

Picture This! Framing the Fun-da-mental Foundation of Early Childhood Education: From the Lens of Pat

It doesn't matter where you go or who you are in early childhood education, you have probably run into Pat Dunmire! The spiked hair, tan shorts and the big smile with her camera held high and turning heads with her signature greeting "Whoooo-hooo!" Pat will tell you: "Photo day is a big deal to me... it's when I get to meet amazing, dedicated staff and the kids... they get me every time!"

Picture Day with Pat and Carolina Portrait Pros begins about 4:30am. Loading the truck, a quick announcement on Facebook as to where Pat is heading, and a quick Wal-Mart run for candy for the staff. "Set-up is easy... we can set-up anywhere: playgrounds, lobbies, lounges, classrooms." For Pat it's the sparkly dresses, the play pants with patches on the knees, toothless grins, pouty poses and getting that one child with autism to give a half-second of eye contact. "School photos mean different things to different people. This one photo experience could mean the world for a child who is homeless, in foster care, migrant, or has special needs. That may be all they have!" With great emotion she says, "That little guy with Autism brings me a challenge... I work very hard for that moment but in the end, it is worth it to that child, his family and me as well." Pat explains that although she has no formal early childhood background, she GETS IT! Her actions and conversations are simple. "How children view themselves is how they view their world. I use my camera to speak to children and they respond."

"It's a special gift to have when you can get children to open up like that," says Carrie Bennett. Pat believes picture day should be child-guided..."I am in no hurry... sometimes, I have to come to the school and ride down the slide, give a few hi-fives, and listen to a story before the big day. If that's what I have to do, that's what I have to do!" Pat sits up straight and proudly speaks of the characteristics of natural, least restrictive environments. "I even know how to be a STAR... Smile. Take a deep breath. And Relax!"

CLICK, CLICK WITH THE CHILDREN

"I just give them the camera." Even with children as young as three years old, Pat will freely place a camera in their hands. "They can handle it." Pat believes photography should invite curiosity, conversation and fun. While kneeling or sitting, Pat is sharing vocabulary about the parts of the camera as well as techniques for holding the camera. "You find something they want to take a picture of and then you push the button. Okay now move your feet kinda like you're dancing, back and forth." Pat says the real joy is when she gives children the freedom to go at it. "You would be surprised at the awesome images they take, of hands, feet, rocks, yarn, door knobs all kinds of stuff we as grown-up are too busy to notice!"

Less than inclined to hand your digital camera over to your child? Here is a quick trick: cut a rectangle out of the front center of a Jiffy biscuit mix box to make a view finder. Pat explains that you can teach children how to hold the camera and at the same time capture insight on what the child is seeing.

FRAMING FOR FAMILIES

"When we go to these schools you see how cool the parents are. I welcome families on Picture Day because Picture Day is for everyone!" Carolina Portrait Pros knows that children are the pride and joy of their families. "I tell parents that on picture day, their kids become my kids." Pat chuckles when she talks about going to family meetings to discuss Carolina Portrait Pros and ask permission to be their school's photographer. "You know you can't win them all but when you get that dad and all those tots grabbing and thanking you or that grandma wanting to make a payment plan so she can get her babies' pictures, I can't help but want to give them my best." Pat shared about her recent trip to a Telamon Corporation TRC Head Start in Indiana. "They were so appreciative that I came from North Carolina just to take their children's and family pictures." Many of the migrant families travel up and down the eastern region doing physical labor on farms, picking apples, blueberries, pumpkins, ornamental and Christmas trees. "Those families work hard. They make sure I get food on my table. The least I can do is make beautiful photos of their babies." Pat ensures that portrait packages are affordable for all the families. She doesn't want families' decisions about their children's portraits to be influenced by their purse. "I want parents to know they are good enough, their clothes are good enough, and most importantly, that their children are good enough!"

HEY TEACHER, SAY CHEESE!!

