Faculty of Education
Graduate Student Symposium

Proposal: Cops in the Head: Periperformative Disruptions in Educational Administration

J. Alysha Sloane

“The Cops in Martin’s Head”
Watercolour & Black & White Photography
J. A. Sloane, 2013

Cops in the Head: Periperformative Disruptions in Educational Administration,
cavorts in a liminal space where the social construction of educational administrative
performative utterances are infused, repeated, and reified. I will begin with Sedgwick’s concept
of periperformativity (2003) to examine the intersection between individual speech acts and the
responsibility of the community in which those relational speech acts are developed and
witnessed. This multimedia presentation will include three images and two sound clips that are rooted in Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed technique called, *Cops in the Head* (1998). I imagine possibilities for the intersection between Theatre of the Oppressed work and periperformitivity in educational administration praxis. Praxis in this case is defined as reflection and action in order to transform the world (Freire, 2008). The theatrical images and sound clips represent a dilemma faced by a fictitious high school principal named Martin. The representations are intended to create an opportunity for the audience to climb inside the exercise and witness the impact of the cops. Outside disciplinary thinking, *in the in-between*, is where we may find radical new approaches for undoing the cops who construct us in the lecture hall, at home, in the office, or in the staffroom. I argue that Theatre of the Oppressed work (Boal, 1979) can help educational administrators deconstruct well rehearsed, unexamined, and detrimental administrative performativities.

**Periperformativities**

Language is performative. If I speak, I seek to describe my reality but my speech also creates reality (Butler, 2004). When a school superintendent makes an explicit performative statement such as, “I expel you,” the adolescent moves through a space that exists between student and non-student. The administrator’s words produce a new reality, one where there are mobility demarcations, the stripping of a previous identity, and the inscription of a new one. Parents, fellow students, administrators, and teachers play a critical role in the adoption of this new reality. Acting as witnesses, they sanction the expulsion and reify its power. Placards, petitions, grievances, and questions are ciphers inside the machinations of the process.

Sedgwick coined the term *periperformative* to describe utterances that are “...not
themselves performatives, they are *about* performatives and, more properly, that they cluster *around* performatives” (2003, p. 68). She conceptualizes this special category of utterances that move beside, around, and up against the performative. Sedgwick builds her case for the generation of a new category through a critique of Austin’s (1970) attitudinal treatment of his “*I dare you.*” performative. She suggests Austin’s foundational work does not properly consider the “scene” in which the utterance has been made. If I dare you to do something, I must assume a real or an imagined audience for the spectacle I aim to unleash upon you. Witness responses can naturalize phenomena which might otherwise be considered absurd in (other) contexts that manifest different power relations.

I suggest periperformative acts can figuratively and literally dissolve ideological fissures, unmake categories, and make it more difficult to sustain entrenched representations of the other. Unfortunately there is much work to be done within antiessentialist research to connect the disinterpellation of the witness to active resistance and social change (Sedgwick, 2003). We require more nuanced conceptual tools so we are better able to notice how and when words and representations work to discipline our minds. I assert that Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal and in particular, his method *Cops in the Head*, is a conceptual tool that can provoke those entangled in educational administrative spectacles to take notice of the ways in which their visualities work to limit what they are able to think and practice in a school.
“Meet Martin’s Cops”
Photographs & Images: J. A. Sloane, 2013
Actors:  Top Left: Mojgan Asili; Top Right: Tara Subedi
Bottom Left: Odik Opap; Bottom Left: Kamau Kiaro
“Martin”: Trent Sloane (all 4 photos)
References


