

About this role: Cameraperson

The mobile cameraperson is one of TPL's unique additions to the video-conferencing studio. This allows for greater movement of the camera and the ability to capture movement and activity from any angle or placement in the room. Traditionally cameras in a videoconferencing studio are mounted to a wall or fixed atop monitors and are limited by the movement of the camera (point, tilt, zoom) from this fixed position in the room. By incorporating one handheld camera and a skilled cameraperson, the participants are no longer bound to the limited sight range of these fixed cameras. They are free to move in and out of the floor, travel through space, and can use small movements to express the emotional quality of their art form.

The handheld camera also allows for easily obtainable close-up shots of the coach when they are talking directly to participants at the far site. Instead of the coach having to move up to a fixed camera for a close-up, the cameraperson brings the camera to them. These close-ups are also effectively used during the beginning and ending of an interactive class when the participants at both sites are talking directly to each other and providing feedback about the interactive experience. Close-up shots are a helpful way of developing relationships between participants at different sites because they provide the intimacy of a one-to-one conversation.

The cameraperson's role is always in service to the goals and flow of the interactive event. It requires a person who is skilled in following movement (dance, sports or otherwise) and is also willing to let go of their personal ideals on what makes a perfect shot. As Nancy Mason Hauser, TPL's lead cameraperson says, "Remember, you are not in the video-conferencing studio to create art or serve your own artistic ambitions/ego. You are there to serve the coach and the participants, and to capture the activity as simply and clearly as possible. Try to put yourself in the position of the participants and say, 'What would I need to see to better learn the content being exchanged?' and then shoot it accordingly. It may be a close-up; it may be shot from behind; it may be the whole body shot from the side."

By being aware of the fixed camera(s) in the studio, and their limited angles, the mobile camera person can be even freer to capture different camera angles and perspectives of the movement. Unlike the fixed camera, the mobile cameraperson can change levels, shooting from beneath or above the activity in the studio. We recommend the cameraperson take time before each interactive class to review the positions of the fixed camera(s) with the assistant coach.

Each camera in the interactive studio becomes the eyes for the participants at the far site. It is essential that you seek to capture the "what" and "how" of the coach's instruction and movement. An awareness of the quality and power of the visual image you are creating in your camera will inspire the participants at the far site to participate fully. The cameraperson is constantly addressing the question of how best to capture a three dimensional form (ie: dance or theater) in a two dimensional medium (video)?

As with all of the roles in an interactive event, the cameraperson's thoughts are layered. Here is a sampling of some questions this role is considering as they communicate the performing arts to the far site:

- What is the content being taught?
- If I were the participant, what angle would I need to see the movement/activity from to learn it better?
- What angle is not being captured by the fixed cameras?
- How does my image relate to the image being received from the far site?
- What image has the assistant coach chosen to send to the far site? –my camera, then stay with the angle I am capturing. –a fixed camera, then move to a new relationship to the participants and find a new angle.
- Do I need to move my camera to fully capture the activity in the space(a dance phrase, a monologue, etc) while shooting?
- Can I capture moving participants without moving or zooming my lens?
- What is the energy pathway of the movement? Can I follow it?

An open communication between the coach, cameraperson, and assistant coach is essential in providing a positive interactive experience for everyone. Most of all these three roles need to get a rhythm going together where the cameraperson can create an effective shot and the assistant coach can select the shot all within the coach's timing and approach to the material they are leading during the exchange. For camera people who are new to the interactive environment we recommend that you spend some time in the studio with the coach before the interactive class practicing together and working out your method of communication.

It is essential that you are familiar with your camera before an interactive class begins. You should be familiar with how to set the white balance for proper color exposure, how to zoom smoothly, and adjust the focus manually and automatically. Initially it may be more difficult to use the manual focus feature on your camera, but ultimately it will give you better pictures when you are shooting in an interactive session. Knowing your equipment will enhance your ability to capture effective shots quickly. The interactive environment is one that moves quickly. Speed and timing are valuable skills that will enhance the quality of communication between the sites.

Always check to make sure your equipment is operating correctly before an interactive event begins. Check the white balance, that your batteries are charged, that you have a tape in the camera for recording your shooting, that your cable is long enough for moving freely in the space and that the connections to the switching station are working properly.

The role of the cameraperson in TPL's interactive studio is an exciting and rewarding role. The development of this role has been pivotal in the development of our interactive model. It has allowed us to connect dancers, actors, musicians, and puppetry artists across the country.