized set of technicalities and “to do’s.” I am compelled, mostly out of habit, to immediately perpetuate such work through a roster (i.e. outline) that guides me through the writing process. When did I become so regimented in my writing? I feel this distancing of myself from the process, leaving me at a loss for meaningful words, because it all feels so “not me.”

I begin to pay attention to the power dynamics in the language I use. I decide to delete and minimize the use of certain words, as a way of getting back into an embodied space of
remembering and re-presenting. What I realize is that each decision is reminiscent of yet another power discourse on the time/space continuum. I want to avoid the discussion of power, but it (power) always seeps into everything, even when I call it something else, like “energy.” This cyclic dynamic of shifting words and renaming and reforming the indistinguishable and trivial bits, matter to me. More important than the actual label that I assign an object, action, or concept is the process of coming to inquire through language and experience, being attentive to what the practice of writing through the tensions provokes in me. The practice of engaging in the process itself is more important than what I provoke in it; that is, the social text I live and write to be, as “x” construct or product. Each rendition becomes an exercise of remembering the tensions and difficulties, holding onto each perceived momentary insight, which feels like a fleeting thought and feeling that dissipates before its capture. It is in this space of becoming that I must let go…let go the idea of holding onto what I deem to be important and let go my inhibitions. Ironically, it is in the letting go that hope manifests, and the paradoxical complexity of that tensile dance continues.

Before I expand on the theoretical influences that have guided my journey, which are intricate within themselves, I aim to be attuned to my current situatedness as I process in my own unrefined fashion the implicated historicities and contexts that preceded my reflective explorations. I notice how I situate myself in the midst of the tensions of language, housed between paradoxes, as language constructs my interactions in the nether space between all the identities that box me into a web of discourses. My choices shape the written text in terms of format, font, and language, which sustain and retain some tangible or imagined value through each re-visioning. I pay attention to how I structure my thoughts into statements. With this attentiveness comes the reflective loop that folds me back on myself. When my statements feel intense, forced, and artificial, I am compelled to reflect on this offering as “not quite being there.” Once again, it is in this paradoxical zone of anticipation and discouragement that hope resurfaces.

In these tensile spaces, I choose to interrupt the process of asserting my space, by offering questions as a way of opening to the (in)between-ness of the social text co-created in reflection; always already a collaborative project. I consider how the process of reflection in query feels merely like a covert mask, rather than an overt statement, of my initial intention—(in)tension—as the storied experiences unfold and enfold amidst the renderings of inquiry.

**Unsettling the location of “I”**

As I play with and inter-rupture language, I consider how “(in)query” and “inquiry” are a layering between the latter as process and the emergent product as social text written/unwritten, scripted/unscripted in our storied ways of being in relation with one another. What this means is that as my text unfolds, so too do my experiences as an educator, a re-searcher, a mother (an example, among the many other connections I espouse that simultaneously other me) and most importantly, as a human being. I am jarred by each ebb and flow of living inquiry that shakes my complicity and fuses the complexity into the wholly otherness I am. What this leaves is an attunement to and appreciation for the relational dimensions between the I/we interface, always already a singularity and whole. My aim is to unravel the I/we interface as one of the most profound paradoxical complexities that house the tensions I write.

In this moment as I stand before you
I register for a course that intrigues me by its title, “Living Inquiry” while I am an “unclassified student” contemplating continuing my graduate education. I am transformed. Being part of Meyer’s “Living Inquiry” course provoked the way I integrated my process of day-to-day knowing, being, and doing, as I live it in all its complexity. Through that immersion, I was and continue to be encouraged to explore and experience themes of place/space, language, time and self/other. I notice the challenge of expressing an approach and (i)deas from the “I,” which may be interpreted and taken up in different ways by “the other” as “we,” translated into potential mis-communication and mis-re-presentation. I strive to write my way through this process of reimagining and practicing this social text I live.

