

April 2014

Mental Health and Safety in Schools: Children's perceptions and experiences

Larissa K. Pipe

The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor

Dr. Susan Rodger

The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

© Larissa K. Pipe 2014

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>

 Part of the [Counseling Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pipe, Larissa K., "Mental Health and Safety in Schools: Children's perceptions and experiences" (2014). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 1931.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/1931>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact tadam@uwo.ca.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN SCHOOLS:
CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Larissa K. Pipe

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

© Larissa Pipe 2014

Abstract

The current study employed an exploratory analysis of children's perceptions of safety, mental health and experiences with bullying in school. Secondary data from surveys administered to a Southwestern Ontario school board was used to gather frequency data in addition to exploring the associations between mental health, feelings of safety and experiences with bullying.

Furthermore, a photovoice component was administered in a select school, intended to gain a deeper understanding of what leads children to feel safe and unsafe, while in school. Results highlight the number of children experiencing mental health concerns as well as the importance of support systems for children to feel safe and secure at school. The results are discussed in connection to previous findings that indicate the critical importance of exploring children's experiences in school to aid in the promotion of safe, healthy school settings. Implications for schools and children's mental health promotion and prevention efforts are discussed.

Keywords: Children, Mental Health, Safety, Bullying, School, Photovoice.

Acknowledgements

To my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Susan Rodger - Thank you for your encouragement, advice and confidence in me. Your endless support throughout all aspects of this process has not only made this thesis possible but has allowed me to explore a topic that I am so deeply interested in.

To the Faculty members of the Counselling Psychology Program: Dr. Alan Leschied, Dr. Jason Brown and Dr. Susan Rodger – Thank you for your guidance and support throughout my graduate school experience. I am forever grateful to have been so privileged to learn from and work with you over these past two years.

To the staff, teachers and students at the participating school and school board - Thank you for welcoming me into your school and making this research possible.

And finally, to my parents – thank you for believing in me from day one. Words cannot express how much your support and endless encouragement has meant to me, I could not have done this without you.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Appendices.....	ix
1. Mental Health and Safety in Schools: Children’s perceptions and experiences.....	1
1.1 Safe versus Unsafe Schools.....	1
1.2 Violence and Bullying in Schools.....	3
1.3 Mental Health in Schools.....	4
1.4 Perceptions of School Safety and Incident Reports.....	6
1.5 Mental Health and School Safety.....	7
1.6 Purpose of the Current Study.....	9
1.7 Research Questions.....	11
2. Method.....	11
2.1 Participants.....	12
2.2 Measures.....	13
2.3 Procedure.....	14
2.4 Analysis.....	16
3. Results.....	17
3.1 School Survey Analysis Findings.....	17
3.2 Descriptive Statistics.....	17

3.3 Correlations.....	18
3.4 Frequencies.....	19
3.5 Perceptions of Safety at School X and School Y.....	20
4. Photovoice Data Collection.....	21
5. Trustworthiness.....	22
6. Photovoice Analysis Findings.....	23
6.1 What Makes You Feel Safe?.....	23
6.1.1 Being around friends.....	24
6.1.2 Being around trusted adults – teachers and staff.....	25
6.1.3 Being in a familiar trusted location – School X.....	27
6.2 What Makes You Feel Unsafe?.....	28
6.2.1 Places that are physically unsafe – fear of physical features.....	28
6.2.2 The back of the schoolyard – fear of the people who are there.....	29
6.2.3 When there is absence of teacher supervision at the back of the schoolyard.....	31
6.2.4 The messages and threats in the forest.....	32
7. Discussion.....	33
7.1 Children’s Levels of Perceived Safety and Incidents of Bullying.....	33
7.2 Children’s Reports of Mental Health Issues and Perceived Safety Levels.....	35
7.3 Children’s Reports of Bullying Incidents and Mental Health Concerns.....	36
7.4 How do Children Depict Safe versus Unsafe School Locations?	37
7.4.1 Relationships.....	38
7.4.2 Violence, Bullying and Intimidation.....	39

8. Implications.....	41
8.1 Recommendations for School.....	41
8.2 Children’s Mental Health.....	43
9. Promotion and Prevention.....	44
10. Limitations.....	45
11. Strengths.....	46
12. Conclusions.....	47
References.....	48
Appendices.....	55
Curriculum Vitae.....	63

List of Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Perceptions of safety, mental health and bullying items.....	18
Table 2. Children's Perceived Safety and Incidents of Experiencing Bullying.....	18
Table 3. Children's Reports of Mental Health and Perceived Safety.....	19
Table 4. Children's Reports of Bullying Incidents and Mental Health.....	19
Table 5. Frequencies: Perceptions of safety, mental health and bullying items.....	20

List of Figures

Figure 1. Student Photograph: Front Entrance to School X.....	24
Figure 2. Student Photograph: Reverse Side (Front Entrance to School X).....	24
Figure 3. Student Photograph: Mr. Principal’s Office.....	25
Figure 4. Student Photograph: “Staff Room” – As Identified by Student.....	26
Figure 5. Student Photograph: The Front of School X.....	27
Figure 6. Student Photograph: The Engine Room.....	28
Figure 7. Student Photograph: “The Bloody Corner”.....	29
Figure 8. Student Photograph: Reverse Side (“The Bloody Corner”).....	30
Figure 9. Student Photograph: The Forest Near “The Bloody Corner”.....	32

List of Appendices

Appendix A: School Survey.....	56
Appendix B: Photovoice Sessions Outline.....	59
Appendix C: University Ethics Approval.....	62
Appendix D: Curriculum Vitae.....	63

Mental Health and Safety in Schools: Children's perceptions and experiences

Schools can be viewed as the primary institution responsible for the educational and psychosocial development of children, defining the important role schools play in the effort to create positive, healthy and safe environments for children (Haynes, 1996). Safety within these schools continues to be a widespread critical issue affecting children of all ages as they progress through the education system. What makes children feel safe versus unsafe is an important question to address in order to combat issues around mental health and the well being of children. The purpose of the current study is to bring attention to children's perceptions of safety within school, as well as to determine the association, if any, to levels of self-reported mental health issues and bullying incidents. The following paper will outline previous literature indicating a need for this research, including a comprehensive review of past studies, which indicate the necessity for schools to exist as safe and healthy environments for children. Topics such as bullying and school violence, mental health in schools, as well as student's perceptions of safety will be of primary focus. Subsequently, the current study will be outlined, followed by a discussion of the results, in addition to the implications and applications of the findings.

Safe versus Unsafe Schools

The safe schools initiative aims to create healthy environments and promote the academic, social, emotional and intellectual growth of students. The overall concept of a healthy and safe school environment asserts that if children feel safe and happy, they are more likely to reach their academic potential (Weare & Gray, 2003). Similarly, it is commonly believed that schools are a major contributing factor to children's positive adjustment and growth, yet only when the environment is psychologically healthy (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003). Duckett, Kagan, and Sixsmith (2010) propose that students in healthy school environments

display high levels of self-esteem and confidence. Further, these researchers defined healthy school programs as involving aims to increase educational achievement, health and emotional well-being. In particular, it was found that positive well-being was associated with the presence of socially supportive relationships with peers and teachers who provided students with a sense of being valued and cared for. Therefore, the healthy development of children is reliant on not only personal qualities and competencies but also the effective support and nurturance from one's social environment. It is these environmental and social resources that are believed to contribute significantly to children's positive development and in turn, guard them from stress and dysfunction (Baker et al., 2003; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000).

As described by Duckett et al. (2010) healthy school environments “are places where conflicts are minimized and handled in a balanced way, where fairness and justice are upheld and where working hard for social and personal gain is paramount” (p.167). Thus, it is essential that schools are competent in the provision of healthy, safe places for students' development, as they are the primary environment in which children spend their time (Yurtal & Artut, 2010). Children's perceptions of safety within school have been found to be strongly associated with academic achievement, socioemotional and behavioural development (Modzeleski, Mathews-Younes, Arroyo et al., 2012), indicating the critical need for safe, healthy schools.

The goal of creating healthy school climates is often offset by the challenges and attributes that can create unsafe school spaces. These unhealthy school atmospheres can involve violence such as unacceptable social behaviour, aggression, bullying, harassment, intimidation and other acts that harm others (McEvoy, 1999). Many children in middle and secondary schools can experience a variety of forms of violence such as bullying, pushing, shoving, grabbing, slapping, verbal insults and threats (Harris, 2000) that can affect them emotionally and

physically, leading their day to day lives in school to be miserable. These characteristics of unsafe school environments inhibit development and learning and can lead to many additional mental and social problems for students.

Violence and Bullying in Schools

Concerns over violence and the safety of students in schools has led to research investigating the detrimental effects that violence poses for children's development. Research focusing on areas outside of the school system, such as levels of exposure to family or community violence has found to be significantly related to levels of behavioural problems and school achievement (Thompson, 2005). Children's exposure to violence has also been found to be associated with increased internalizing and externalizing problems, along with elevated levels of child-reported distress (Raden, 1998). Additionally, a study by Matthews, Demsey and Overstreet (2009) found that exposure to violence was related to academic performance and attendance. The researchers asserted that children's exposure to violence not only poses threats for their physical safety but also contributes to a variety of negative psychological, behavioural and academic consequences. The impact of these exposures on children's functioning in schools has only recently become an area of concern, given the belief that violence and associated mental health concerns may greatly impact a child's ability to function effectively in school (Matthews, Demsey and Overstreet, 2009).

Various forms of bullying such as verbal threats, intimidation, and physical altercations as well as more recent forms of online or "cyber-bullying" are becoming more prevalent within schools and are quite possibly the most common form of school violence (Boulton et al., 2009; Harris, 2000). These bullying behaviours within schools have also been known to have a variety of psychological and emotional effects on children and adolescents. According to Kaltiala-

Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen and Rimpela (2000) victimization is likely to cause considerable distress. These researchers indicated victimization as a predisposing factor of later developing mental disorders or alternately that internalizing problems contribute to becoming victimized, making the direction of causality unknown. Through their study concerning bullying and victimization in relation to psychosomatic symptoms, depression and anxiety revealed involvement in bullying was associated with all mental health problems that were analyzed. It was found that mental health problems positively correlated with bullying, with similar rates among both bullies and victims.

Alternate studies found differences between the levels of depression and anxiety among all those associated with bullying, including the bully, victim and those that are both the bully and a victim (Slee, 1995; Swearer, Song, Cary et al., 2001). Interestingly, researchers found those students falling in the bully and bully-victim categories to maintain the highest levels of depression in comparison to the victim and no-status student. Despite the differences in levels of mental health concerns, researchers suggest that there is a relation between bullying, violence, and mental health problems. Essentially, this indicates a need to focus on school violence and children's feelings of safety if school based mental health programs are to be successful.

Mental Health in Schools

Mental health services for children have a long-standing importance within schools, leaving practitioners and professionals to view schools as an exceptionally important system of care (Barrett, Eber & Wiest, 2013). Given that children spend a great deal of time in school, it is a key location for providing school based mental health services and interventions for children at risk or displaying early symptoms of mental health problems (Bradshaw, Buckley & Jalongo,

2008). Additionally, intervening and addressing these concerns at the school level may reduce stigmas surrounding mental health service (Bradshaw, Buckley & Ialongo, 2008).

