

Pratt

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Submission date: 23-Jan-2019 10:22PM (UTC-0800)

Submission ID: 1067861967

File name: Pratt.docx (16.37K)

Word count: 777

Character count: 3948

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SA 2.1: Critical Assessment Of Pratt

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In Louise Pratt's 'Art of the Contact Zone', she emphasizes the importance of the contact zone, and also described the advantages along with disadvantages. She begins her writing by telling us about an event where her son was made fun of for his pronunciation. This ultimately rubbed her the wrong way, and she begins giving us the entire backstory of her son, Sam. She tells us reader the power of literacy and how Sam developed it through baseball, and also shaming the school for not giving her son any meaningful tasks. Then she goes ahead and talks about the history of the Guaman Poma's Letter, and then abruptly defines the contact zone – a place where two cultures come together and teach / learn from each other, simply an exchange in information. The text quickly moves onto the aftermath of the interaction between the Spanish and the Inca, where it immediately talks about the Spanish being greedy and conquering the other culture. Afterwards, it began talking about teachers and the affects of a class called 'Cultures, Ideas, Values'. With these examples, Pratt believes that the cons of the contact zone outweigh the disadvantages, because the disadvantages are easily preventable and controlled, as long as it is addressed. She simply believes that the contact zone is a great way of gathering new perspectives and that there aren't many risks.

I believe that her claim will most likely attract many individuals, because the way she formats her argument persuades us that the cons aren't as bad. Many people enjoy the idea of collaboration and being more knowledgeable, which is the main reason why and how Louise Pratt builds her audience. However, I personally believe that this type of thinking is an idealistic

approach – all pros no cons. Simply, there will always be a con in some shape or form because nothing will ever go your way. The idea of a contact zone is a great idea, however, the concept is impossible to fully achieve because reconciling our differences is practically impossible. Louise Pratt uses a great example of the Inca and Spanish, where Pratt explains the encounter between one another:

“Gunman Poma's New Chronicle ends with a revisionist account of the Spanish conquest, which, he argues, should have been a peaceful encounter of equals with the potential for benefiting both, but for the mindless greed of the Spanish” (Pratt, 660)

“The Spanish, he writes, brought nothing of value to share with the Andeans” (Pratt, 660)

“The Indies, he argues, should be administered through a collaboration of Inca and Spanish elites.” (Pratt, 660)

The text shows the dominance one culture had on another, and the inequality with it. I personally feel that this will most likely happen because humans naturally desire to showcase their dominance / superiority among others. Although some humans are better at containing it, there will always be the few that're completely trigger happy, resulting in horrendous outcomes like these. However, I do believe that there is another side to the contact zone that's extremely useful and powerful. Louise Pratt's example of the 'Diversity, Ideas, Values' class subject displays the pros of the contact zone extremely well:

“All the students in the class had the experience, for example, of hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students saw their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame; all the students experienced face-to-face the ignorance and incomprehension, and occasionally the hostility, of others.” (Pratt, 667)

The way the class unifies a diverse body brings in a different and unique perspectives. The contact zone allows for that reconcile of differences by teaching those in the room acceptance of their culture. That's exactly where I can agree on Pratt's point on the contacting zone having its pros, because that acceptance is the first step in resolving bigger problems, such as the inequality throughout the world. This contact zone allows for unique perspectives to meet and learn from one another. Without the contact zone, people will be surrounded by those who are the same culture, making you get used to hearing all the good things about it. It'll often time neglect the low points of not only your culture, but those around you. That'll impact the way you walk and treat others that ultimately aren't the same as you. That's why by becoming more culturally aware through the contact zone, it'll be the first steps in reconciling our differences and suppressing the human nature of dominance.

Citation

- ³ Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* 1991. New York: Modern Language Association P, 1991: 33-40.

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