

# Using The Camera To Empower Students

By Jessica Wallach

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Welcome to my talk: Using the Camera to Empower Students and Deepen Learning.

I am Jessica Wallach and I am a photographer, educator and accessibility queen. I have been a student with disabilities and have taught students with disabilities.

Today we explore camera work in two ways: Teaching through the lens: setting the stage and making your virtual classroom accessible. I am assuming the majority of us are teaching through the lens right now and that this topic is rather timely. Secondly we will look at building relationships through the lens: using the camera to empower students and deepen learning.

This talk is predicated on two things: one is that teachers need to contradict the ableism and two the camera is an alternative to a pen and paper. When I became a photographer, this became my mission: to build my photo sessions around the fact that all bodies are good, so I will show you some photos to remind you that all bodies are good.

Cameras are a tool in our toolbox for Universal Design for Learning. Cameras are an option, an alternative to pen and paper and they are a communication tool.

If I could see you through my camera today I would know I like you, how you use your camera, things about you I could use to tailor the lesson to you. But since I can't, so I have a series of questions for you to fill out, so I can teach with you instead of to you, there are four questions: What are three advantages of distance learning to build relationships with students? What are three ways you contradict ableism or if you can't think of them, what are three ways you show your students you like them, it's one and the same thing? What are three ways you make your classes accessible, that is your virtual classroom and that was before covid? What are three ways you have used the camera as a teaching tool that was before Covid in your physical classrooms?

So like I said I want to know your thoughts and your stories so you can either answer those questions with paper and pen or you can use my document at [tinyurl.com/jwaccess](https://tinyurl.com/jwaccess) and answer those questions there so we can all learn from each other all you need to do is enter my document and then you're going to left click right click that is right click and click duplicate slide and right on those slide you duplicated and you can write, you can add photos, you can add links, you can add video. I want to hear what you have to say. Also like I said you can turn off the video and answer the questions now or you can do it as you go through or at the end. All right so I want your stories.

Let's talk about teaching through the Lens, setting the stage and making your virtual classroom accessible. I'm going to turn off my slideshow at this point so you can see me. This is the heart of what we're learning today and I want you to be able to connect and see what I'm doing.

All right, so connectivity is the heart of reaching our students virtually. We need to be strongly connected for our cameras to work. So I like to use the ethernet cable, but if I'm not using an ethernet cable, I might use a repeater or a hub or I may be right at my modem. I make sure my modem is not in a closet or a cabinet. The other thing I do is I turn off everything else that could eat bandwidth. I just went around my house, I turned off my tv. I disconnected my cell phone from my wi-fi. I turned off my google home. I asked my family to turn everything off. So that my bandwidth could be as big as possible now.

The second way to make your classroom accessible, the second way we can make our classrooms accessible is good lighting. You want good front lighting. I do it with a lamp. See when my lamps are off you can't see me very well and it's hard to read what I'm saying. We know as teachers that communication is so much more than the audio, there's a visual component to communication and so we need our students to be able to see us well so they can read our expression and read our lips if they need to.

Another way we can make our classrooms accessibility is think about where our camera is compared to us, what is our camera angle. I suggest that your camera angle would be peer to peer, that is straight on so it's like the right in front of you, you've gotten down low and you're talking right to them. You don't want to be higher than them that makes you big and them small. You don't want to put your camera way up here so they are bigger than you, you want to use the camera to say we are peers and you also want to think about your proximity to the camera. Again you don't want to be so far away that they can't read your facial expressions. And then we want to think about our background, I always think about my environment as the third teacher. I want to add things that are going to emphasize what I'm teaching and I want to take away any distractions.

Also in this hyper visual classroom, we need to be hyper vigilant about audio description. We need to describe any visuals we are using because we have students with visual impairments and visual processing impairments and so we need to get really good at describing things. What is the main subject, how big is it, what color is it, what does it feel like. All those things you want people to see you need to be able to do in words and you need to teach your students to do that. And as artists, the more languages, the more ways we can explore something whether in words and pictures, and sounds and smells, the bigger our repertoire for inspiration is.

Just to review creating accessibility on camera, you want strong connectivity, you want front lighting, you want to think about your angle and proximity to the camera oh you do want to think about your sound you might want a mic I'm not a sound expert other people here probably are

so ask that you want to use your background as a third teacher and you want to think about audio descriptions for any visual you're using and you want to take breaks from the camera.

Okay now let's talk about building relationships through the lens. Use cameras to deepen learning and empower students.

So to deepen learning with a camera, the first thing I'm going to suggest is build relationships with students by having them use a camera to show you what they like, love, hate, do, want, what sparks their thinking, playing and analysis. Really use the camera to bring them alive, to wake them up.

Secondly use the camera to create images for a reference library, to record brainstorming. A lot like how you might use a notebook. For some people a notebook is a great way to record ideas but for other people trying to think about words is a struggle, trying to write words of the struggle but using a camera can be much easier.

So for dancers you might have them record how people and things move. For musicians you might have them record things they want to put to sound or imitate the sound of. For people in theater they could take pictures and videos of motivations of character. And for visual art well that's easy, all the elements of composition are everywhere they see, composition elements are every place.

So how do we build connections through a lens? How do we keep that connection going between classes? Well don't just tell but show them how to do things. Make the connection between your student and yourself by creating examples. Get them to fall in love with your hands, your feet, as you show them how to dance and how to play instruments. And then ask your students to show you their process and progress. Videos and still images are great ways to slow down the process so you really can give them thoughtful feedback.

All right so just some camera tips, they're gonna sound similar to what I said before except for the first one.

The first one is really you need to decide, anybody with the camera now needs to decide. do we take a photo or a video or do we need Both. I'm going to say if you want to come in close and show position, a technique where you are showing how to hold something that's going to be a photo. If you need sound, if you need motion, that's going to be a video. So that's the first thing, decide what medium you're going to use.

Second is use a lot of light. If you're recording motion you need more light so your camera's shutter goes faster, the more light the better. Fill the frame with critical information. This is similar to using the environment as the third teacher. Right sometimes we need a blank background and sometimes we need to give information about our main subject.

And always stabilize your camera and decide on your angle.

To recap: always like your students and remind and model that people's bodies mind and ways of being our good. Make your classroom accessible Use the camera to build relationships and connect. Decide if you need a still or a video to communicate your idea. Camera work is a wonderful alternative to pencil and paper.

Want more, have questions, let's think together, i want to hear your thoughts, please write me [jessica@greaterdepthmedia.com](mailto:jessica@greaterdepthmedia.com)