As highlighted in prevalence research, children's mental health is an area of growing concern, indicating that many children in need of mental health services are not receiving them (Friedrich, Mendez & Mihalas, 2010). For those children who do receive aid, schools are often seen as the primary provider, with estimates of the number of children receiving these services in school ranging between 70 and 80 percent (Hoagwood, Burns, Kiser et al., 2001). Thus, within the school system, there may be good opportunities to create and implement school-based mental health programming. This form of programming intends to address the mental health issues prevalent in children and promote the most effective care, creating a safe and encouraging atmosphere for students to achieve their highest potential. Previous research on a similar program, known as the Safe schools/Healthy students initiative, displayed safe environments as essential to promoting healthy development and academic success (Modezeleski et al., 2012). Additional evidence has shown school mental health programs improving educational achievement through decreasing school absences, reducing discipline referrals and improving test score levels (Paternite, 2005; Rones & Hoagwood, 2000).

Anxiety disorders are found to be the most common mental health issues and the primary reason for referrals to mental health services (Albano, Chorpita & Barlow, 2003). Further, anxiety disorders are also seen as the most prevalent childhood psychological disorder, affecting 10% of children and adolescents (McLoone, Hudson & Rapee, 2006). Hatton, McNicol and Doubleday (2006) conducted a comprehensive literature search of 11 studies concerning prevalence rates of anxiety disorders and found that among pre-adolescent children under the age of 12, anxiety disorder prevalence rates ranged from 2.6% to 41.2% of community wide samples.

Further, research has suggested that 35% of children in primary care reported mild to moderate levels of anxiety and 17% reported levels that fit disorder specific criteria (Chavira, Stein, Bailey & Stein, 2004). Together, these occurrence rates indicate the high number of children in classrooms affected by anxiety distress. Aside from prevalence, it is important to assess anxiety in school settings as children can display internalizing or externalizing symptoms, leaving those who internalize anxiety to be at risk of being unnoticed by mental health professionals and those who experience externalizing symptoms to display more disruptive behaviours (Tomb & Hunter, 2004). Anxiety symptoms have been found to interfere with children's interpersonal and academic functioning (Last, Hansen & Franco, 1997) and position them at greater risk of developing anxiety disorders and depression (Cole, Lachlan, Peeke et al., 1998).

Perceptions of School Safety and Incident Reports

Perceptions of safe versus unsafe schools may vary between demographics and depend very much on one's definition of a safe environment. Schools with low violence reports are often defined as safe. Likewise schools with fewer school fights, bullying incidents, less vandalism and fewer reports of students who feel unsafe are thought to be safe school environments (Langhout & Annear, 2011). Further, studies have found that students who were aware of social and peer support systems available felt safer in class lessons, perceived school as a friendly place and worried less about the threat of being bullied (Cowie, Hutson, Oztug & Myers, 2008). Therefore understandably, much is involved in what determines children's perspectives of a safe school environment and thus a more detailed analysis of what children perceive to be safe and unsafe is necessary in aiding the effort to create healthy, protected environments for children.

Researchers, Langhout and Annear (2011) commented on the lack of studies examining how students understand school safety and the few studies that specifically asked children about safe places. In order to address this issue, researchers looked to determine what is meant by 'safe', reporting results that show children have different perceptions of safety based on factors such as school location and age. The study reported that older children's perceptions of unsafe places correlated with injury data, adult absence and low levels of territoriality, whereas younger children associated unsafe places with adult absence and referrals (records in which teachers track students who are caught breaking rules). The implications of this study indicate a need to identify what elementary school students label as safe and unsafe school places.

One of the common outcomes of bullying is the feeling it creates for students of being unsafe in schools, a finding supported by numerous studies that show bullying to be inversely associated with perceptions of safety within schools, and recently reported as the most common reason why children felt unsafe (see, for example, Beran & Tutty, 2002; Cowie & Oztug, 2008). Additional studies also present results indicating a significant association between levels of being bullied and perceived safety in school (Rushton & Larkin, 2001, Boulton, Duke, Holman et al., 2009). These studies commented on the major concern these findings raise, given the necessity for children to feel safe in school. More specifically, the widely accepted notion that children develop and learn best in a setting where they feel safe and psychologically secure (Rushton & Larkin, 2001; Boulton et al., 2009) indicates that the association between bullying and perceptions of safety is an area that requires much further research.

Mental Health and School Safety

Abraham Maslow posited that children have an inherent need for safety and some kind of predictable world and that, without this, they begin experiencing feelings of fear and anxiety

(Simon, 1999). Although minimal research addresses the direct association of school safety and mental health, some studies have looked at comparable variables, such as more general feelings of safety (i.e., neighbourhood safety) displaying intriguing results. Through examining possible connections between neighbourhood trust and safety in relation to childhood mental health, research has found that children living in more deprived neighbourhoods have a higher chance of requiring mental health care services (Van der Linden, Drukker, Gunther et al., 2003). Meltzer and colleagues (2007) report similar results, linking children's perceptions of their neighbourhoods, trustworthiness and feelings of safety with childhood psychopathology, particularly emotional disorders. Researchers speculated this relationship between children's lack of neighbourhood trust and safety was connected with increased rates of psychopathology and posited that this may be because these children feel they must continually look over their shoulder and assess their environment. Aside from the potential physical threats of being in an unsafe environment, this can also evoke much anxiety and further mental illness as children attempt to cope psychologically with fearing for their own safety.

Much can be said for the application of these results to children's experiences within the school system, which is an important site to consider given the school's role in shaping children's development. Children's Mental Health Ontario (2007) stated that "increased mental health support in schools can provide students with early treatment to problems like conduct, behavioural and anxiety disorders, potentially reducing the need for school transfers and promoting a positive, safe school environment" (p. 1). Thus it can be seen that the relationship between children's levels of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression are important to consider and compare with feelings of safety at school. Determining the factors that predict or mediate children's feelings of safety and belonging in schools is key to understanding what

makes children feel safe versus unsafe and addressing the issues around the mental health and well being of children.

Purpose of the Current Study

Past literature has identified several important themes related to children's mental health and safety, yet little research exists on the direct interplay of the two within a school setting in association to violence (Bacchini, Esposito & Affuso, 2009; Boulton et al., 2009; Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Swearer & Doll, 2001). The current study explores children's perceptions of safety within schools and the levels of mental health issues related to anxiety, stress and depression, focusing on children's self-reports of bullying incidents and mental health concerns. Past research has detected a connection between safety perceptions and mental health (Bacchini et al., 2009; Boulton et. al., 2009), and this work provides the foundation for the current study's analysis of children's mental health and feelings of safety.

Determining what predicts children's feelings of safety and mental health is critical in order to expand the availability and quality of mental health services at school. To achieve this, it is important to include children's discussion of what they deem to be safe versus unsafe and how they describe mental health given that they are the primary beneficiaries of school safety interventions (Langhout & Annear, 2011). Through discussions with students, the current study reports potentially useful information concerning the factors that create a safe school environment from the perspective of the students themselves. This will add to the existing research, which frequently focuses on personal characteristics and aspects of the individual rather than on environmental factors that promote adjustment in schools (Baker et al., 2003). Children were provided the opportunity to take photos of locations around their school and describe their pictures in an activity known as photo voice. Utilizing photo voice further asked

students about safe places, as their voices should be at the root of determining the definition of what is safe versus unsafe. In support of this, Langhout and Annear (2011) also assert that research should amplify children's voices and ask them directly about safe places, as this will fill the gap in past studies, which frequently do not consider student's perspectives concerning safe schools.

Further, through considering student's self reports of experiences with bullying, the current study adds to recent findings which claim bullying to be the single most common reason for why students feel unsafe in school (Cowie & Oxtug, 2008). Bullying incident reports from the student's perspective will provide an additional measure to assess school safety. In combination with analyzing student's self-reported mental health concerns, the results of the current study help to conceptualize how these variables may relate and in turn, influence overall perceptions of safety.

Through small group interviews with children following the photovoice activity, the current study explores how children define safety, and their perceptions of safe, versus unsafe places within the school environment. This provides useful information in the understanding of what makes certain locations within a school to be considered safe and unsafe. Additionally, findings may add to information gathered through system-wide safe school surveys and aid in determining the next steps to create a psychologically, physically and emotionally safe school environment. Together, the data derived from the current study are aimed at providing beneficial information for intervention and prevention initiatives for Safe School and School Based Mental Health programs to promote safe, healthy environments and experiences for children.

With the safety of children in schools continuing to emerge as area of concern (Bucher & Manning, 2003; Giancola & Bear, 2003; Modzeleski et al., 2012), this research complements the

growing body of knowledge on what can be done to keep children feeling safe in the education system. As mental health plays a role in the overall development of children, it is also important to address the levels of self-reported anxiety, depression and stress among school children.

Research Questions

The current study addresses the following questions:

- Are children's levels of perceived safety connected to their self-reports of incidents of bullying?
- Are children's reports of mental health issues correlated with perceived safety levels?
- Are children's reports of bullying incidents related to their self-reports of mental health concerns?
- How do children depict safe versus unsafe school locations?

Method

The current study involves both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of data derived from a School Survey and semi structured group interviews with children following a photo taking activity. System-wide student surveys within a large Southwestern Ontario school board provide information for the initial analysis of children's perceptions of safety, mental health issues and experiences with bullying (see Appendix A). Quantitative scores in these areas were analyzed and compared to determine possible associations. Subsequent qualitative research within a selected school in the School Board allowed for a greater focus on children's perceptions of safety within the school environment. In consultation with the School Board, School X was identified to be a location of interest and suitable for further examination. This decision was as a result of plans for a community centre to be built nearby the school. With

programming development to be determined, the opportunity for a more in depth analysis of community needs was beneficial to the School Board, as well as the community. Therefore, the second analysis involved quantitative data from the school survey completed specifically by students at School X. This was done to look more closely at student perceptions of safety within their school environment. In order to provide a more descriptive element to this analysis, qualitative research was incorporated to attain critically important information pertaining to safety from the perspective of the students themselves. The use of the photovoice technique facilitated the gathering of this information, where children were instructed to take photos of places around their school and later discuss in a group their feelings of safe versus unsafe school locations.

Participants

The current study included 13,157 students in grades four to six within the School Board. Students participating in the study completed the survey as part of the annual board-wide process. A generally equal proportion of males and females participated in the completion of the Survey, comprising a total of 13,157 participants. The second phase of the qualitative analysis narrowed in on students at School X, including 214 students as well as 220 students at School Y, for comparison reasons. As the surveys were previously completed and collected through the School Board, no further participation of the students was needed to complete the initial stage of the current study.

The final phase of the study included eight students total, two in grade four, five in grade five and one in grade six, attending School X. The selection of participants for this portion of the study was reliant on the return of signed parental consent forms. Invitations to participate in the current study were distributed to all students in grades four, five, and six at School X. The

resulting eight students were those who attained consent to participate. These students participated in the photovoice activity and subsequent discussion sessions.

