

# The Panopticon Classroom: The Role of CCTV in Shaping Teachers' Behavior

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## Abstract

The growing use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in educational settings, particularly inside classrooms, is predominantly justified by the need to ensure security; however, the consequences of this surveillance on teachers' behavior and professional identity have largely been overlooked. The present study aims to investigate the role of CCTV cameras in shaping and modifying teacher behavior. Given the theoretical nature of this research, the methodology employs a qualitative approach, based on conceptual analysis and informed by Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of disciplinary power and Jeremy Bentham's concept of the Panopticon. The findings demonstrate that installing cameras in the classroom transforms this space into a modern Panopticon. Based on the Foucauldian principles of visibility, uncertainty of observation, and normalization, teachers, aware of the constant possibility of being watched, internalize the gaze of the observer and continuously engage in self-regulation and behavioral modification. The results indicate that video surveillance is not merely a neutral security tool, but rather an active agent in controlling and directing behavior, which can severely impact teachers' professional autonomy, pedagogical innovation, and psychological well-being. Ultimately, this research elucidates the ethical and educational implications of such continuous surveillance and emphasizes the necessity for a critical review of policies regarding the use of surveillance technologies in schools, with a focus on preserving the status of teachers.

**Keywords:** Panopticon, Michel Foucault, CCTV, Shaping Behavior, Teachers, Disciplinary Power

## Introduction

In contemporary society, the rapid proliferation of surveillance technologies has fundamentally altered the dynamics of observation and control, embedding continuous monitoring into the fabric of everyday life. Educational institutions, traditionally regarded as sanctuaries of learning and pedagogical autonomy, have not been immune to this pervasive trend. Driven by growing demands for accountability and risk management, the modern school environment has increasingly become a space governed by technological observation. The initial deployment of CCTV in schools was primarily focused on enhancing security. The systems were installed to protect the perimeters of schools against intruders. However, as the technology advanced and the needs of educational institutions evolved, the use of CCTV began to extend beyond just security. Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of CCTV solutions being operated in schools. These systems have been used to tackle challenges such as vandalism, arson attacks, and theft of school property. The CCTV systems were not only installed in external areas but also started appearing in corridors, computer rooms, libraries, and even more controversial spaces such as student toilets and classrooms (Hope, 2009). The use of CCTV in classrooms has been a subject of ongoing debate. While some argue that it helps address issues such as bullying and resolve allegations made by pupils against teachers, others question the ethical implications of such surveillance.

Amidst this ongoing debate, it is crucial to consider the broader theoretical implications of surveillance. In this regard, the concept of the Panopticon offers a useful analytical framework. The Panopticon is an architectural model of surveillance originally designed by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century, and later was expanded into a comprehensive theory of power by Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the Panopticon's physical structure as a mechanism designed to isolate and observe. He outlines its architectural principle: "at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower... All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy" (p. 233). Through the use of backlighting from windows on both sides of the peripheral cells, the supervisor in the central tower can constantly observe the silhouettes of those inside. As Foucault notes, these cells act as "so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (p. 233). The principle of the Panopticon lies in its asymmetry of sight; the inmate can always be seen but can never see into the central tower to know if they are currently being watched. Consequently, Foucault declares that "Visibility is a trap" (p. 234). Because individuals never know exactly when they are being observed, they must assume they are being watched at all times, leading them to internalize the surveillance and self-regulate their behavior. Therefore, it is through

this theoretical lens of automated, internalized power that the modern deployment of CCTV in educational institutions could be examined. Within the classroom, these dynamics do not only affect students but also extend to teachers, whose professional practices and behaviors may be influenced by the presence of CCTV.