I consider the context of my situatedness as I envision Meyer’s conceptual renditions of living inquiry. What I notice is that “what actually happens” in practice is a matrix of unknowing, inconsistency, incongruence, and playful tensions (at times not feeling very playful) that constantly confront my ways of coming to/through inquiry. Repetition in each rendering becomes increasingly important and simultaneously nauseating in how the waves of re-membering and rendering unfold and enfold a narrative within a narrative (King, 2003), within…

I acknowledge that being situated within the nursing context or frame of reference is my most familiar. Such a situatedness and context shapes a particular view of the world, adding dimension to the interdisciplinary/disciplinary academic discourses I explore. Although it is through my experience of being situated as a nurse educator and recent graduate student that I am privileged in how I come to write my process of learning to live inquiry, my process is inclusive of my selves/identities scripted and unscripted, in the liminal spaces betwixt and between the identities of others.

I question my praxis of living learning amidst my propensity toward “being good at what I do,” which seems more of an investment in the instructional and instrumental capacity to distribute information rather than acting to focus on living the conceptual theory I aspire toward. Do I offer a space for open communication in the classroom that engages and supports living (in)query? Do I provide space for ongoing assessment of how we are/are not collectively connecting to (in)formation? What I feel at the moment is overwhelmed by the PowerPoint presentations that I have been given (by who?) to make my life easier, which are intended to guide me through the material I must cover. I notice that I am not connected to this way of thinking through topics and I am definitely not connected to this way of sharing (in)formation.

How do I negotiate being a novice (a title I abhor) in the world of teaching/learning—when I admittedly struggle with my own insecurities in skillfulness, with my unfamiliarity with the curriculum philosophy (which doesn’t belong to me)…while searching for the philosophy I espouse—as I live (in)query of the multiplicities that do not feel consistent and congruent within my conceptualization of living inquiry?
My process beckons me to engage…

How do I establish trust with these individuals who have been labeled “students,” with whom I will co-inquire? Do I create a safe environment? Is being safe the goal? It is very much the focus in the world of healthcare when “clients” are at risk of being harmed by “dangerous” nursing students and nurses. Is safety possible or is safety an illusion that we aspire toward, when in fear of being found to be “wrong doing,” or in some way being unethical?

My nursing lens holds me to the prevention of risk, to the promotion of protecting us from harm…is this actually possible when we are living and breathing these moments of uncertainty? How does the potential for ethical confrontations inhibit our process of inquiry? What does being ethical mean in the context of living inquiry? How do we in our (in)forma©tivity construct the boundaries between I/other that represent respectful negotiations of co-creation?

How do we move toward a “strengths-based” approach while acknowledging that we are human and make mistakes as we learn…if we cannot have the space to be human as learners, what are we saying about praxis and our expectations of professionals? What I am considering feels in some ways like I am blaspheming the standards I am expected to uphold for the benefit of safe keeping of “the public.” I feel the need to speak this way, to be thoughtful about the complexities, as I am inspired to live the tensile spaces between policy/nursing care standard and what actually happens in our lived experience.
At times, I find it difficult to focus on the philosophy of the curriculum and I become the “task master” and “at risk student” detector (as though this were my designation by default). I consider how we, as educators, are encouraged to label the diverse student population into manageable sectors (i.e. “at risk” student, student with special needs, etc.). When we extend our services to meet the unique needs and learning styles of students, we tend to typify and be deterministic in our approach, as put forward by curricula with constructionist tendencies. For example, the courses that attempt to acknowledge diversity, but rather are exemplifying concepts in a stereotypical fashion; assuming similar responses from groups of peoples that are predetermined based on like/similar characteristics. What happens to those that fall between the acknowledged categorization of power discourses, between the predetermined, identifiable margins into the cracks?

Am I guiding the learner toward the curriculum and facilitating a means of navigating through “the system,” versus stepping back and learning from the diversity of individual perspectives to (in)form our curriculum and methods of engaging in praxis? Curriculum when viewed as praxis research, according to Lather (1991), is a pedagogy of reflexive engagement in a critical, social, human science, being respectful of the parameters of the present lifeworld and experiences of participants within an awareness of social and historical contexts of that present. Lather challenges us in research and pedagogy to salvage praxis as

[an] interruptor strategy…[u]ncovering the particularity and contingency of our knowledge and practices at the core of whatever generative advances we might make regarding our purposes and practices.

