

Existential Crisis on a Field Course

Gillian Gerhard
University of British Columbia

Who am I to teach these students?

What can I teach?

What do I know?

I am not a geologist, botanist, atmospheric scientist,

zoologist, microbiologist, or astronomer.

I can't teach those things.

I could talk about calculus, and funky math,

economics, and the

Life-Cycle Environmental Impacts of Manufacturing Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cells,

but none of that seems terribly relevant here,

on the pacific coast of Baja California.

Here

Where Boojum trees aren't just in poems;

Where lizards dance on hot sand;

Where lava clinks like heavy glass and looks like frozen froth;

Where snails drill holes in captive shells;

Where sand is black and white and pink;

Where squids are purple water jets that come ashore to die;

Where elephant trees live improbable lives and

Agave do bloom in the afternoon.

I discover these things with my students,

but what do I teach them? Do I teach by asking questions,

if I truly mean: What? How? Why?

Do I teach by offering my attention?

My wonder? My curiosity? My passion?

Is this enough?

Does this make me a teacher?