### **Literature Review**

Surveillance is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon studied across various disciplines. Early studies examined CCTV primarily as a benign pedagogical tool for teacher training. Pierce (1960) distinguished between using cameras for “total teaching” versus as a “visual aid,” while Althenhein (1963) compared the advantages of CCTV observations against traditional in-person methods, highlighting its ability to prevent classroom disturbances despite lacking physical context. However, as technology advanced, the primary function of school CCTV shifted from pedagogy to security and behavioral management, prompting extensive research into its social and ethical implications. The majority of this literature has focused on the student experience. Exploring student perceptions, Birnhack and Perry-Hazan (2020) found that youth view surveillance through the lens of their broader school relationships. While some students used metaphors like “family” to describe their school climate, others relied on metaphors such as “prison,” “military,” “factory,” and “reality show”—highlighting how constant monitoring fosters feelings of alienation and mistrust. Taylor (2010) complements these findings by demonstrating that CCTV negatively impacts pupils’ privacy, well-being, and creativity, making them feel uncomfortably spied upon. Furthermore, scholars have raised significant ethical concerns regarding this continuous monitoring. Warnick (2007) argues that electronic surveillance fundamentally differs from in-person observation due to its permanence, storage capabilities, and the unequal power dynamics it creates, necessitating strict ethical guidelines such as minimization and transparency to protect student autonomy. Framing this within a broader sociological context, Hope (2009) categorizes the use of school CCTV into three mechanisms of social control: access control (protecting physical boundaries), conduct control (regulating behavior through direct intervention or self-surveillance), and evidence gathering. Hope argues this represents a troubling shift in educational values, moving away from social integration toward strict system integration and deviancy control. While the literature extensively covers the impact of surveillance on students, the teachers’ viewpoint has frequently been marginalized. A notable exception is the work of Perry-Hazan and Birnhack (2019), who analyze the pervasive surveillance of teachers, such as inspecting teaching methods and tracking time management. Crucially, they explore how educators actively react to this monitoring through behavioral modifications, including internalizing, avoiding, concealing, resisting, and “showing off” (i.e., superficially performing tasks solely for the camera). Their study concludes that CCTV acts as an oppressive practice that exacerbates the power gap between administration and staff, ultimately demoralizing teachers. Conversely, it is worth noting that some recent studies maintain a functionalist perspective, arguing that CCTV remains highly beneficial

for deterring non-compliant behaviors and providing objective records for supervision and assessment (Meishar-Tal et al., 2022; Ghimire & Rana, 2022).

Despite the considerable volume of research on school surveillance, the literature remains overwhelmingly student-centric. More importantly, while studies like Perry-Hazan and Birnhack (2020) identify the behavioral reactions of teachers to CCTV, these studies seldom make an explicit, theoretical connection to Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power. This gap is noteworthy, as Foucault's Panopticon provides critical insight into how continuous, unverifiable observation molds human subjectivity and agency through the principles of visibility, uncertainty, and normalization. Consequently, a more thorough, theoretical examination of CCTV's influence on teachers' behavior from a strictly Foucauldian perspective is essential to fully comprehend the ethical and psychological implications of modern educational surveillance.

### **The Burden of Visibility: Surveillance and Professional Autonomy**

Visibility is the foundational pillar of Foucault's theory of disciplinary power. Within the framework of the Panopticon, visibility does not merely passively record; it actively serves as a mechanism for control. The architecture of the Panopticon enables continuous surveillance without the subjects being aware of whether they are under observation at any certain time, establishing a condition of deliberate and enduring observability that guarantees the seamless, automated operation of power. Foucault refers to this as an "economy of visibility" (p. 220), noting a historical inversion in how power operates. While traditional sovereign power relied on the visibility of the ruler, modern disciplinary power operates through its own invisibility while imposing "on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (p. 220). He argues explicitly that it is "the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them" (p. 220). In the present era, this compulsory visibility has expanded from physical architecture to digital surveillance, where data tracking and analytics continuously observe and evaluate individual activities. Regarding the use of CCTV in classrooms, this concept implies that instructors are subjected to what Foucault terms "hierarchical observation," a mechanism that "coerces by means of observation" (p. 201). The presence of cameras subjects teachers to a continuous, vertical gaze. This visibility is both physical and symbolic, representing the ever-present eye of the school administration, parents, or the wider public. Because the observer behind the camera is unseen, teachers must work under the assumption that they are perpetually monitored, internalizing the surveillance. This internalized gaze has severe implications for professional autonomy, as it actively shapes and alters teacher behavior. Foucault theorized that the ultimate goal of continuous observation is the production of "docile bodies," bodies that may be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 151). Under the pressure of hierarchical observation, teachers may subconsciously mold themselves into these docile subjects to align with perceived institutional expectations. For instance, knowing their actions are recorded and could be

reviewed out of context, teachers might adhere more strictly and rigidly to the curriculum, actively avoid controversial but necessary educational topics, or refrain from utilizing innovative, dynamic teaching methods. The camera enforces a normalization of behavior, stripping away the spontaneous, unscripted moments that often define effective pedagogy. Consequently, teachers perceive a compromise to their professional autonomy. The heightened sense of being visible transforms the classroom from a space of academic freedom into an environment of discomfort and anxiety.

