Developments in technology have brought not only greater freedoms but also more means for monitoring of individuals’ behaviour and performance. While debates continue on the balance between laissez-faire freedom and overzealous supervision across all domains, one of the most controversial centres is that of education. Classroom cameras, attendance monitoring and regular pop-quizzes are just a few ways in which teachers and educators can not only capture snapshots of individual student behaviour on a daily basis, but also transfer these data for analysis and follow-up by the school’s leadership. With mobile phones and computers in most classrooms, the question is no longer whether such things are possible, but rather whether these levels of student monitoring are beneficial or even counterproductive. This essay will discuss the ways in which student engagement can be monitored and good student engagement can be fostered.

Some people may argue that it is the responsibility of teachers and ultimately of the school to keep a careful eye on students to ensure that they are fully engaged and are actively learning. They point out that parents and future employers expect completion of a course of study to mean that students have been actively engaged and have covered every aspect of the programme in detail. They note that attendance is correlated with positive academic outcomes and that pop-quizzes are the only way to make sure that every minute of every day is used productively.

However, it is also true that learning is more than simply following the argument of a teacher or keeping up with reading passages in textbooks, and just being present or just being able to answer multiple-choice questions does not mean a student is working at their best. Many people have realized the importance of fostering life-long learning skills of self-discipline and self-monitoring. They point out that the kinds of information that can easily be captured are not necessarily the best indicators of these longer-term academic goals.

In brief, while some level of monitoring may be necessary according to local requirements and for student safety, schools and parents should look more towards longer-term indicators of student achievement and try not to be overly influenced by simplistic data on attendance or responses to simple comprehension checks. Through working with students on the development of their lifelong learning skills, parents and teachers will encourage student discipline from within themselves, leading to long-term benefits for all.