



The University of
the West Indies
Institute of Gender and
Development Studies



Issue 5 – 2011

The Novel as a Bridge to Understanding Violence and Oppression

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Abstract

“The Novel as a Bridge to Understanding Violence and Oppression” is the academic path described in this paper. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat was the novel used as that bridge in a city college critical reading class. The question—How does one engage the student and facilitate the development of sustained critical thinking?—drove the research. The instructor used a critical pedagogy inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The paper sheds light on the importance of relationships and methods used to facilitate the development of critical literacy. Various media were woven together to sustain intellectual engagement. Over a three-month period, the classroom community explored and confronted issues of gender, race, sexuality, family, and class. The students broadened their understanding of social justice. Their experiences produced a number of outcomes. Students examined the kinds of violence produced in society and designed presentations that exhibited their understandings; they wrote extensions to the novel which reflected their empathy with the female characters; they produced Venn diagrams as they explored historical and current events. In the end, there were implications that the hegemonic impact of globalization called for the need for a paradigm shift in education.

Key words: critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, gender, violence, hegemonic globalization