—Lather, 1991, 14

What is the intention behind spending so much time and energy creating traps and identifiers for “the at-risk student?” Are we seeking to maintain standards and/or justify our work in a particular way? How do we unpack the discourses that paralyze us between concerns for safety of the public (as dictated by registering bodies that guide the profession) and the pedagogical concerns of meeting individual and collaborative student learning needs identified by those students, who resist classification and are simultaneously designated as ‘x’?

At Risk
Mis-re-presentation
Precludes me,
as I am labeled, categorized, diagnosed
Dis-eased.

In my everydayness,
I am becoming
Othered,
Not I; somehow different from me.

My (i)dentity
Branded ©
At risk of being human
... a crack opens in the cave, aside from a bit of crumbling dirt, I survive and thrive... as I careen into another abyss...

I resist the notion of linear views of learning, yet the ‘I’ constructs self-implode me. At times, I feel I am the sole member of my idealized learning collective, but I’m not living the dream. My sense of space is gaping between curriculum and lived experience like an open wound, raw and exposed to the elements. All the ideas are swirling in my head, drifting in vacuous clouds of omniscience.

When I am catapulted back to the reality of being conscious of what is actually happening, I am struck by the pained expressions of boredom searing from the eyes of a classroom of onlookers. The irony of this sight is that I am reading excerpts from Freire’s text, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1970), as a means of preparing students for what to expect in my class. This irony is lost on me in my pedagogical reverie in the heat of the moment.

My visioning is blinded by the emptiness of their gaze, as I no longer imagine my claims of unique beings, but rather impassive bystanders bearing this accidental trauma, as if they were watching me as their TV... waiting to be entertained. I come to realize that this performance is a representation of my alienation and isolation, where I stand out there alone. I am safe behind the lesson plans and prescribed formulas of a preset curriculum, talking my monologue about idealized values and beliefs...and as long as I do not look at those faces, the status quo is maintained.

Being confronted by looks of apathy and dis-interest confront my exuberant ranting and raving about the world as I perceive it, through the vacuum of the course content. No matter the import I espoused on my pedagogical philosophy, there was something more, something missing...perhaps it was a bit about my neophyte approaches, lack of skill, intent, and attunement to our (dis)connections. It may have been about the lack of silence that author and educator, O’Reilly (Palmer & O’Reilly, 1998) covets in her classroom; the silence we struggle to fill with information; the silence we fear will linger longer and take an awkward eternity.

I have difficulty opening to this space of the unexpected, even though that is what I believe to be important...what actually happens, leaves me shaken... and pushed back into the space of co-learner, where I seemed to have lost my footing to satiate an appetite for platitudes and promises.

Between closing and beginning lives a gap, a casesura, a discontinuity. The betweenness is a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other. It is neither poised nor unpoised, yet moves both ways...

It is the STOP.

(Applebaum, 1995)

When I pay attention to these moments of stasis, they too become “ah-ha” moments in which I am increasingly open to the unknowing and questioning. I begin to perceive my co-involvement in the cycle of our bearing witness to each other, as we mirror our otherness and our sameness. I feel I am more
open to listen to the silence and hold the tension with my own intentions. I begin to notice the humanness between the deca-dence and the cracks between the lines, where a smile emerges.

The challenge for educators is to learn to embrace teaching as pedagogical action that permits cracks to appear in order for learning to happen.

