

Free essay about community- contact zone

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



Very many communities and societies exist today but the one that I am familiar with most is my class. I am currently in college and the school is an assemblage of people from all walks of life. My class, which is to large part composed of my course mates, also exhibits a divergent assemblage of individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

In “ Arts of the Contact Zone” Mary Louis Pratt brings forth an argument about a “ community” and a “ contact” zone. The word community is quite a common phrase and according to Pratt, the society’s idea of community is “ strongly utopian, embodying values like equality, fraternity liberty which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize”. In regards to a contact zone, Pratt argues that “ the idea of a contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the community”.

Pratt contends that community is an imagined and an idealized construction. This is because it has an assumed unity that instead of liberating marginalized voices suppresses them.

In light of Pratt’s point of view, my classroom can be considered a community but can also be considered as a contact zone at the same time. My class is a community because everybody is there for a similar reason. Everyone in the classroom experiences similar surroundings and the professor or the lecturer teaches the same ideas to the entire class. As mentioned earlier, my class brags of members from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. From Caucasians, African Americans, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, my class seems to have it all. As such, one would

think that getting along would be a daunting task and there is no way that we would ever get along and the word community would not apply. However, this is not so.

Things were quite rocky at the beginning when we first joined up but over time, things have only gotten better. For instance, most of us did not know each other on a personal level. Our diverse range of backgrounds only aggravated the situation. We also took quite a lot of time to understand and get used to our professors. However, once we got used to each other and our professor, everything started to become quite smooth and this has been the trend for quite some time now. These days, entering into the classroom is like entering into a small mini world. The class offers some form of a “ safe house”. Pratt defines a safe house as a place or location where “ groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogenous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared misunderstandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression”. During classroom sessions, we are all able to escape the expectations of the general social world. In this confined environment, we consider as our “ safe house”, we can talk to anyone without regards to our many differences. Every single student has at least something in common with the others. We are in the same class, we complete similar assignments and we are treated in a similar way. In our class sessions, it is common for the professor to assign us group assignments. Sometimes the professor arranges us in a set of groups while in other instances, we are told to arrange ourselves in compatible groups. It is in such instances that the definition of “ community” finds massive application. During such cases, we are able to assemble our strengths and

weaknesses and make them work together so as to get the project done in the best way possible and make sure that everyone the bets marks possible. However, the above description is what Ben Anderson would call an “imagined community” which is in real sense a contact zone. The single most thing that qualifies our classroom to be a contact zone is our diverse backgrounds. In addition, everyone in the class is different, whether cognitively or physically. As mentioned earlier, Pratt thinks that “the idea of a contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy” and this notion significantly applies in the classroom setting. The common goal of getting educated and passing our exams that we all share in the class does not veil the fact that we are significantly different. This is just in terms of our differing ethnicities but also because of our the different cliques and personalities that we share. According to Pratt, a contact zone is also used “to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they lived out in many part of the world today”. Even though we shared many traits and ideas, we would never actually be the same 100%. As Pratt argues, there is a need for us to develop methods of comprehending or even noticing the intellectual and the social spaces that are not unified, homogenous so as to develop ways of valuing and even tolerating differences.

I think our class is more of contact zone rather than a community. To give an example, there was a time a debate sprang up randomly in our class about

the issue of racism. The question was whether racism still existed the society today. Everyone agreed that racism was indeed still rampant in the society but what got the debate going was when an aspect of stereotyping was introduced. One person suggested that black people are naturally more arrogant and loud. The opinion of the class was divided right at the middle with the black students vehemently opposing this statement while the Caucasian students save for a few supported the statement. At this time, the notion of a community did not seem to exist and everyone had a differing opinion. This scenario reinforces Pratt's assertion that there is a need for us to move away from this " utopian community" that we tend to create in our minds and deal with this harsh reality of a " contact zone". Until the public is able to do this, cultures will not cease clashing as a " contact zone". This hugely applies to our class. It seems that we have been blinded by this " utopian fantasy" where we think that simply because we get along in class, share similar goals and are taught similar ideas, we are essentially a community. However, as seen in the debate mentioned above, some unspoken issues need to be addressed before we can consider ourselves a community. The utopian fantasy where a society generally disregards and lives without actually realizing the wide variety of differences or problems that need addressing is surely very destructive. What's even more worrying is that people are aware of it but tend to ignore it.

Works Cited

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