### **Unverifiable Observation: Uncertainty and Self-Censorship**

The paralyzing effect of modern surveillance relies on the calculated, agonizing uncertainty of the observer's gaze rather than the absolute certainty of being watched. This ambiguity is the operational core of Foucault's disciplinary framework. The physical apparatus of observation, whether the central panoptic tower or the CCTV camera mounted in the corner of a classroom, remains glaringly visible, constantly reminding the subject of the power structure. However, the actual act of observation remains strictly unverifiable. The teacher "must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (Foucault, p. 235). This structural ambiguity effectively severs the traditional relationship between seeing and being seen. The surveillance camera acts as a machine that "dissociates the see/being seen dyad" (p. 235). The unseen administrators or data analysts see everything without ever being seen, while the teacher is rendered completely visible without ever seeing their observer. Because teachers cannot verify when the camera is actively monitored or when predictive algorithms are flagging their behavior, the power of the surveillance becomes automated and permanent, even if the actual observation is entirely discontinuous. Foucault explains that this uncertainty induces a "state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p. 234). The unpredictable nature of advanced technologies like facial recognition or classroom audio-analytics forces educators into a state of preemptive anxiety. They are no longer simply reacting to direct orders; instead, the ambiguity of the surveillance forces them to internalize the watchful eye. They begin to continuously evaluate their own actions, language, pedagogical choices, and even physical posture against the harshest possible interpretation of an unknown judge. This leads to a form of self-censorship, where the external threat successfully transitions into internal policing. The ambiguity of the unblinking camera means that "a real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation" (p. 236). The teacher, terrified of a misconstrued interaction, an out-of-context video clip, or a statistically generated performance flag, radically sanitizes their classroom presence. They adopt aggressively conservative teaching methods, eliminate spontaneous debate, and avoid controversial but necessary subject matter to preemptively defend themselves against an unverified threat. In a way, the teacher "assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself" (p. 236). By self-regulating and restricting their own academic freedom in response to an unverifiable gaze, the teacher tragically fulfills the

ultimate objective of the panoptic machine: they “inscribe in [themselves] the power relation... [and become] the principle of [their] own subjection” (p. 236).

### **Internalizing the Gaze: Normalization and Identity Construction**

The pervasive monitoring of educators can also fundamentally rewrite the parameters of acceptable professional existence through what Foucault defines as normalizing judgement. To understand nature of this mechanism, Foucault makes a critical distinction between traditional judicial punishment and the modern disciplinary apparatus. Traditional law operates on a rigid binary: actions are either permitted or forbidden, and the subject is either innocent or guilty. Normalizing judgement, however, abandons this binary in favor of a continuous, graduated spectrum of evaluation. The surveillance system does not simply catch rule-breakers, rather it establishes a “minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards which one must move” (Foucault, p. 215). Under the constant, recording lens of CCTV or digital analytics, teachers are perpetually measured against an idealized educator and a frictionless classroom management, and thoroughly sanitized discourse. Every lecture, tone of voice, and disciplinary action is implicitly graded. This perpetual assessment makes teachers to be evaluated entirely by their proximity to an artificial standard of perfection. Through this continuous, quantitative measurement of behavior, the surveillance apparatus actively manufactures the concept of the “abnormal.” The norm wields its power by tracing “the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal” (p. 215). In the modern educational setting, abnormality is rarely synonymous with criminality or explicit malice; it encompasses any pedagogical deviation from the homogenized ideal. A teacher who utilizes unconventional, unstructured Socratic methods, allows critical debates, or explores deeply controversial historical nuances is swiftly highlighted by the system. Disciplinary power operates through a process of “binary division and branding... (normal/abnormal)” (p. 232). The surveilled teacher lives in professional dread of this branding. The threat of being categorized as an abnormal or problematic educator, forces the teacher to submit to the “constraint of a conformity that must be achieved” (p. 215). Moreover, this normalizing judgement could be the reconstruction of the teacher’s identity. Foucault warns that “the Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching” (p. 216), operating flawlessly beneath the surface of formal institutional equality. Initially, an educator might consciously and defensively alter their behavior to survive the metrics of the surveillance system, deliberately adopting a rigid, controversy-averse persona merely as a shield. However, because the penalty of the norm is perpetual, this external coercion inevitably dissolves into internal conviction. The boundary between the teacher’s authentic pedagogical philosophy and the system’s imposed homogenization begins to blur. Over time, the teacher internalizes the “power of the Norm” (p. 216) so deeply that they mistake the system’s coercive standards for their own professional moral judgment. They no longer avoid sensitive topics or maintain a hyper-formal, detached demeanor because a camera is watching; they do so because

their very psyche has been re-engineered to believe this is what defines a good teacher. Therefore, the discipline successfully strips away the educator's unique individuality, replacing it with a standardized, system-approved replicate.