—Fels, 2004, 76

Fels, as graduate educator, introduced me to Applebaum. Now as I consider my meandering paths, which continue to shift and transform, I begin to see the connections between the cracks. As a nursing educator and as a new scholar, my juxtaposition of identity opens me to hear and speak the language of power discourses, striving toward inclusion/egalitarianism and a desire to maintain social justice. Simultaneously, my viewpoint aims to hold the tension that is imbedded in the struggle to create and learn from “the curriculum” that often overlooks the process of becoming and being in moments of transition, holding the uncertainty of every-dayness, emerging beyond static notions of roles and identified selves. Martusewicz (2001) writes about “passages beyond critical pedagogy” (4), which she describes, similar to Aoki, as an emersion of the educator learning from the student through the tensions between our planned curriculum and what actually happens. Martusewicz elaborates that often educators who are determined to make change have expectations that are unrealistic, disconnected from the relationships that must first manifest (or do not develop because of the disconnect) in the classroom.

Curriculum scholar, Aoki (Pinar & Irwin, 2005), through his experiences as an educator, alludes to the foreignness in the face of hospitality that apprehends the space between the curriculum as planned and the curriculum as lived. What I understand of this now, from my experiences, such as those above, is that there is a need for the genuine authentic relational narrative to open to the gap between what we plan and what actually happens. What he speaks to is the educator’s responsibility to open the liminal gap/crack/space that thus creates a bridge between seemingly disparate extremes of ambivalence in “the tensioned space of both “and/not-and” a space of conjoining and disrupting, (…) a generative space of possibilities, a space wherein tensioned ambiguity newness emerges” (Pinar & Irwin, 2005, 318). Aoki articulated these in between spaces as metonymic moments; where he contends that we are “living in the spaces of between, marked by the cracks in the words” for example, “curriculum-as-plan/curriculum-as/live(d);” a difficult and ambiguous pedagogy of possibility (321). Aoki uses Cohen’s lyric philosophy to unsettle curriculum conversations through history as a metonymy, “There’s a crack, a crack in everything; that’s how the light comes in” (Pinar & Irwin, 321). This crack, he proceeds to open further into the living spaces of curriculum, between narrative languages of (in)di-visible paradox/dichotomy.

As I open myself to the cracks, the questions flow forth: Do I share my humanness, which feels altogether inconsistent and incongruent, and thereby introduce vulnerability into the inevitable power dynamic of my own expectations of mutual respectfulness? Does our curriculum, which aspires toward egalitarian relationships, set us up for disappointment by not questioning and acknowledging the systems and conditions in which we exist as powering over structures?

We talk about other structures out there, but what about what is actually happening right here and now? How do I even get to the unique learning
approaches out there, if I am focused on these institutional policies and expectations that feel tightly bound around my feet, dragging me back to evaluative measures of the planned curriculum? How does my quest to be organized dictate a certain dynamic, putting forward a proclamation that I am showing preparation by example and perhaps confirming that I am focused on my own performance in the presentation of (in)formation? How do I live as a learner amongst learners in process...when I feel so far away?

Academic Performance: A space of learning both within and without, through which action-process occurs utterly through form and simultaneously through the destruction of form.

—Fels & Stothers, 1996, 257

I consider Fels & Stothers’ notion of academic performance, as I re-visit and question my own performa©tivity in the social text of academia: How are my questions open, inclusive, and provocative in the face of a curriculum that at times feels closed, fixed, and undisputed in its relative truth/knowledge base? I am re-inspired by their play on form as a calling attention to how we are formed as they destruct and question what forms us. It is this play that is the spirit of both Meyer and Aoki that beckons me to continue on this pathological journey of hope.

Re-emerging from the clouds of confusion, identity crisis, and other pathologies

Who and what are the resources that I have at my disposal? Do we (as a class/as a group of colleagues) work together to create an atmosphere where it is important to seek multiple resources and sources to our inquiries? How do I deal with inconsistencies between my approach and the curriculum put forward by the academy, when the connections appear
unclear, challenging, and left unchallenged through varied interpretations and constructions predetermined in our course syllabus?

How do I get involved in the community of educators in different ways to affect change (i.e. other than by being expected to sit on another expendable committee of sorts)? How do I get involved without perpetuating the cycle of complacency (i.e. committees taking up time and creating make-work projects, which at times feel like academic posturing or maintaining the status quo of vested interest groups)?