Measures

The survey was used to assess prevalence rates of bullying incidents, feelings of safety and mental health issues, and was designed to reach students in grades four to twelve, although only data for students in grades four to six will be used. A recently added section to the Survey examines children's views and feelings surrounding mental health. In the current study, the elementary school version was used specifically addressing the sections titled: *student views*, *student feelings*, *inclusion* and *incidents*. Students were asked to respond to the following statements concerning safety: *"This is a safe school for students"*, *"I feel safe in the school building"*, and *"I feel safe in the school yard."* The students were to respond to these statements using a five point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". The following statements concerning mental health were also addressed in the current study: *"I feel worried, sad or stressed at school"*, and *"I feel angry or upset at school"*. Using a similar Likert scale, students were asked to respond to each mental health statements by selecting one of the following five options: "Daily," "Weekly," "Monthly," "Seldom" or "Never". Certain items on the School Survey referred to bullying incidents and behaviours of the students. Students were asked to report the frequency of their personal experiences with being the victim of bullying (verbal, physical, social, sexual, and/or through use of technology). Participants were to respond using a Likert scale again ranging from "Daily," "Weekly," "Monthly," "Seldom" or "Never".

Photovoice, originally developed by Caroline C. Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997) was utilized in the current study in order to visually and verbally capture children's perceptions of safety within schools. This consisted of reviewing and discussing photographs, taken by

students at School X. According to developers Wang and Burris (1997), this technique seeks to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants from their personal viewpoint. Further, it allows for “critical dialogue and knowledge about important issue[s]” to take place (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). This technique was well suited for the current study, which aims to have children maintain their own voices concerning what makes them feel safe and unsafe within their school environment. As explained by researchers Chio and Fandt (2007) the photovoice technique provides a unique opportunity in research to offer students an alternate way to express themselves, using photographs as a means of communication. The process utilized disposable cameras and printing software in order to obtain children’s pictorial depictions of safe versus unsafe school locations. Audio recording devices were also used to record students’ later discussions of selected photographs.

Procedure

The School Board collected the original data as a part of a larger initiative, looking to create safe, caring and positive learning environments for students. Surveys are distributed annually to all elementary schools in late March. Teachers reviewed the purpose of the surveys with students and instructions for completing it. The research department at the School Board examined all Surveys and electronically uploaded responses into a database used for the current study. The School Board’s research department had obtained ethics approval and collected all necessary consent requirements prior to distributing surveys. Ethical considerations ensured the anonymity of the Surveys and provided private spaces for children to complete the Surveys. Further, the department granted approval for The University to utilize the statistics in the current study’s secondary data analysis. The non-medical research ethics board and the School Board both provided ethical approval for the data collected in the qualitative setting (see Appendix D).

The current study specifically used components of the survey that addressed the student's perceptions of school safety as well as student reports of experiencing bullying. New to the Survey, the current study also analyzed the Mental Health self-reports of students through the Surveys questions pertaining to their levels of worried, sad, stressed, angry and upset feelings. This data was analyzed on a board-wide level, as well as using a more targeted approach, specifically addressing the items pertaining to perceptions of safety within and outside of the school as well as the school as a whole at School X and School Y.

With consent from parents/guardians, eight students were able to participate in the photovoice activity. The photovoice process took place over the course of four sessions during the nutrition breaks at School X (see Appendix B for a detailed outline of each session). During session one, students were introduced to one another as well as the co-facilitator and myself. Nametags were distributed and casual get-to-know-you games were played to help the students feel more comfortable. Discussion about safety followed, including what it meant for the students to feel safe or unsafe and how they felt. At this time, some students offered personal examples of feeling safe and unsafe, which allowed for further group discussion around the topic. The last component during session one involved introducing picture examples of seemingly safe and unsafe environments. I facilitated discussion regarding the students' thoughts and feelings about the pictures. This was intended to encourage student's to begin thinking about how some environments and situations can elicit feelings of safety, whereas others may lead to feelings of being unsafe.

Session two took place over the students' second nutrition break of the day. It was during this time that the purpose of the study was explained:

We want to know about different areas in the school and how they make you feel. Some places can make us feel safe and some places might make us feel unsafe and I want to

know about all these places in your school. I have a very important job for you – you are going to be using cameras to take some pictures around the school. You will be taking pictures of places in the school you feel safe and some places you feel unsafe

Further discussion of the process followed, including addressing any questions and reviewing the rules, such as pictures cannot be taken of people. The technicalities of using the disposable cameras were explained and cameras were distributed. Students then explored the school grounds both inside and outside, under the supervision of the co-facilitator and myself. Students were given ample time to capture areas around the school they felt were safe and unsafe. At the end of session two, cameras were collected and pictures developed for the following day.

During session three, student's were given time to review their photos and were asked to consider their reasoning for taking each photograph as well as their thoughts on feeling safe or unsafe in the areas they took pictures. Students were then asked to select two to three photographs to talk about as a group. Each student had the opportunity to share their chosen photographs and discuss why they chose to take the picture and what about the location in the photograph made them feel safe or unsafe. The photographs were the centre of the group discussion, utilizing a semi-structured interview format to allow for flexibility in the gathering of information (see Appendix B for a list of interview questions). All discussion portions were audio recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

Using the above noted relevant data from the Surveys, descriptive and correlational analyses were conducted in order to determine if any associations exist between the means of student's perceptions of safety and self-reported mental health. Frequency reports further describe student's experiences with bullying and self-reported mental health concerns. A narrowed descriptive analysis of student responses to the Survey at School X provides

information regarding students' perception of safety. This will be supplemented by qualitative analysis retrieved from the photovoice activity at School X.

Audio data recorded from the discussion portion of the photo-voice activity was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis as presented by Creswell (2007). Following Creswell's (2007) first step in the data analysis process, transcribed material from the photovoice discussion sessions were segmented into categories of information. Many categories were initially developed, leading to the second step of the process known as horizontalization. During this process, significant statements were listed and organized under various themed categories, known as clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2007). In consultation with two experienced researchers, consistency in the organization of the data was deemed reliable and appropriate. Themes were ultimately organized under two main research questions directed at the students, "what makes you feel safe?" and "what makes you feel unsafe?" Under each question category, further themes were developed due to the frequency and relation of some student's descriptions to those descriptions of their peers. This process is referred to by Creswell (2007) as selective coding, being the last step in the coding process, resulting in a systematic organization of the information, displaying themes under the central phenomenon of student's perceptions of safety within the school environment.

Results

School survey analysis findings

Descriptive statistics. The following table displays the descriptive statistics for students in the junior division (grades four to six) on all items of interest, retrieved from the School Survey.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics: Perception of Safety, Mental Health and Bullying Items

Item on Survey	Description	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SV01	Safe school*	4.02	1.00	13,157
SV07	Safe school building*	4.26	1.08	13,052
SV08	Safe school yard*	3.85	1.21	13,112
SFb01	Worried, sad or stressed at school+	3.57	1.23	13,102
SFb02	Angry or upset at school+	3.73	1.18	13,073
INCa01	Verbally bullied+	4.06	1.19	13,038
INCa02	Physically bullied+	4.47	.960	12,977
INCa03	Socially bullied+	4.34	1.08	12,939
INCa04	Sexually bullied+	4.83	.66	12,881
INCa05	Bullied using technology+	4.74	.740	12,917

* Strongly disagree (1), Somewhat disagree (2), Neutral (3), Somewhat agree (4), Strongly agree (5)

+ Daily (1), Weekly (2), Monthly (3), Seldom (4), Never (5)

Correlations. Below are the correlations of interest, intended to investigate each of the research questions proposed in the current study, specifically for students in the junior division (grades four to six).

Table 2

Children's Perceived Safety and Incidents of Experiencing Bullying

		SV01	SV07	SV08	INCa01	INCa02	INCa03	INCa04	INCa05
SV01	Pearson Correlation	1	.563	.518	.274	.260	.245	.175	.157
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	13,157	13,009	13,070	12,983	12,927	12,886	12,830	12,864
SV07	Pearson Correlation		1	.586	.294	.282	.268	.192	.186
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N		13,052	13,004	12,884	12,831	12,792	12,737	12,772
SV08	Pearson			1	.344	.348	.335	.204	.223

	Correlation								
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N			13,112	12,941	12,889	12,848	12,798	12,831

Table 3

Children's Report's of Mental Health and Perceived Safety

		SFb01	SFb02	SV01	SV07	SV08
SFb01	Pearson Correlation	1	.655	.300	.346	.397
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	13,102	13,030	13,053	12,958	13,016
SFb02	Pearson Correlation		1	.335	.382	.418
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N		13,073	13,023	12,931	12,989

Table 4

Children's Reports of Bullying Incidents and Mental Health

		SFb01	SFb02
INCa01	Pearson Correlation	.434	.449
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	12,945	12,919
INCa02	Pearson Correlation	.348	.373
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	12,889	12,864
INCa03	Pearson Correlation	.407	.426
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	12,853	12,825
INCa04	Pearson Correlation	.207	.346
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	12,757	12,778
INCa05	Pearson Correlation	.199	.154
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	12,786	12,787

Frequencies. The following table displays frequency statistics for students in the junior division (grades four to six) on all items of interest, retrieved from the School Survey.

Table 5

Frequencies: Perception of Safety, Mental Health and Bullying Items

Survey Item	Description	Frequency	Total Students	Percent
SV01	Safe school	1,169*	13,157	8.9
SV07	Safe school building	1,162*	13,052	8.9
SV08	Safe school yard	2,073*	13,112	15.8
SFb01	Worried, sad or stressed at school+	2,837+	13,102	21.7
SFb02	Angry or upset at school+	2,331+	13,073	17.8
INCa01	Verbally bullied+	1,783+	13,038	13.7
INCa02	Physically bullied+	847+	12,977	6.5
INCa03	Socially bullied+	1,164+	12,939	9.0
INCa04	Sexually bullied+	307	12,881	2.4
INCa05	Bullied using technology+	395	12,917	3.1

* Number of students who responded strongly disagree or disagree to item on survey

+ Number of students who responded daily or weekly to item on survey

Perceptions of safety at School X and School Y. Specifically looking at students attending School X, three items concerning children's perception of safety were reviewed: *This is a safe school for students, I feel safe in the school building, and I feel safe in the school yard.* This data was then looked at in comparison with student's answers to these same items from School Y, located in a suburb within the School Board that is considered more affluent. The two schools were found to display homogeneity of variance for a between subject ANOVA, thus suitable for comparison. An analysis of variance showed there was no statistically significant difference ($F = .997$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$) regarding the item, *this is a safe school for students*, between students at School X ($N = 214$, $M = 4.04$, $SD = .97$) and students at school Y ($N = 219$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = .81$). However, a significant difference was found between students rating of safety at each school, concerning their feelings of safety within the school building ($F = 4.07$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$) and in the school yard ($F = 8.72$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Results suggested that when responding to the item, *I feel safe in the school building*, students at School X feel less safe ($N =$

209, $M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.13$) compared to students at School Y ($N = 219$, $M = 4.34$, $SD = .90$).

Further, students at School X ($N = 212$, $M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.21$) feel less safe in the school yard, compared to those at School Y ($N = 220$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = .97$).

Photovoice data collection

Staff members at School X were very friendly and accommodating during the set up and process of the photovoice data collection. Similarly, students were pleasant and responsive to hearing the description of what they would be participating in. The first session consisted of discussion around what it meant to feel safe and unsafe. Student's contributed some of their personal views and shared some examples of moments in which they felt safe or unsafe. The group was excitable and talkative, as many of the students were classmates, friends or siblings, making it difficult at times to remain on topic. Repetition of questions and the answers of those students who were focused on the task allowed for the process to move forward.

