

**Exploring Positive Emotionality through Poetical Inquiry of Student Voice**

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### Introduction/Need:

The Georgia 4-H Camping Program is a phenomenon which thousands of youth experience each summer. In an effort to make sure students were prepared for a successful week of summer camp, Elbert County 4-H implemented “Living Together Peacefully at Camp” lessons and contract in 2023. This change was strongly recommended by Georgia 4-H administrators after seeing a significant increase in behavior problems during the 2022 camping season, which was the first “normal” camp schedule post pandemic. These lessons help students prepare for camp by way of social-emotional learning. Students were asked to express their emotions at the end of their first full day of camp and aligned with the 4-H Thriving Model’s indicator of positive emotionality. Anonymous responses were analyzed by the researcher using the qualitative method of poetic inquiry. Brown, et al. (2021), wrote, “Poetry is essential to phenomenological thought” (p. 258), and therefore fits nicely for exploring positive emotionality through student voice regarding a camping experience.

### Conceptual Framework:

All 4-H programming should be built on pillars of positive youth development. The 4-H Thriving Model is a positive youth development concept which encompasses the 4-H Essential Elements (Mastery, Belonging, Independence, Generosity) and the 5 C’s (Competence, Caring/Compassion, Confidence, Character, and Connection) (4-H PLWG, 2023). This framework provides seven indicators of thriving youth: goal setting & management, growth mindset, openness to challenge & discovery, positive emotionality, hopeful purpose, transcendent awareness, and prosocial orientation. Additionally, youth who are developing positively will show outcomes of contribution, positive academic attitudes, personal responsibility, social competency, connection with others and have personal standards.

For this particular study, the specific indicator of positive emotionality was used to allow students an opportunity to express emotions from day two of Cloverleaf Summer Camp at Wahsega 4-H Center. Daniel Goleman wrote in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, “The emotional brain responds to an event more quickly than the thinking brain. If you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can’t have empathy and effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.” Students need to understand all emotions are important and should be expressed in an appropriate manner. “A key component of emotional and social intelligence is being able to recognize and manage your own emotions as well as knowing how to recognize and respond to others’ emotions” (Hughes & Terrell, 2007, p. 17). Summer Camp is an excellent place to work on positive emotionality. A myriad of emotions are produced during camp because youth are exposed to a variety of experiences and different people. Furthermore, for Cloverleaf Campers (4th-6th grades) specifically, this may be the first experience spending extended nights away from home.

### Methodology:

“Rigid adherence to analytic steps risks leaving no time or space for moments of ‘wonder’ or emotional responses which facilitate rich engagement” (Brown, et al., 2021, p. 257). This research approach is not always conducive to youth programming, causing a sterile feel. “Once released, the work of art or the flow of the poem becomes its own thing. So, while deeply personal, poetical thinking seeks to transcend the idea of authorship.” (Freeman, 2017, p. 77). Therefore, poetical

inquiry is excellently suited to be co-authored by youth and the adults who serve them. “Poetic transcription creates a third voice that is neither the interviewee’s nor the researchers’ but a combination of both” (Glesne, 1997, p. 215). Allowing student voice to shine through research is an important piece of positive youth development. Poetry should express emotion. “It is felt experience; the experience of being in the whirlpool of sensuous flow that we are as experiencing beings” (Freeman, 2017, p. 72). The Glesne article states, “experimental writing makes writers and readers more aware of the researcher’s relationship with the text and research participants” (1997, p. 214). When the researcher is 4-H Staff, the relationship is solidified in experience with participants and the data.

### **Results/Findings:**

Once anonymous responses were typed into a database, the researcher pulled each emotion or feeling out. This created a list of fifty-eight, eleven of which were repeated by numerous campers. “Happiness” or some variation of it was the most common response, reoccurring thirteen times. “Scared” was the next popular emotion, being replicated by eight campers. The extracted word list was used to create a word cloud, showing which words had the most precedence. In an effort to make sure the twenty-three participant voices were heard, a poem was constructed which used each of the fifty-eight emotions. To create the poem, the “why” behind the emotion expressed on the student response cards was used. When students did not provide a reason as to why they felt the emotion listed, the writer drew from her own participation of the day and her tenure as a summer camp chaperone to form the descriptive lines. Stapleton (2021) writes, “the emotion does not reside only in the text within the poetry, but in the reader’s response to it” (p. 452). The researcher wanted to maintain verbiage that was reminiscent of the youth who participated. Once complete, a small group of campers reviewed the poem and gave their satisfaction, “Yes! That sounds just like summer camp!”

### **Conclusions:**

Poetical inquiry has a place among positive youth development practices. When practiced in co-creation, poetical inquiry can add richness to youth literacy, a topic of which many rural schools and poverty-stricken areas struggle. Providing a phenomenon for youth to participate and using an element of the 4-H Thriving Model, such as the indicators, makes a suitable environment for this type of qualitative study. Additionally, asking students to reflect on the day opened the door for more dialogue around social-emotional learning or other thriving indicators. “Living Together Peacefully at Camp” is recommended to be implemented by every county attending a Georgia 4-H Summer Camp, as it does provide framework to assist youth in navigating unfamiliar territory while staying with people they may not know for a week-long residential program.

### **Implications/Recommendations/Impact:**

To enhance learning opportunities for youth, it is recommended that more time be spent on social-emotional learning prior to participating in the phenomenon. Further, students need to comprehend emotions are neither good or bad, each one serves a purpose. The responses indicate youth aged 9-11 may not have a strong understanding beyond basic emotions. Providing students with an emotion wheel, such as The Junto Institute’s Emotion Wheel, may enhance the variety of responses received by allowing the campers an opportunity to explore emotions beyond the basic six of love, fear, anger, sadness, surprise and joy. Additionally, creating a poem that embodies how students feel while at

camp can be used as camp promotion for future students in the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades. Students may be more apt to take recommendation from peers than adults. Expanding a capacity for student voice, campers could have the opportunity to recite the poem or lines for a promotional video about Wahsega 4-H Center Cloverleaf Camp.

**References:**

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