### **The Cost of Compliance: Pedagogical and Ethical Consequences**

On the pedagogical front, the presence of the recording apparatus triggers an epistemological flattening of the classroom space. Because the camera captures only optical and acoustic surface-level data, the invisible, emotional, and intellectual context of human interaction are stripped away. Teachers are forced to make their pedagogy legible and safe for remote, out-of-context viewing. This structural demand inevitably forces educators into a rigid, defensive adherence to prescribed curricula. The active dialogue of the classroom, which relies on open exploration and critical debate, could be replaced by the passive delivery of standardized textbook facts. Innovation and unconventional methodologies inherently require a margin of error, a safe space for organic correction. The continuous recording eliminates this margin entirely. Fearing that experimental techniques or complex, nuanced discussions might be misinterpreted by an administrative observer lacking pedagogical context, teachers retreat to aggressively conservative, risk-averse strategies. Consequently, the art of personalized teaching is stifled, denying students the dynamic, responsive education required for diverse intellectual growth. This defensive posture disrupts the relational dynamics of the classroom, severing the bond between educator and student. Aware that every interaction is documented, teachers must continuously perform a highly sanitized version of control. Humor, personal anecdotes, and empathetic, informal communication are discarded, replaced by a formal, legally defensible detachment. This theatrical performance of order forces teachers into unnatural pedagogical extremes. Some use strict control to look perfectly disciplined, while others retreat into excessive leniency to avoid any recorded perception of harshness or conflict. Both extremes destroy the balance of the classroom, transforming the space from a community of mutual trust into a cautious, transactional environment where open communication is sacrificed to the demands of the recording lens.

Ethically, the consequences of this surveillance extend beyond privacy; it represents the undermining of the educator's professional dignity through the non-consensual creation of a permanent administrative archive. Drawing on Foucaultian principles, the ethical horror of continuous recording lies in its power to transform the living teacher into an objectified, highly documented entity reduced to a series of searchable data points. The CCTV system operates as an archiving machine, capturing every movement, word, and interaction, and storing it indefinitely. While teachers are nominally aware of the cameras, the lack of transparency in the surveillance apparatus, including how the footage is stored, who has access to it, how long it is kept, and what administrative or algorithmic criteria might be used to retroactively scrutinize it, strips them of all professional autonomy. The educator is no longer treated as a trusted professional subject, but is

instead degraded into calculable material, exposed to the threat of retroactive exploitation and stripped of the fundamental human dignity of unrecorded existence.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the integration of video monitoring within educational environments transcends mere passive observation, it functions as a mechanism for behavioral and psychological transformation. By examining this phenomenon through the framework of disciplinary power, it becomes evident that continuous, unverifiable observation fundamentally rewires the professional dynamics of the learning environment. The inescapable gaze compels educators into a state of self-surveillance, gradually removing their pedagogical creativity and replacing dynamic, authentic instruction with rigid compliance. When the fear of having isolated moments decontextualized or labeled as non-compliant dictates instructional choices, both teacher autonomy and the quality of student academic engagement suffer immensely.

It is essential to clarify that this does not seek to invalidate the legitimate, practical applications of surveillance technology. Cameras undeniably play a pivotal role in safeguarding school perimeters and providing critical evidence during emergencies. The physical safety of students and staff is a priority, and modern security infrastructure remains a highly effective component of that defense. However, the uncritical expansion of these systems directly into the instructional space introduces severe consequences that needs to be considered. To reconcile the vital need for campus safety with the preservation of instructional integrity, educational institutions can abandon unstructured surveillance practices in favor of rigorous, ethical frameworks. There is a critical imperative for transparent and clear policies governing the use of these technologies. Maintaining institutional transparency requires informing educators of the operational boundaries of classroom cameras, such as data retention limits and access protocols. Furthermore, the integrity of these systems relies on safeguards that strictly separate security surveillance from performance evaluation or pedagogical oversight.

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**17 March 2026 -TBILISI GEORGIA**