During the second session, students were eager to learn what they would be doing with the cameras and excited to begin. Being the first week back to school following the Christmas break, the high energy and excitement of the students led to added enthusiasm for the photovoice process. After a brief explanation of how to use the camera and a review of the rules, students set off to take their photos. Some students maintained that they did not want to waste any pictures and were quite selective in their shots, while others took great interest in snapping a picture of everything they could. With reminders to stay on task and consider their reasoning for taking photographs, I believe the students very much enjoyed this process and felt quite proud walking around the school with their personal cameras. While students were taking photographs, the hallways were quite busy, making the movement between areas within and outside of the school slightly difficult. It is also important to note that the photovoice activity occurred during

School X's nutrition break, which was a busy time in the school yard, as all other students were out for recess. Although I was pleased to see all the students engaged in the activities, at times they needed reminders to remain on task.

Following the collection and development of photographs, I returned the next day for the final two sessions with the students. From the moment we met the students, they were eager and excited to see their photographs. Shuffling through their photos, students were happy to comment on which photographs were their favourites and explain why they took pictures of certain locations. A few students wrote notes to remind themselves what they wanted discuss with the group on the reverse side of some photos. Each student selected a few pictures from their assortment to talk about with the group. I then facilitated the group discussion, ensuring that every student had an opportunity to explain their photographs and consider their personal feelings of being safe or unsafe. Although there were some distractions during this process, the students did very well supporting each other and engaging in group discussion. Overall, I believe the student's thoroughly enjoyed the group meetings and photovoice activity. Some very thoughtful discussion between group members demonstrating the success of this process in allowing students to comfortably express themselves and be heard.

Trustworthiness

During the photovoice sessions, all efforts were made to ensure the students felt comfortable with one another, the co-facilitator and myself. This was initiated through playing introduction games to get to know one another and create a safe, open atmosphere, ultimately preparing the children to become more comfortable with sharing their thoughts and feelings. Through developing this rapport, students were able to be open and honest about their experiences and feelings knowing that there were no right or wrong answers, which helped to

ensure the credibility and the truthfulness of their discussion (Shenton, 2004). Further, I engaged the students through use of reflective listening, frequently repeating back statements they were contributing to the discussion. This technique not only allowed the children to feel heard but also provided them the opportunity to consider what they were saying and correct me if I misunderstood. This technique also helped me to remain aware, as a researcher for any contradicting information or discrepancies with descriptions the children were giving (Shenton, 2004). These efforts therefore allowed for the qualitative research to remain trustworthy and credible in demonstrating an accurate, holistic picture of children's perception of safety within school.

Photovoice Analysis Findings

Qualitative data retrieved from the photo-voice activity and group interview component of the study supplied important information to better understand how students described and perceived safety at school. This further revealed under what circumstances, students felt safe and unsafe. A total of seven themes emerged during the analysis of the transcription data, organized accordingly under two categories. The first three themes demonstrated student responses to the research question, "*what makes you feel safe?*" whereas final four themes fell under the research question, "*what makes you feel unsafe?*" The total of seven themes accurately represent the summary of students' perception of safe and unsafe locations at School X.

What makes you feel safe? As students identified locations in which they felt safe, common answers reflected the supportive environment of School X. During discussion phases, commonalities surfaced around students' feelings of security when in the presence of trusted others and in places they felt at ease, as seen in the following themes.

Being around friends.



Figure 1. Student photograph: Front Entrance to School X

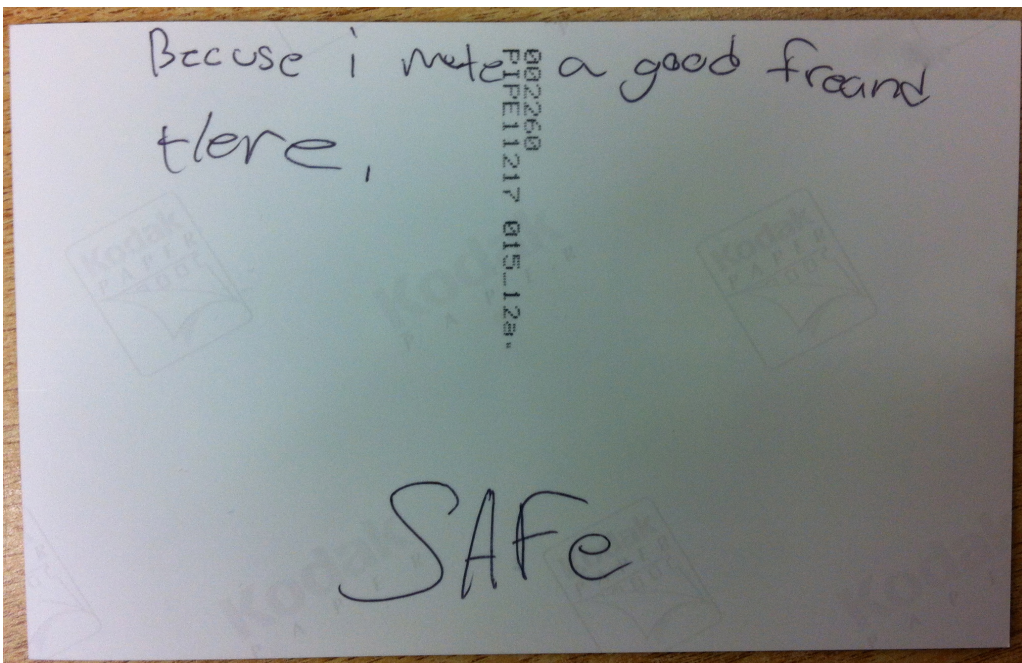


Figure 2. Student photograph: Reverse Side (Front Entrance to School X)

The notion of placing oneself in a physical location near friends was a frequent theme among student descriptions when explaining a safe setting. Frequently, students mentioned the

presence of their friends in locations they identified to be safe places within or around their school. This indicated the influence of being around friends on student's perception of safety.

What else about that place makes you feel safe?

Um... I was near my friends when I took it.

I took it because there are teachers and my friends inside it.

So it makes me feel safe.

Being around trusted adults - teachers and staff.



Figure 3. Student photograph: Mr. Principal's Office



Figure 4. Student photograph: 'Staff Room' – As Identified by Student

Students expressed a level of comfort and feelings of safety when trusted teachers and staff members were nearby. More specifically, student's identified a deep level of trust that teachers and staff cared about them and their safety. For the students, this meant that help was close by if they were ever in need. They chose to take pictures of locations in which teachers and staff were within close proximity, and discussed feeling safe in those areas because of their presence. Thus, being around trusted adults was second theme and identifier of safe locations within the school.

*It's a picture of Mr. (Principal's) office.
I think it's a safe place because Mr. (Principal's) usually always in it.
[...] I felt happy because... um, I know him and he is, um a really nice Principal*

*It's a picture of the staff room
And I feel safe in that picture because teachers hangout in there, so if I was getting hurt
or bullied, a teacher could come out.*

*It's Mr. (Principal)'s [office]
Well first off, there's the Principal there.*

Well, even if anything happened in there, his thing is in the office and then I've got the vice Principal right next door, the secretary right there and whatever teachers are in there at the moment.

Being in a familiar, trusted location - School X.



Figure 5. Student photograph: The Front of School X

Student's recognized School X as a generally safe environment, as seen through student photos of the front of the school as well as their verbal discussion of School X as a location in which they believe to be safe. This demonstrates the level of comfort and security student's feel while at their school and speaks to the perceived safety of their school environment.

Um, I took a picture of the photo because inside the school it makes me feel safe.

The front of the school.

I think it's a safe place because people normally go in there all the time talking and nothing really goes on.

Um, the front of the school.

Safe.

Because I grew up at the school pretty much.

What makes you feel unsafe? When choosing and describing locations labelled as unsafe, student's frequently reported concern over their own safety and/or the safety of others. This involved concern over physical safety as well as discomfort over being in certain locations or near certain people around the school, as seen through the following themes.

Places that are physically unsafe - fear of physical features.

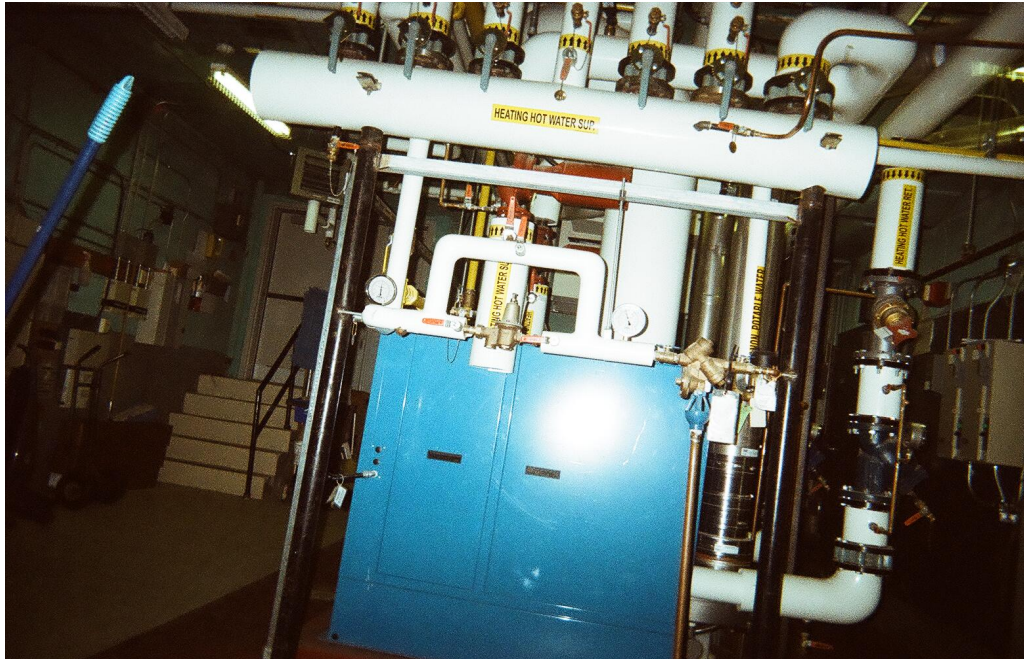


Figure 6. Student photograph: The Engine Room

Many students described feeling unsafe when in locations they believed put themselves or their peers in physical danger. This demonstrates how student's felt unsafe when their physical surroundings were a concern. Student's commented on specific physical features in areas and mentioned their fear of themselves or their peers getting hurt. These statements maintained the theme that places believed to be physically unsafe were a common indicator for why student's felt unsafe in certain locations.

*[...] Engine room [boiler room/janitors closet]
It's very dark, it's very... and someone could get really hurt, really hurt... so I feel it's unsafe in there.*

*I took the picture because I didn't want anyone to get hurt and I don't like people getting hurt, so I took a picture to warn you guys about the engine room.
[...] all the levers. It can... the lever can burst off and hit someone.*

Um, it could be dangerous because [...] if you went into the steam room, there's wires and electrical boxes, so if you fell or tripped on anything... well you'd technically get fried, like a fish. [boiler room/janitors closet]

It's a picture of the janitors room.

I think this is an unsafe place because if you were walking in it, something could fall down and hurt you.

And somebody might have sprayed something in it, like one of the, um... the chemicals to clean. And um, it could like, hurt you.

The janitor's room.

It's really scary because it's really dark and... really old.

I see like all these wires that really get me worried.

