



Philosophy Circles

Panopticon

There is roughly one CCTV camera in the UK for every 11 people. The Panopticon of the title refers to philosopher Jeremy Bentham's plan for a prison in which all the inmates could be observed from a central tower. The point was that, while not everyone could be watched at once none could know when he was being watched, and so would have to be on best behavior at all times. The stimulus looks at wider issues in society using the microcosm of the school situation.



It's best to set it up like an April Fool, as it will get them more invested if they start out thinking that it is for real. There are two versions of the stimulus: one written simply and one using more pompous language. If you are going for the wind-up approach, you might like to paste the text into a more formal document for maximum effect.



Do some paired/grouped discussion before asking for their opinions. As responses come in, help connect them by pointing out agreements and disagreements. Given the likely range of points, you could overlay a question now and then to maintain a coherent dialogue.

- How important is it to have privacy?
- Does privacy only matter if you want to do something bad?
- What do you have a right to keep private? What don't you have a right to keep private?
- How much privacy is it worth losing to be safer?
- Is it OK to watch everyone, or only people who have already done something wrong?
- How much does being on camera change how people act?



Once modelled, encourage the class to self-facilitate. They can choose the next speaker, and use phrases such as 'I agree/disagree with...because...'

NEXT STEPS

Take up the offer of the last line of the stimulus! What would pupils write to the school governor? Do they agree with the idea? Or oppose it? Or a mix of both? And why?

You could also direct them to the current debate on CCTV in this country. Are they an overextension of government power, or essential for our safety in modern times?

The school has been asked to take part in the Panopticon Project. There will be cameras with sound recording in all classrooms and other areas of the school, inside and out (excluding toilets).

All film will be stored for three months. Film of pupils or staff who are a cause for concern can be kept for a longer period.

Recording everything will help teachers to deal with poor behaviour. It will provide proof of bad choices. The film can also be shared with parents via email, so that they can see their children's misbehaving. It should eliminate bullying and ensure that children are kind and helpful to one another.

It will also help senior managers to improve teaching, as they can watch any lesson and tell teachers where they are going wrong.

We expect the best thing about the Panopticon will stopping problems before they start. Both pupils and teachers will know that someone could be watching. Those who are doing as they should, have nothing to fear. Indeed, Panopticon will help us reward good behaviour and excellent teaching.

We trust that you like this idea, but if you should have any concerns please write to the Governor responsible, Albie Sinew.

The school has been invited to take part in Panopticon, a government-sponsored project to improve behaviour, teaching and learning by using the latest monitoring technology. Panopticon involves the installation of state-of-the-art closed circuit television cameras with sound recording, in all classrooms, meeting rooms and public areas of the school, inside and out (excluding toilets).

The footage from these cameras will be stored for three months before being deleted on a rolling cycle. However, the system will integrate with the school's timetabling and attendance software so that footage containing individual pupils or staff who are a cause for concern can automatically be retained for a longer period.

Having such thorough recording of the school day in all locations will allow teachers to deal more efficiently with inappropriate behaviour. As well as providing definite proof of poor behaviour, the software provides a facility to share relevant sections of footage with parents via email, so that they can see their children's misbehaviour first hand. It should eliminate bullying and ensure that all children are kind and helpful to one another.

It will also provide senior managers at the school with a useful tool for feeding back to teachers on their performance. It will eliminate the need for "observation lessons", which do not always give a fair picture of a teacher's performance, because all lessons can be observed live or from the archive.

It is anticipated that the biggest impact of the system will not be in managing poor performance after the event, but in preventing poor behaviour and improving the standards of teaching in the first place, as both pupils and teachers will know that someone could be watching. Those who are doing as they should, have of course, nothing to fear - and indeed Panopticon will provide senior managers with opportunities to reward good behaviour and excellent teaching practice.

We trust that this new initiative meets with your enthusiastic support, but if you should have any concerns please address them in writing to the Governor responsible, Albie Sinew.