

Teaching on the Edge: Navigating Vicarious Trauma and Ethical Dilemmas in Prison Education

Charmaine Phipps

Chaffey College, United States

Abstract

Prison education is a challenging space that often presents educators with difficult emotional and moral conundrums. This paper reflects the devastating effects of vicarious trauma experienced by prison educators as they come to know about their students' violent pasts. Through the lens of personal experience, this study delves into the psychological toll that arises from reconciling the dual identities of students—both as individuals seeking redemption and as perpetrators of heinous crimes. The paper further questions the ethical dilemmas of cultivating knowledge for students who have caused substantive social harm and challenges our limits towards empathy, caring or educating perpetrators in transformative learning. By integrating personal narrative with scholarly research, this work aims to shed light on the emotional labor of prison educators and the ethical complexities inherent in their role.

Keywords: Vicarious Trauma; Prison Education; Ethical Dilemmas in Correctional Teaching; Incarcerated Students' Rehabilitation; Educator Emotional Well-being