Anyone can slip and fall. [stairwell]

And there's lots of water that people... bring in from outside.

The back of the schoolyard – fear of the people who are there.



Figure 7. Student photograph: “The Bloody Corner”

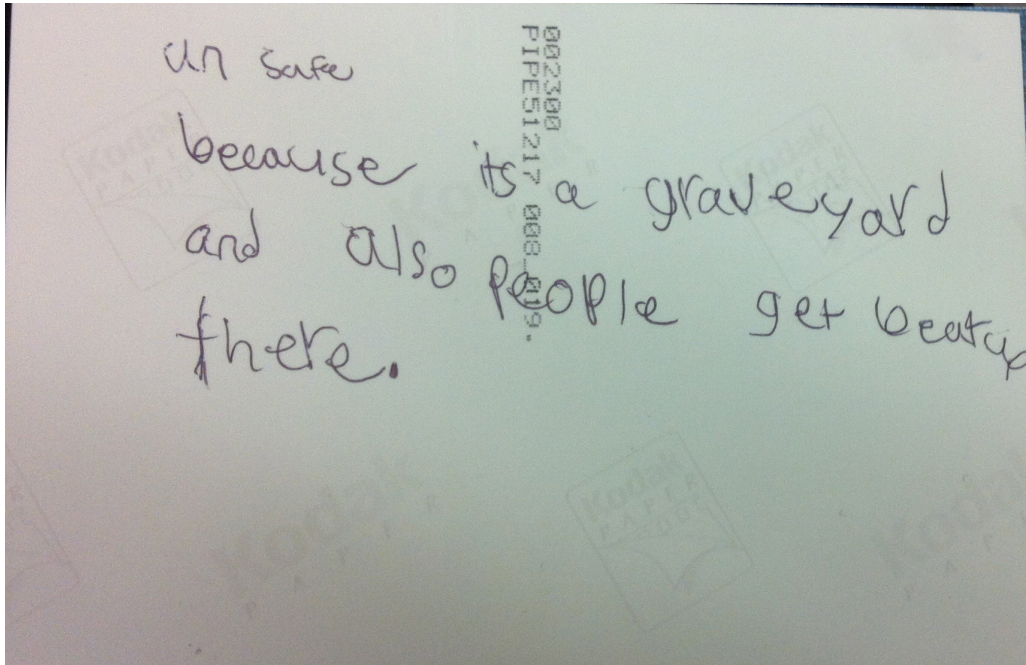


Figure 8. Student photograph: Reverse side (“The Bloody Corner”)

The student’s expressed feeling unsafe in an area near the back end of the schoolyard. They specifically identified personal negative experiences while in this area, which gave reason for some to label this location as unsafe. In addition, students described feeling unsafe as a result of witnessing or hearing about events that occurred in this area. Through the student’s discussion, a connection was noticed between feeling unsafe in this location and a fear or discomfort of the people who are there.

It’s called the bloody corner.

Um...it’s unsafe...

Because it’s a graveyard and also people get... beat-up there.

Because... um, it just scares me, caz if I get beat up there, I’m just gunna run

I feel horrified there.

Yeah, it’s unlucky because back in that corner, I was near the bars, during school hours... and this... some kid- trip- well, you wouldn’t know what it’s called, but it’s called a slow-foot.

You put your foot in front of someone and you hit their back (demonstrated) and um, someone did that to me and I hit my face off the bars.

*On the other side... um, they also have people that [...] last year they started, like throwing like sticks and soccer balls and water balloons at kids. and they do drugs
Yeah and I got hit by one!
That's why I took a picture!
I got hit by a stick. With a stick!*

They were beating up a kid and they were doing drugs back there and that's why I took a picture of this.

His name was Jake and he got seriously injured by older kids. He was in grade... in grade um, 7...

And he got seriously injured, his back was all screwed up after the guys beat him up. Now his foot is like this and he has a bit of a limp when he walks.

Does it remind you of that?

Yeah.

When there is absence of teacher supervision at the back of the schoolyard. In

association with the previous theme concerning a specific location eliciting unsafe feelings from students at the school, an absence of teacher supervision at the back of the schoolyard was also found to be a reoccurring comment among the students. Multiple students felt it important to emphasize that teachers do not supervise this area of the schoolyard during recess duty. To the students, this meant that help was not close by while in this particular location. This led to the understanding that students' feelings of being unsafe in this area increased due to the lack of teacher supervision and consequently was an additional theme regarding what made students feel unsafe.

*[...] and also people get... beat-up there.
There's no teachers there.*

*Because you're not allowed over there!
The teachers won't come over there and they're not allowed over there*

Teachers don't go back there.

The messages and threats in the forest.



Figure 9. Student photograph: The Forest Near “The Bloody Corner”

Students’ reports of feeling unsafe also involved written messages on trees in the forest at the back of the schoolyard in which students felt unsafe. Messages written by others with the intent to scare were having an effect on how student’s perceived safety in this location. Some student’s spoke to these messages while describing why they felt unsafe in this location.

[...] Whenever I go back there all I see is.... These things saying ‘we’re always watching’... ‘we’re coming for you’... ‘don’t turn back... turn back now’... ‘don’t look behind you’, whatever.

It said “turn back now....” I saw one that said “turn back now or you’ll get....”

It said turn back now or you’ll get raped.

Yeah, they’re just spray-painting them to get you out of the forest so they can go in there and do drugs.

Discussion

The current research study was designed to look at both quantitative and qualitative data to explore how children experience mental health and bullying, as well as their perceptions of safety at school. Qualitative components to this study intended to explore the experiences of children from their viewpoint, with attention to how children perceive safety and what language and visual images they used to describe this. In general, the current study revealed some agreement between how children reported their perceptions of safety on the school survey and how they verbally explained their perceptions of safety during the qualitative research portion. Aside from indicating the results to be fairly consistent, this mixed methods approach allowed researchers to see the importance of relationships in children's mental well being and feelings of safety. The qualitative data also provided an understanding for why children might feel unsafe at school, such as the specific fears they maintain in some locations associated with bullying and aggressive behaviour. These results will be further examined in this section, with regard to the research and theories presented earlier in this paper.

Children's levels of perceived safety and incidents of bullying

Schools labelled as having unhealthy environments have often been found laden with various form of violence, such as unacceptable social behaviour, aggression, bullying, harassment, intimidation and other acts that harm others (McEvoy, 1999). The current study's qualitative analysis has displayed reasons such as this to be associated with why children feel unsafe in school. Students labelled certain areas of School X, such as the back of the schoolyard as unsafe locations. Further discussion revealed that high school students in the area were showing physical aggression (throwing things at students), intimidation (messages in the forest) and unacceptable social behaviour (doing drugs). Students also indicated that high school

students have been beaten up in this location, showing that being a witness to violence also led to feelings of being unsafe. It was these factors, related to bullying that made the student's feel unsafe in this area of the schoolyard. Thus it is evident that at School X, perceived safety was influenced greatly by witnessed incidents of bullying, violence and unacceptable social behaviour, in the way that in areas with higher bullying behaviours, students felt less safe.

Numerous studies indicate bullying to be inversely associated with perceptions of safety within schools and a frequent reason for why children feel unsafe (Beran & Tutty, 2002; Cowie & Oztug, 2008). The current study's correlational analysis also revealed a pattern of connection between student's feelings of safety and their experiences with bullying. Findings displayed that as students were feeling safe in the school building and the schoolyard, they were simultaneously not experiencing bullying as frequently. These positive correlations between student perceptions of safety and experiences with bullying parallels previous findings by Langhout and Annear (2011) showing schools were more frequently viewed as safe if they had fewer fights and bullying incidents.

Further, frequency data displayed that the most common form of bullying experienced by students in the junior division was verbal bullying, as 14 percent of students answered *daily* or *weekly* to the survey question, *have you personally been verbally bullied?* In regards to feeling unsafe, it was found that the highest number of junior students felt unsafe in the schoolyard. Student responses to the survey item, *I feel safe in the schoolyard*, revealed that 2,073 students either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement, 16 percent of the sample. These two items of interest also displayed a moderate positive correlation, $r(12,939) = .34, p < .001$, further displaying the association between perceived safety and experiences with bullying.

Children's reports of mental health issues and perceived safety levels

It is commonly believed that schools are a major contributing factor to children's positive development when the school environment itself is psychologically healthy (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee & Patil, 2003). In order to holistically consider what makes a school environment psychologically healthy, it is important to consider children's experiences with mental health and safety. Results of the current study displayed that 22 percent of junior students surveyed felt worried, sad or stressed at school daily or weekly, translating to 2,837 students in grades four to six who are experiencing these feelings. This number is significant, considering previous statistics, which found anxiety disorders to be the most prevalent mental health disorder among young people, affecting 10% of children and adolescents (McLoone, 2006). Although the survey is not intended for identifying mental health disorders, the feelings listed in these questions are potentially concerning if students are experiencing them this frequently. Further, 18 percent of junior students, 2,331 to be exact, reported feeling angry or upset at school on a daily to weekly occurrence. This displays an significant number of students in grades four to six who are experiencing mental health related feelings items on a daily to weekly basis. These numbers are highly important, as previous research has mentioned the concern that many children in need of mental health services are not receiving them (Friedrich, Mendez & Mihalas, 2010).

The average answer to items on the school survey regarding feelings of safety displayed that on average, students somewhat agreed that their school was safe for students ($M = 4.02$), they felt safe in the school building ($M = 4.26$) and the school yard ($M = 3.85$). Interestingly, when looking at frequency data, it was found that 9 percent of junior students responded *strongly disagree* or *disagree* to both items: *this is a safe school for students* and *I feel safe in the school*

building. Alternatively, 16 percent *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* with the statement *I feel safe in the schoolyard*.

With respect to the association between these two items of mental health and perceived safety, it was found that students are reporting feelings of safety when they are not experiencing mental health concerns. As no direction of causality can be identified, it is important to indicate that it is also true that students who are infrequently feeling sad, worried, stressed, angry or upset are also feeling safe at school. Among these positive correlations found between all mental health items and perceptions of safety items, the strongest positive correlation existing between students feeling angry or upset and perceptions of safety in the schoolyard $r(12,987) = .42, p < .001$). Findings also revealed a strong positive correlation between students reporting feeling worried, sad or stressed and feeling safe in the school yard $r(13,014) = .40, p < .001$). These results are consistent with those found previously by Modzeleski and colleagues (2012) that found children's perception of safety associated with socioemotional development.

Children's reports of bullying incidents and mental health concerns

Previous research proposed that violence and mental health concerns might greatly impact a child's ability to work effectively in school (Matthews, Demsey & Overstreet, 2009). Given the above noted findings that 22 percent of junior students reported feeling worried, sad or stressed at school and 18 percent reported feeling angry or upset at school it is important to be aware of the impact these experiences might have on children's academic performance. Further, it is possible that mental health concerns are associated with other factors that may create further difficulty for children at school. Researchers Henio, Rimpela, Rantanen and Rimpela (2000) found correlations between mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, and bullying. They further suggested that either experiences of bullying victimization are influential

in later developing mental health problems or, alternately, that dealing with mental health issues may lead to becoming victimized. Although causality cannot be determined, the current study displayed similar results, indicating a positive correlation between children's reports of experiencing bullying and mental health concerns. In other words, when students reported experiencing bullying more frequently, the frequency of experiencing mental health concerns also increased.