Today, I am confronted with the challenge of what it is like to teach 30 students material that is new to me and to my fellow colleagues teaching the course. Amidst the uncertainty, I expect to sustain motivation and interest with a quiet group that is not willing to engage in dialogue. What unfolds is my insecurity in my own abilities and my need for acceptance. I notice the power dynamic of my positioning at the front of the class and consider the tensions.

I feel confronted by the egalitarian aspects of our collaborative curriculum; perceptions I safely tuck away in the recesses of my mind. My judgment of the generation ‘x’ consumer learner, who is waiting to be entertained and filled with information, has enveloped and confounded the potential for individual uniqueness and imaginings of the collective learning experience to unfold...with potentials that on some level are un-theorize-able in the way that we have traditionally attempted to do, constraining the openings and filling the cracks.

What I remember…
Looking into their eyes
Feeling some inter-standing of suffering
Our human condition
Shared energy
Holding the fragile pieces of identity
Otherness fills the space
Empty void
Abyss of humanness
I share that responsibility
Care-full not to drop the tension

“Understanding has become impossible
because nothing stands under.
Interstanding has become unavoidable because
everything stands
between”
—Taylor and Saarinen,1994, 2

…ah-ha falls back into place, into the everydayness of things

Today, I question how I am being the learner I expect others to be? I reflect on my own historicity and notice that my most challenging experiences are
the ones in which I learned the most. I am compelled to consider my inspirational teachers and what it was about their way of being that had an influence on my learning. I re-consider my need for acceptance, my values of individual, unique learning styles, and I go back to the classroom for another go...planning as I live and living as I plan. How am I attentive to the moments when ‘it’s all about me’ sets in, steering the learning process in a particular direction? What do I do with this awareness? How do my expectations regarding feedback on my performance negate the dynamic of the learning process?

I share a methodological approach that feels metonymic and speaks to complexity, with my colleagues, as I describe my processing in the form of a presentation about “what I’m up to,” in an effort to contextualize the unraveling and unpacking of language and ideas that constitute our situatedness. I receive a comment that questions why I am talking about research and inquiry in this exercise of exploration into teaching.

At each juncture, I am challenged to articulate, to disrupt, and to clarify what it is I am getting at.

If we conceive of researching, teaching and art-making as activities that weave in and through one another—an interweaving and intraweaving of concepts, activities, and feelings—we are creating fabrics of similarity and difference. In these intralingual acts, there is at once an acceptance of playing with particular categories and a refusal to be aligned with any one category.

—Irwin, 2004, 28-29

What I notice in my current situatedness in nursing education is how philosophies and theories challenge and are confronted by the actual praxis of healthfulness and holism in the process of how we as educators and students (co-learners in process) engage in living pedagogy (uniquely and collaboratively). As a faculty and student body, I perceive that we are encouraging and have acclimatized to unhealthful behavior (i.e. working long hours, under increased stress, with poor eating and sleeping patterns). Additionally, we have not created nor provided opportunity for ourselves to come together and learn from each other through the complexities of who/how we are as human beings, beyond and including our professional perspectives as nurse educators/students. It seems that no one wants to acknowledge these perceptions or speak to our hypocrisy.

How do we imagine and create a pedagogy and living praxis that nurtures us in our everydayness? What is at risk as we struggle to navigate and negotiate the spaces between us as academics, as community members, as colleagues and with our students...with a language of “being at risk” being central to our a curricular dialogues; how do we flip this language on its head, be especially critical in light of increased demands and decreased support for both faculty and students? How do we choose to explore the layered complexities of this academic environment, which extends to other academic environments not restricted to nursing? How do students and faculty, as co-learners in support networks, express their experience and perceptions of pedagogy as lived, as they assess and critically reflect on the connections between philosophy/theory/policy and ‘what actually happens’ as an evolving praxis of living pedagogy?
I hear complaints of individuals (students) not getting enough sleep, of having to work to support themselves through school and constantly juggling the many demands and facets of a "modern" life. What happened to our discussions of self-care as a priority to quality of life? How do we promote the healthfulness we profess is so important? How am I contributing to the stressfulness of being a student? How am I fostering a sense of community in the midst of large classroom sizes? How do I support and facilitate learning in environments that feel toxic and provide/sustain de-toxification through our interactions within these environments (i.e. hospital units that act as clinical settings for student learning)?

