Perceived School Safety: Visual Narratives from the Middle Grades

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Feeling unsafe in school negatively influences students’ well-being and school outcomes

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Attendance
- Learning motivation
- Academic achievement
Participatory visual research methods have many benefits

- Shared agency
- Builds trust
- Promotes ownership
- Supports student voice
Students could relax and detach from school pressures in *safe* spaces.

“Right now I’m reading a book. It’s called *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and it describes it as someone back then, where they see the first boat, with the girl and her little brother. I feel like I’m on an adventure with them having fun...You see what they’re seeing and not what you’re seeing.” (Yolanda)
Unsafe areas were primarily ‘unowned’ non-classroom spaces

“My experience here has been tragic because it’s where other kids and I are always made fun of...They’ll say ‘get out,’ and be really mean about it...Anybody not in their group, they would just pick on. We can make this school a lot happier by having more protection in the bathrooms.” (Gina)
Supportive spaces had adults who were willing to listen to students.

“I feel that I can talk about my problems because I have talked about my problems here before and I trust them very much. I chose to take this picture because when I had my bullying problem last year, twice I asked for help. They helped me solve my bullying problem. Also, when I have any questions, they are always there for me.” (Joaquin)
Findings have implications for school practice

• Increases accountability of unowned spaces

• Promotes vigilance of all forms of peer maltreatment

• Encourages discussion on how to create more safe spaces on campus
create knowledge.

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