The strongest positive correlation as found between student reports of being verbally bullied and experiences of feeling angry or upset while at school $r(12,917) = .45, p < .001$, as well as feeling worried, sad or stressed $r(12,943) = .43, p < .001$. Similarly, strong positive correlations were found between children's reports of being socially bullied and feeling angry or upset $r(12,823) = .43, p < .001$ as well as worried, sad or stressed at school $r(12,851) = .41, p < .001$. These results parallel frequency findings, which display verbal and social bullying to be the most frequent form of bullying experienced by junior students with 14 percent and 9 percent, accordingly, experiencing this on a daily or weekly basis. These results are all consistent with the literature, explaining that forms of violence can have an effect on children emotionally and physically (Harris, 2000).

How do children depict safe versus unsafe school locations?

The current study's use of qualitative data through the photovoice activity allowed for a very unique view of children's perceptions of safety. As noted by Brunsdon and Goatcher (2007), when both visual and verbal communication is used to explain an individual's experience, new pathways of understanding are uncovered that may not have existed if only one form of data collection was used. Where quantitative results indicated 16 percent of junior students strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, *I feel safe in the school yard*, it was

unknown why students were feeling this way. A focused exploratory analysis of School X and School Y was completed in order to compare schools with quite different SES profiles, one being in the central part of the city and the other in an affluent suburb. The intent was to look at two schools of similar size, within one school board to determine what they are reporting. The comparison of these two schools revealed a significant difference between student responses to this item, indicating that students at School X felt less safe in the school yard, compared to students at school Y. This was also found true in regards to student's feelings of safety within the school building. Currently, designs are being developed for a new neighbourhood resource centre to be located within School X. This makes for an ideal time to understand the physical features of both the yard and the school and children's perceptions of these areas to help with planning decisions. Again, although useful in understanding where students felt safe and unsafe, these survey findings were unable to provide further descriptions of why students were feeling this way. Qualitative data revealed distinct themes in student's descriptions during photovoice discussion sessions, indicating why children were likely to feel safe and unsafe while at school.

Relationships. Researchers Duckett, Kagan and Sixsmith (2010) found that positive well-being was associated with the presence of socially supportive relationships with peers and teachers who provided students with a sense of being cared for. This paralleled current qualitative research findings in that students reported feeling safe while in the presence of friends or trusted adults. It can be understood that the nurturance and support offered through these relationships can lead children to feel safe and cared for. Multiple students at School X took photographs of locations they associated to be relatively close to teachers, such as the main office and staff room. These relationships were therefore a key factor in feeling safe, such as for one student who stated, *"I feel safe in that picture because teachers hangout in there, so if I was*

getting hurt or bullied, a teacher could come out". It was also a common association for students to mention peer relationships when describing locations in which they feel safe, stating the presence or relative closeness of teachers and friends as an influential factor. These findings are consistent with an earlier study conducted by Cowie, Hutson, Oztug and Myers (2008) that revealed students felt safe and worried less about being bullied and perceived school as a friendly place when they were aware of the social support systems within the school. Similarly, the importance of relationships in children's perceptions of safety can be seen in the qualitative finding that students at School X commonly felt unsafe when there was a lack of teacher supervision. The back end of the schoolyard was an area in which all students were in agreement that it created feelings of being unsafe. A reoccurring comment during student discussion was that *"teachers won't come over there"*, a statement which was echoed by others in the group and received with heads nodding in agreement. This further supports the theme of relationships and the importance of supportive relationships in helping children to feel safe at school. Not only did students report feeling more safe when in close proximity to friends and teachers but they also reported feeling unsafe in areas where there was a lack of teacher supervision and thus, an absence of caring relationships nearby. This finding was further supported by Langhout and Annear, (2011) who found data suggesting that both older and younger children associated unsafe places with adult absence.

Violence, bullying and intimidation. The above noted findings of correlations between perceptions of safety and experiences of bullying are further supported by qualitative data collected specifically at School X. Different forms of violence, as explained by Harris (2000) can have a lasting effect on children emotionally and physically. This can further affect their ability to learn effectively while in school as well as influence their feelings of comfort, security

and safety while in the school environment. Harriss (2000) further found evidence in support of this association between students being bullied and how they perceived safety in school.

Similarly, through discussions with students at School X during the photovoice activity, it was revealed that students frequently associated unsafe locations with areas in which they witnessed or experienced some type of violent, bullying behaviour or intimidation through messages written on trees. Repeatedly, students mentioned feeling unsafe at the back of the schoolyard, such as one student who stated, *“they were beating up a kid and they were doing drugs back there and that’s why I took a picture of this”*. Another explained a more personal experience with bullying/violent behaviour:

It’s unlucky because back in that corner, I was near the bars, during school hours... and this... some kid [...] it’s called a slow-foot - you put your foot in front of someone and you hit their back and um, someone did that to me and I hit my face off the bars.

These examples display the association students made between violent, bullying-related behaviours and feeling unsafe, whether it was due to personal experience or witnessing these behaviours. These findings are supported by numerous earlier studies that have shown bullying to be inversely associated with perceptions of safety within schools, and recently described as the most recurrent reason for why children felt unsafe (Beran & Tutty, 2002; Cowie & Oztug, 2008). Interestingly, when children at School X knew of someone who was hurt in the back of the schoolyard, witnessed someone being bullied in this area or simply were aware of these occurrences, they reported unsafe feelings. These findings are in support of previous research conducted by Langhout and Annear (2011) that displayed older children’s perceptions of unsafe places to be correlated with injury data. Thus, whether or not the children were experiencing the bullying or violent behaviours themselves, the occurrence of these behaviours alone led children to feel unsafe in certain areas.

Implications

The current study's findings demonstrate associations between children's mental health, bullying experiences and perceived levels of safety within school. These considerations are paramount when determining how to best support children in school to achieve their greatest potential, all while feeling both psychologically and physically safe. Research displays that schools are a major component of children's positive adjustment and growth when those school environments are psychologically healthy (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003). Therefore the implications of this research are found within the advantages this knowledge provides for use in the development of school programming.

Recommendations for school. The breadth and depth of information retrieved during the photovoice process demonstrates the powerful nature and usefulness of real life examples from those who experience them first hand. When considering how to best help children feel safe and secure at school, it is highly important to hear from students themselves, using their experience as the basis for future preventative actions. Recommendations such as increasing teacher supervision near the back end of the schoolyard or keeping doors closed to student-labelled unsafe areas such as the janitors closet are ways in which School X can be made to feel more safe.

Findings from the current study can further be made useful when implemented to help promote safe, healthy environments for students. The high percentage of junior students who are feeling worried, sad, stressed, angry, or upset at school indicates a need for mental health programming, designed to help students understand and cope with these feelings. The sincere enjoyment student displayed while participating in the photovoice project indicates the probable success of future programming for students that involves a creative component, such as taking

photographs while discussing topics of a more sensitive nature. Researchers Brunsten and Goatcher (2007) also suggested that photovoice activities allow participants to have control over the direction of discussions, while encouraging “free talk”, all which contributes to building trust and rapport with participants (p.44). This can be applied to school programming through adding a creative component to group discussions that may be of the sensitive type, resulting in the provision of a more comfortable atmosphere. Needless to say, creative activities such as taking photographs can help make engaging in groups fun for students, as seen in the current study. This recommendation is supported by the suggestion of Brunsten and Goatcher (2007) that explains photovoice as a way to make the research process more pleasurable for participants because of the hand-on, creative component of taking photographs.

Researchers Duckett, Kagan and Sixsmith (2010) found that student well being was increased when students had the opportunity to contribute to their learning environments and the decision making within the school. Researchers believed these opportunities would not only provide the students with sense of control over their environment, but also increase opportunities for students to build positive, supportive relationships with their peers and teachers. Along very similar lines, current findings displayed relationships to be a key component to student’s feelings of safety. Students at School X felt safer when in the presence of trusted adults and peers and simultaneously reported feeling unsafe when there was an absence of teacher supervision (at the back of the schoolyard). Thus, even greater effort within the school to further encourage the nurturance of supportive relationships would be of benefit to the students at School X. Additional organized groups or activities during nutrition break hours and opportunities for students to build stronger relationships with teachers and peers are highly encouraged.

Children's mental health. The current study's finding that 22 percent of junior students feel worried, sad or stressed at school and 18 percent feel angry or upset, provide important information all professionals working with young children should be aware of. It is highly important for teachers to be cognizant that some of their students may be struggling with academics due to factors that extend beyond their learning abilities, such as mental health concerns. Remaining acutely aware of these factors will enable teachers to be watchful for warning signs that student's are struggling. Providing emotional support and willingness to engage in discussion with students about mental health will be beneficial to the student's positive development. Further, knowing when to search out additional support, such as the school's special services staff will aid the support of children experiencing mental health related issues. Teacher awareness of the current study's findings may also help in the understanding of the associations between mental health and perceptions of safety. In relation to the realm of academia, these variables have been found to influence student's academic performance, as noted by previous studies in which children's perceptions of safety within school were found strongly associated with academic achievement and socioemotional development (Modzeleski, Mathews-Younes, Arroyo et al., 2012). Thus, all three variables including perceptions of safety, mental health experiences and academic success, maintain the potential to influence each other. This is of key importance for teachers to know in order to adjust their approach to unique student situations. For instance, allowing for flexible learning environments or alternate forms of assessment when a student is visibly struggling would be beneficial in some cases. The key concept of an overall healthy and safe school environment stresses that if children feel safe and happy they are more likely to reach their academic potential (Weare & Gray, 2003). This

underlines the importance of all efforts to increase or strengthen student's feelings of safety and positive mental health at school.

Promotion and prevention

Frequency data in the current study highlights the number of students experiencing mental health related concerns while at school. Additional research by Tharinger and Palomares (2004) as well as Goldstein, Morris, and Bryant (2003) has demonstrated that up to four fifths of students who are in need of mental health services are not receiving them (as seen in Perfect & Morris, 2011). It is therefore evident that services need to reach more students in need of support or assistance. Given that children spend a great deal of time in school, it is a key location for providing school based mental health services and interventions for children at risk or displaying early symptoms of mental health problems (Bradshaw, Buckley & Ialongo, 2008). The development of a community centre within close proximity to School X creates the ideal opportunity for programming to be designed and implemented with the specific needs of the surrounding community in mind. It would be beneficial if preventative programs could be implemented directly within School X, in order to provide children with the skills and resources to combat problems, should they arise.

Preventing children from feeling unsafe at school can also be achieved through making efforts to ensure that support systems within the school environment are known and made easily accessible to students. The existence of support systems will not be advantageous if students are not made aware of the availability resources. Researchers Cowie, Hutson, Oztug and Myers (2008) suggest advertising peer support structures to the students, using communications such as posters and announcements to ensure the knowledge reaches the student population. Prevention practices also includes maintaining privacy and confidentiality for those students seeking help

regarding mental health or bullying concerns as well as adequate support and supervision around the school, such as in the school yard, where 15.8 percent of junior students reported to feel unsafe. All things considered, these efforts will aid in creating a psychologically healthy environment for students, which has been seen to increase student's overall perception of safety as well as provide the most ideal environment for academic learning.