How am I taking care of myself during these moments of tension with time/space? What do I do to sustain, maintain and actively participate in my own reflexive process of inquiry and healthfulness? How are we embodying our experiences and expressions of those experiences within the academic setting, which tends to be overwhelmingly “mind-full?” I keep coming back to the conditions that set up our expectations of progress. I wonder what questions we need to be asking to re-imagine power discourses and the imaginary “power over” our lives that efficiency models of progress perpetuate.

How do I share a form of language and expression of experience without othering, when the text itself is a form of otherness, as I, author, am othered, from it, text? This provokes the question of why it is that I question the otherness as much as how the otherness became a given…reverting back to the power discourse discussion that boxes me in, as though it were a dichotomy and not a paradoxical complexity. How do I embrace my othering as much as my process of unknowing as a means of playing the tensions with my intentions in each moment of being?

Do we, as inquirers into educational processes, engage with intention, or conversely, do we become consumed by our complicit historical situatedness and context, holding onto our identified selves to justify and validate our inquiry to supplant curiosity through intended and focused engagement, thus perpetuating the structure of our coming together in a particular way? Are we as “role inhabitors” brought together by markers of language, category, and label holding the box around us, protecting us from irrelevant, inconsistent, and incongruent tendencies to stray from purpose, goal and objective?

—Szabo, 2005, 111

As I attempt to articulate the recycled quandaries between dichotomous living and paradoxical imagining, I am once again thrown back on myself. What are the assumptions and expectations I make of others and myself as learners, as I am increasingly aware of and value un-knowing, provoking truisms, and inter-rupting perceptions of knowledge? How do the expectations and assumptions that emerge from the planned curriculum and the institutional vision influence my inquiry and shape how we come together as learners? Do we as learners question the assumptions and expectations that unfold from the local and big picture deconstructions we discuss within our own contexts? At times, it seems easier and more politically correct to look elsewhere for examples, when so much of the change that needs to be provoked is right under our noses.
The educator, as re-searcher, thus has a responsibility to explore, question, provoke, and reveal the complexity and dynamics between interested parties; to disrupt and interrupt the constructions of reality that dichotomize and divide us, as much as the aspirations that venture into the paradoxical complexities that morph us. And within the pathological rubble of (de)con/struction we unleash the voice of humanness.

As an educator re-searcher, and learner of life, I am assigned the task of questioning my roles, identities, and how I am complicit in constructing the conditions within the context in which we find ourselves. I continue in my redundant rant to reiterate, in an effort to thoughtfully engage in the journey...what this nauseating process of recycling speaks is less important than the act, yet the speech is the act (here I commemorate the complexity Arendt has instilled in me)...and so on and so forth.

I want to cut and paste
and re-create
even this moment.
Each remembering
presented and re-presented
in a way
A-way from
becoming and coming to
(an)other awareness
Is all about being in the midst of the process.

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**About the Author**

**Joanna Szabo** received her doctoral degree from the University of British Columbia in 2009, from the Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry (CCFI), located in the Faculty of Education. Her dissertation was focused on the importance of manifesting process-as-product and exploring alternative methodologies and writing forms to express the process of living inquiry. She holds a BN from the University of Calgary and an MN from the University of Victoria. Dr. Szabo is an assistant professor at Mount Royal University. Her interests include: relational ethics; narrative, reflective and arts-informed inquiry; complexity thinking; exploring the discourses surrounding technology and globalization; and the tensions surrounding identity constructs embedded in the I/we interface.