“Teachers are amazing and we don’t give them the appreciation they deserve. I go to so many schools and can tell when children are learning and been treated right.” Over the past few years, Pat has learned that many programs require classroom staff to document children’s learning and developmental progress. “Give me 15 minutes, I can show them how to have fun with the camera... just follow the child and get some great photos! Showing teachers how to get one photo can tell a lot. It’s all about knowing what you are looking at and telling the story.” Keisha Ridges, Owner and Center Director, says that Pat is a great resource to everyone. “I watched her take pictures. Now I’m taking more pictures. I don’t want the ‘say cheese’ pictures, but rather the snapshots of the children building with their blocks, rocking their babies, playing in mud or doing a floor puzzle. I am better able to support my staff in documenting and aligning with our NC Foundations.”



SNAPSHOT THAT SUMS IT UP!

Jaime R. Kinner, Director of Sugar Grove Developmental Day School, sums up the amazing benefit of using Carolina Portrait Pros this way: **“I was one of those directors that hated picture day at my center and all the stress that comes along with it. We met Carolina Portrait Pros at the NCAeYC conference and asked Pat to come out and photograph our school. Pat built relationships with the staff and children... Thank you, Pat, for making picture day a fun day for my staff and the children.”**

Shawna Daniels, former Bright Horizons educator and now Technical Assistant Specialist with Child Care Services Association shares, **“Pat is the most energetic, loving and kind person I know. She has found a way to combine her love for photography into service for early education professionals, children and families. She serves with her heart and only wants the best for everyone, leaving smiles wherever she goes.”**

Carolina Portrait Pros is committed to serving early childhood programs throughout North Carolina. With over 20 years of smiles, stories and preschool photography experiences. “We are blessed beyond belief... We rise early, play hard, and know at the end of our day we captured the essence of a child’s world.”

SUGGESTED READINGS AND RESOURCES

- Picture This Using Photography as a Learning Tool in the Early Childhood Classroom: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254296042_Picture_This_Using_Photography_as_a_Learning_Tool_in_Early_Childhood_Classrooms
- Getting the Picture: Using the Digital Camera as a Tool to Support: http://www.naeyc.org/yc/files/yc/file/201203/Luckenbill_YC0311.pdf
- The Power of Documentation IN the Early Childhood Classroom: <https://www.naeyc.org/files/tyc/file/Seitz.pdf>
- The Digital Camera NAEYC: <https://www.naeyc.org/files/tyc/file/digital.pdf>
- Homeroom: <https://gethomerom.com/>
- Shutterfly: <https://www.shutterfly.com/classroom-share/?esch=1>
- 21 ways to use photos in the classroom: <http://www.weareteachers.com/blogs/post/2015/04/08/21-ways-to-use-photos-in-the-classroom>
- 100 ways to us a digital camera: <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/100-ways-use-digital-cameras>



visit us at

www.carolinaportraitpros.com



10 Tips for Framing up a Great Photo Day!



- 1 It's A 1st!** Remember Photo Day may be a first for a child, the family and even your staff!! Relax and Have Fun!
- 2 No worries! No hurries!** We at Carolina Portrait Pros are not watching the clock our lens is definitely on the children!
- 3 K.I.S.S., Its Happy Hour! Keep It Simple, Silly!** Less is definitely more when photographing little people. Plan ahead on space, time and know when your children "happy hours" are so we can make the experience pleasant!
- 4 E-motions!** Giggles, Wiggles and Jiggles are AWESOME and they can do Posey Pics Too!! We are following the child's lead here. We strive for less frowns and more smiles!!
- 5 Ham It Up!** Encourage families to let their children pick out their outfits from head to toe! Each child is unique and we want their amazing personality, temperament and style to flow and show! Oh yeah, if you wear your fancies don't forget to send play clothes for later.
- 6 Person First.** Children with Disabilities and their families desire a photo experience with patience, respect and a photo mini-session that values them. We will individualize the session to adapt and accommodate to the child's needs.
- 7 Project Approach.** Encourage your classroom staff to integrate Photo Day and photography into the curriculum. Great way to promote science, social studies, language and social-emotional development!
- 8 Talk About Time.** Administration and staff need to communicate about arrival, breakfast, playground and even specialist schedules. Remember while our camera is clicking and the program clock is ticking!
- 9 Sick Children, Stay At Home.** Illnesses occur we will return to capture that happy, healthy friend!
- 10 Be A S.T.A.R.—Smile.** Take a deep breathe. And Relax! Photo day is about the experience. The process always equals a great product A BIG SMILE!