Limitations

One of the prominent limitations of the current research was the required secondary analysis of the school survey data. The fact that this data was already collected meant there existed no opportunity to monitor how students were understanding the questions or if they were taking the process seriously. This also meant I was unable to adjust survey questions that were misworded and/or unclear. For instance, certain items on the survey that grouped together feelings such as *worried, sad or stressed* limited the use of results in interpreting mental health concerns among students. There were also many other questions that could have been asked to gain a better idea of mental health, safety and bullying in school, although this was not possible due to the pre-existence of the survey data.

The voluntary sample of students for the qualitative data collection at School X was also a limitation in the current study. This voluntary sample meant that some students who may have had significant experiences with feeling safe or unsafe at school would have been overlooked. The possibility to control for this may have provided a greater sample of the student population and been helpful in further understanding student's experiences with safety and perceptions of feeling safe and unsafe in their school. Thus, relying on a voluntary sample and requiring parental consent, limited the number of students who signed up for the study, and in turn may have limited the overall scope of data collected.

Strengths

The community sample of students in grades four to six within a designated school board provided for a high volume, non-clinical sample. This was beneficial as it eliminated the restrictions of research derived strictly from outpatient or treatment facilities in which generalizing results would be a challenge. The current study's sample of children within the school board provided the optimal setting to better understand children's experiences and perceptions in the school environment.

The combination of both a quantitative and qualitative analysis contributed to a detailed description of children's experiences with mental health, bullying and safety in schools. The key strength of the current research rested within the opportunity to hear and understand student's lived experience from the students themselves. This not only provided more in depth research information but also offered support for and greater description of what the numerical data was showing.

The use of the photovoice technique in the current study was a strength within itself. This activity allowed for students to maintain control over what they chose to take photographs of and what they intended to talk about during the discussion session. As mentioned earlier, allowing children to feel this sense of control made the photovoice technique an appropriate way to discuss topics of safety within school, which may be sensitive subject to some. As mentioned by Brunsdn and Goatcer (2007), the photovoice technique allows participants to control how their experiences are represented and enabled them an alternate way of expressing their lived experience. This was beneficial for students in that it allowed for an alternate form of communicating their thoughts and feelings concerning safety, especially for those students who were slightly more shy and reserved than others. Finally, the creative process of taking

photographs and reviewing them was enjoyable for the students, leading them to feel engaged and excited about the research process and discussions as they proudly displayed their photographs. This created the space for great conversation and allowed students to feel more comfortable when talking about their personal perceptions of safety.

Conclusions

The current study's findings reinforce the importance of creating psychologically and physically safe environments for children to grow and develop. Being that schools are the primary locations in which children spend their time, it is essential to regard children's perceptions of safety and experiences with mental health and bullying within schools as areas of critical importance. Results displayed that students in grades four to six most frequently experience verbal and social bullying and felt the least safe while in the schoolyard. The levels of fear students maintain of certain locations, as seen through qualitative data indicate an additional area of concern. All efforts made to help children feel more safe at school will in turn make time spent at school more enjoyable and have positive effects on socioemotional development as well as academic performance. Further, the numbers of students struggling with mental health issues such as feeling sad, worried, stressed, angry or upset while at school indicate the necessity for programing to help them learn ways to cope and manage these feelings. The support, guidance and supervision by teachers and professionals will aid in the creation of healthy environments, promoting the academic, social, emotional and intellectual growth of students within our education systems.

References

- Albano, A., Chorpita, B., & Barlow, D. (2003). Childhood anxiety disorders. *Child Psychopathology* (pp. 279-329). New York: Guilford Press.
- Bacchini, D., Esposito, G., & Affuso, G. (2009). Social experience and school bullying. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 19*(1), 17-32. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/casp.975>
- Baker, J. A., Dilly, L. J., Aupperlee, J. L., & Patil, S. A. (2003). The developmental context of school satisfaction: Schools as psychologically healthy environments. *School Psychology Quarterly, 18*(2), 206-221. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/scpq.18.2.206.21861>
- Barrett, S., Eber, L., & Weist, M. (Eds). (2013). Advancing education effectiveness: Interconnecting school mental health and school-wide positive behavior support. OSEP Center for Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports.
- Beran, T. N., & Tutty, L. (2002). Children's reports of bullying and safety at school. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 17*(2), 1-14. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/082957350201700201>
- Boulton, M. J., Duke, E., Holman, G., Laxton, E., Nicholas, B., Spells, R., Williams, E., & Woodmansey, H. (2009). Associations between being bullied, perceptions of safety in classroom and playground, and relationship with teacher among primary school pupils. *Educational Studies, 35*(3), 255-267. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03055690802648580>
- Bradshaw, C. P., Buckley, J. A., & Ialongo, N. S. (2008). School-based service utilization among urban children with early onset educational and mental health problems:

The squeaky wheel phenomenon. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(2), 169-186.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.23.2.169>

Brunsdon, V., & Goatcher, J. (2007). Reconfiguring photovoice for psychological research. *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 28(1-4), 43-52. Retrieved from

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/845401273?accountid=15115>

Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2003). Challenges for safe schools. *The Clearing House*, 76(3), 160-164.

Cartwright-Hatton, S., McNicol, K., & Doubleday, E. (2006). Anxiety in a neglected population: Prevalence of anxiety disorders in pre-adolescent children. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 26(7), 817-833. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2005.12.002>

Chavira, D. A., Stein, M. B., Bailey, K., & Stein, M. T. (2004). Child anxiety in primary care: Prevalent but untreated. *Depression and Anxiety*, 20(4), 155-164. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/da.20039>

Children's mental health Ontario closely following recommendations of school community safety advisory panel. (2007, Aug 30). *Canada NewsWire*, pp. 1.

Chio, V. C. M., & Fandt, P. M. (2007). Photovoice in the diversity classroom: Engagement, voice, and the "Eye/I" of the camera. *Journal of Management Education*, 31(4), 484-504. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1052562906288124>

Cole, D., Lachlan, G., Peeke, M., Truglio, R., & Serocynski, A. (1998). A longitudinal look at the relation between depression and anxiety in children and adolescents. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 451-460.

Cowie, H., & Oztug, O. (2008). Pupils' perceptions of safety at school. *Pastoral Care in Education* 26: 59-67.

- Cowie, H., Hutson, N., Oztug, O., & Myers, C. (2008). The impact of peer support schemes on pupils' perceptions of bullying, aggression and safety at school. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, 13(1), 63-71.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632750701814708>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (2nd ed.)* Sage Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, CA. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/621463047?accountid=15115>
- Duckett, P., Kagan, C., & Sixsmith, J. (2010). Consultation and participation with children in healthy schools: Choice, conflict and context. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1-2), 167-178. Retrieved from <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/754059821?accountid=15115>
- Espelage, D. L., Bosworth, K., & Simon, T. R. (2000). Examining the social context of bullying behaviors in early adolescence. *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 78, 326-333.
- Friedrich, A., Mendez, L. R., & Mihalas, S. (2010). Gender as a factor in school-based mental health service delivery. *School Psychology Review*, 39(1), 122-136.
- Giancola, S. P., & Bear, G. G. (2003). Face fidelity: Perspectives from a local evaluation of the safe Schools/Healthy students initiative. *Psychology in the Schools*, 40(5), 515-529. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/pits.10107>
- Harris, I. M. (2000). Peace-building responses to school violence. *NASSP Bulletin* 84(614): 5-24.
- Haynes, N. (1996). Creating safe and caring school communities: Comer school development program schools. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 65(3), 308-314.

Retrieved from <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/222061076?accountid=15115>

- Hoagwood, K., Burns, B. J., Kiser, L., Ringeisen, H., & Schoenwald, S. K. (2001). Evidence-based practice in child and adolescent mental health services. *Psychiatric Services, 52*, 1179-1189.
- Kaltiala-Heino, R., Rimpelä, M., Rantanen, P., & Rimpelä, A. (2000). Bullying at school—an indicator of adolescents at risk for mental disorders. *Journal of Adolescence, 23*(6), 661-674. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/jado.2000.0351>
- Last, C., Hanson, C., & Franco, N. (1997). Anxious children in adulthood: A prospective study of adjustment. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 36*, 645-652.
- Laughout, R. D., & Annear, L. (2011). Safe and unsafe school spaces: Comparing elementary school student perceptions to common ecological interventions and operationalizations. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 21*(1), 71-86. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/casp.1062>
- Mathews, T., Dempsey, M., & Overstreet, S. (2009). Effects of exposure to community violence on school functioning: The mediating role of posttraumatic stress symptoms. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 47*(7), 586-591. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2009.04.001>
- McEvoy, A. (1999). The relevance of theory to the safe schools movement. *Education and Urban Society 31*(3): 275-85.
- McLoone, J., Hudson, J. L., & Rapee, R. M. (2006). Treating anxiety disorders in a school setting. *Education & Treatment of Children, 29*(2), 219-242. Retrieved

from <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi->

[bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/202668956?accountid=15115](https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/202668956?accountid=15115)

Meltzer, H., Vostanis, P., Goodman, R., & Ford, T. (2007). Children's perceptions of neighbourhood trustworthiness and safety and their mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(12), 1208-1213.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01800.x>

Modzeleski, W., Mathews-Younes, A., Arroyo, C. G., Mannix, D., Wells, M. E., Hill, G., Murray, S. (2012). An introduction to the safe Schools/Healthy students initiative.

Evaluation and Program Planning, 35(2), 269-272. doi:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2011.11.001>

Paternite, C. E. (2005). School-based mental health programs and services: Overview and introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 33, 657– 663.

Perfect, M. M., & Morris, R. J. (2011). Delivering school-based mental health services by school psychologists: Education, training, and ethical issues. *Psychology in the Schools*, 48(10), 1049-1063. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/pits.20612>

Raden, A. S. (1998). *The effects of community and home-based violence on the social and emotional development of young children: The moderating role of head start*. Yale University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, , 118-118 p. Retrieved from

<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi->

[bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/304460129?accountid=15115](https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/304460129?accountid=15115)

Rones, M., & Hoagwood, K. (2000). School-based mental health services: A research review. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 3(4), 223–241.

- Rushton, S., and E. Larkin. 2001. Shaping the learning environment: Connecting developmentally appropriate practices to brain research. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 29: 25–33.
- Shenton, A. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(63-75).
- Simon, L. (1999). Children need a daily dose of alphabet soup [the 3 ss: Safety, security and stability]. *ATA Magazine*, 79(3), 7-11. Retrieved from <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/231466560?accountid=15115>
- Slee, P. T. (1995). Peer victimization and its relationship to depression among Australian primary school students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 18(1), 57-62.
- Swearer, S. M., & Doll, B. (2001). Bullying in schools: An ecological framework. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2, 7–23.
- Swearer, S. M., Song, S. Y., Cary, P. T., Eagle, J. W., & Mickelson, W. T. (2001). Psychosocial correlates in bullying and victimization: The relationship between depression, anxiety, and bully/victim status. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2(2-3), 95-121. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J135v02n02_07
- Tomb, M., & Hunter, L. (2004). Prevention of anxiety in children and adolescents in a school setting: The role of school-based practitioners. *Children & Schools*, 26(2), 87-101.
- Van der Linden, J., Drukker, M., Gunther, N., Feron, F., & van Os, J. (2003). Children's mental health service use, neighbourhood socio-economic deprivation and social capital. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 38, 507–514.



Wang, C., & Burriss, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behaviour*, 24(3), 369-387.

Yurtal, F., & Artut, K. (2010). An investigation of school violence through turkish children's drawings. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(1), 50-62. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886260508329130>

Appendix A: School Survey

SAFE SCHOOLS SURVEY 2012

GENDER: Male Female GRADE: 4 5 6 7 8

Shade Circles Like This  not like this 

STUDENT VIEWS

Fill in one bubble for each statement to show if YOU agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
SV01 This is a safe school for students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students show respect for all other students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students show respect for all staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff show respect for all students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are proud of this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a caring, respectful atmosphere at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SV07 I feel safe in the school building.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SV08 I feel safe on the school yard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

STUDENT FEELINGS

- I feel like I really belong at this school.
- I learn better at school when I'm not feeling worried, sad, or angry.
- People at this school are concerned about the feelings of others.
- I know where to get help if I or a friend am feeling worried, sad, or angry.
- Students at my school are taught to care about the feelings of others.
- We talk at school about how we feel or how we handle stress.

Fill in one bubble for how often the following describes you personally at school this year.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Seldom	Never
	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
SFb 01 I feel worried, sad, or stressed at school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SFb 02 I feel angry or upset at school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other students tease you, call you names, or gossip about you for feeling worried, sad, or angry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

INCLUSION

Do you ever feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at your school because of any of the following? (Please bubble in the items that apply to you).

- No, I always feel welcome
- My sex (male/female)
- My ethnocultural or racial background
- My Aboriginal background (First Nation, Metis, Inuit)
- My appearance
- My religion or faith
- My language background (my first language)
- My grades or marks
- My family's level of income
- A disability that I have
- My sexual orientation
- Other reason(s) _____

--	--	--	--

27914





INCIDENTS

Fill in one bubble for how often, if ever, the following events have happened to you personally, at school during this school year.

Have you personally been:	Daily ▼	Weekly ▼	Monthly ▼	Seldom ▼	Never ▼
INCa01 verbally bullied?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
INCa02 physically bullied?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
INCa03 socially bullied?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
INCa04 sexually bullied?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
INCa05 bullied using technology?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bullied based on sexual orientation?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bullied based on ethnic background?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
threatened to hand over money?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
intimidated by a gang or gang member?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you have been bullied this year at school, who usually has bullied you? (bubble one only)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Usually girls | <input type="radio"/> Groups of boys and girls |
| <input type="radio"/> Usually boys | <input type="radio"/> None - I do not get bullied |
| <input type="radio"/> Sometimes boys and sometimes girls | |

INCIDENTS

Fill in one bubble for how often, if ever, you personally, either by yourself or as part of a group, have done the following at school during this school year.

Have you personally:	Daily ▼	Weekly ▼	Monthly ▼	Seldom ▼	Never ▼
verbally bullied a student?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
physically bullied a student?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
socially bullied a student?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sexually bullied a student?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bullied a student using technology?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bullied a student based on sexual orientation?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bullied a student based on ethnic background?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
threatened a student to make him/her hand over money?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
intimidated a student as part of a gang or as a gang member?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



RESPONDING TO BULLYING

If you know of a friend who is being bullied how likely would YOU be to do the following:

	Not Very Likely	1	2	3	4	5	Very Likely
		▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	
talk to your friend about what is happening to him/her		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
talk to another student about what is happening to your friend		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
talk to your parent(s) about what is happening to your friend		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
tell your friend's parents		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
tell a school staff member (e.g., teacher) about what is happening to your friend		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
tell the police about what is happening to your friend		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
talk to a trusted adult in the community about what is happening to your friend		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
ignore what is happening to your friend		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
approach the person responsible for the bullying		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
report the bullying anonymously at school		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

DEALING WITH BULLYING

Suggestions about how to deal with bullying are listed. Fill in one bubble for each suggestion to show how helpful YOU think it would be in dealing with bullying.

	Not Very Likely	1	2	3	4	5	Very Likely
		▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	
School presentations by adults about bullying.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
School presentations by students about bullying.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Some way to report anonymously at school.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Increase supervision at school by school staff.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Monitoring of the Internet by parents.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Students need to understand the harm caused by bullying.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Improve the skills of students to deal with bullying.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Buddy system for students.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Classroom discussions about bullying.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Rewards for reporting bullying incidents.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Consequences for bullying.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Call the police.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Having a trusted staff member to talk to.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Follow through so they see that something happens.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
See that there are consequences for the bully.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Encourage students to be Upstanders.		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

--	--	--	--





27914

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

- Do you use text messaging? Yes No
- Do you use any social networks such as Facebook, Twitter? Yes No
- Do you have your own personal cell phone? Yes No

Have you personally experienced any of the following during this school year?	Never ▼	Once or Twice ▼	2 or 3 Times a Month ▼	About Once a Week ▼	Almost Every Day ▼
Someone forwarding your email or text message without your permission.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone spreading a rumor about you online.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone sending you a threatening email or text message.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone posting an embarrassing picture of you online without your permission.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you done any of the following to another student during this school year?	Never ▼	Once or Twice ▼	2 or 3 Times a Month ▼	About Once a Week ▼	Almost Every Day ▼
Forwarded someone else's email or text message without their permission.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spread a rumor about someone online.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sent a threatening email or text message.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Posted an embarrassing picture of someone online without their permission.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Your school has done things to try and reduce bullying to make students feel safe.

Do you personally feel safer because of what has been done? (bubble one)

- I have always felt safe
- I feel safer now
- I still feel unsafe



THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.

Appendix B: Photovoice Sessions Outline

Session 1 – Nutrition Break 1: 10:40-11:30

Introduce participants

- Distribute name tags
- Play a quick “get to know you game”
- Have lunch
- Talk to them about safety:
 1. What is safety?
 2. What does it mean to feel safe?
 3. How do you feel when you’re safe? How would you feel if you were not feeling safe?
-in your mind – scared, worried, frightened, unhappy, alone, upset, anxious... -in your body – tense muscles, upset stomach, headache, dizzy or faint, sweaty or nervous
-in how you act or behave – i.e., avoid whatever is making you feel unsafe
 4. Lets talk about some examples of safe and unsafe feelings or places... show pictures:
 - A. Halloween picture
 - B. Bridge picture (I felt very unsafe at this bridge because the image doesn’t show houses or a road. If I would change anything I would put in security guards and lights.)
 - C. Playground/swings picture
 - D. Scary-looking hallway picture

-some places can feel unsafe because we are worried we might get hurt or someone might jump out at us

What we’re going to do, today and tomorrow – we are going to think about and talk about physical places within the school that might make us feel safe and unsafe

Explanation of Purpose:

We are going to do some activities together to talk about safety at school. We want to know about different areas in the school and how they make you feel. Some places can make us feel safe, and some places might make us feel unsafe and I want to know about all these places in the school. We are going to be doing something a little bit different than just talking about these places. I have a very important job for you – you are going to be using cameras to take some pictures around the school! You are going to take pictures of places in the school that are safe and some other places that are unsafe. We are going to walk around the school together to take these pictures, and we have to be on our best behaviour because we have this very important job to do. We can’t take pictures of any people so these photos will only be of places within the school.

Session 1 – Nutrition Break 2: 1:10-1:50

Discussing Photography

- Teach the students how to use the camera, take first photo of their name tag
- Remind them of limitations of the camera use:
This is a very important responsibility and we have to remember to take this project very seriously

Distribute Cameras

- Supervise while students take pictures
- Collect cameras; conclude session with a reminder that we will meet the next day/next week to discuss (?)

Session 2: Discussion of Pictures

- Return printed photo's to the students and give them a few minutes to look through their pictures and choose 2 they would like to share
- Each student will share their first photo, one at a time and will repeat in the same format for the second photo

Discussion Questions

Questions directed towards one particular photograph:

- 1.) Can you describe this photo to us?
 - a. Can you tell me why you took this photograph?
 - b. Do you believe this to be a safe place, or an unsafe place?
 - c. What made you choose this particular location?
 - d. What was going through your mind as you were taking this photograph?
 - e. Is there anything in particular that you would like to point out in this photograph?
 - f. Is there something you wish the photo showed?(they can only take pics of the photos there) if you were going to take this photo again, is there anything else you wish was a part of that photo? - I would have taken it with the lights off b/c it feels dark to me
what would your ideal pic look like
- 2.) Can you tell me more about why you think this place is safe/unsafe?
 - a. What about this place makes it safe/unsafe?
 - b. In this photograph, what part of it captures the safe/unsafe feeling you have from this location?
 - c. What would make this location safe/unsafe (opposite)?
 - d. (If unsafe) What do you think you could do to help restore this location to a safe place?

Questions directed to the majority of photographs:

- 1.) Which photo is your most favourite? Why?
- 2.) Which photograph makes you feel most safe/unsafe? Why?

Wrap-Up Questions:

- 1.) After taking all these photographs, how do you feel?
- 2.) What do you feel is working well in terms of what your school already does to make you feel safe?
- 3.) What do you feel needs to be done in your school, to make it a more safe place?
- 4.) If there were one photograph that you wish you were able to take, what would it be of? Why do you wish you took this photo?
- 5.) If there were one thing that you could do, to make yourself and your friends feel safer at school, what would it be?
- 6.) How do you feel about school safety, following this photovoice activity?
- 7.) If you were in charge of designing a brand new school and it was going to be the safest school for everyone what would it look like?

Appendix C: University Ethics Approval

Western Education
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Review Number: 1305-6
Principal Investigator: Susan Rodger
Student Name: Larissa Pipe
Title: *Mental Health and Safety in Schools: An Analysis of Children's Perceptions and Experiences*
Expiry Date: April 30, 2014
Type: M.Ed. Thesis
Ethics Approval Date: August 22, 2013
Revision #:
Documents Reviewed &
Approved: Western Protocol, Letter of Information & Consent

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of the Western University Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

2012-2013 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Alan Edmunds	Faculty of Education (Chair)
Dr. John Barnett	Faculty of Education
Dr. Wayne Martino	Faculty of Education
Dr. George Gadanidis	Faculty of Education
Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki	Faculty of Education
Dr. Julie Byrd Clark	Faculty of Education
Dr. Kari Veblen	Faculty of Music
Dr. Jason Brown	Faculty of Education
Dr. Susan Rodger	Faculty of Education, Associate Dean, Research (<i>ex officio</i>)
Dr. Ruth Wright	Faculty of Music, Western Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (<i>ex officio</i>)
Dr. Kevin Watson	Faculty of Music, Western Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (<i>ex officio</i>)

The Faculty of Education	Faculty of Education Building
1137 Western Rd.	edu-ethics@uwo.ca
London, ON N6G 1G7	519-661-2111, ext.88561 FAX 519-661-3095

Copy: Office of Research Ethics

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Larissa K. Pipe

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
2007-2011, Honours B.A.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2012-2014, M.A.

Honours and awards: Wilfrid Laurier Dean's Honour Roll
2010-2011

Related Work Experience: Psychology Intern
Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
2013-2014

Research Consultant
Thames Valley District School Board
London, Ontario, Canada
2013-2014

Research Assistant/Site Manager
Stanford University Research Study
University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
2013

Canadian Mental Health Association
Waitlist Clinic Volunteer
London, Ontario, Canada
2012

Research Assistant
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
2009-2012

Professional Affiliations: Canadian Psychological Association
Student Member
Present

Canadian Counselling and Psychological Association
Student Member
2012-2013