

Supporting teachers to support trans students: how prepared do teachers feel to support trans children in a Scottish primary school?



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Abstract

The aim of this research project was to discover how prepared teachers felt to support a trans¹ child in their class. Research was carried out in a primary school in the South-West of Edinburgh. Seven members of staff were selected to participate based on convenience. Research involved interviews based around a scenario involving a trans child arriving into the interviewee's class. Questions aimed to discern teachers' initial reactions to the prospect of supporting this child, why they reacted as they did and if they felt they had received adequate support to prepare them to meet the needs of a trans child. The results suggest that teachers are willing to provide support for trans children but are unsure of what this would involve. Results suggest that teachers should be made more aware of the resources available in order to help them develop in this area.

¹ The operational definition of this term will be clarified within the introduction.

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Introduction

Background and Significance

In a society which it may be argued is becoming ever more progressive in terms of the rights of minority groups, the movement for trans rights is gaining increasing ground in Scotland. Most recently the Scottish government has pledged to change gender recognition law to recognise people who identify as neither male or female (Brooks, 2016) and three new Glasgow primary schools are set to have gender neutral toilets (Pells, 2017). In 2016 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) changed its guidelines to allow socially transitioned trans people to compete in the Olympic Games (IOC, 2015) while in 2017, mainstream television programmes such as Britain's Next Top Model ('Episode 1', 2017) and RuPaul's Drag Race ('Oh. My. Gaga!', 2017) featured openly trans women. The presence of trans people in the public eye is significant especially for trans children who often feel that they are completely alone in their gender identity (Kennedy and Hellen, 2010). Although progress has been made, trans people still face widespread prejudice and transphobia; in 2016 the number of transphobic hate crimes reported to police was found to have almost tripled in five years (Yeung, 2016). One of the worst examples of a hate crime against trans people was the attack on a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) nightclub in Orlando in 2016 where 49 people were killed, making it the worst terrorist attack in America's history (Malkin, Yuhas and Lyons, 2016). As a proud ally to the trans community and a future teacher I believe it is vital that trans children are given the best possible support in primary school to ensure they grow up with good self-esteem and a feeling of validation. It is vital also that their peers are taught the importance of acceptance to ensure that future generations grow up with this mindset and continue to make society more progressive. Teachers have a responsibility to foster this in children and to meet the needs of trans children who present in their class. It is

therefore pertinent to gauge how prepared teachers feel to provide appropriate support for these children to ensure their time at primary school is positive, and for teachers to feel confident in meeting their needs.

Topic and Purpose

By conducting this research, I aimed to discover how teachers in a Scottish primary school felt about the prospect of having to support a trans child and whether they felt comfortable or that they would benefit from increased resources, support, and information surrounding trans issues. This manifested in my main research question “How prepared do teachers feel to support trans children in a Scottish primary school?” and my sub-questions: “What is the range of reactions from teachers towards the prospect of welcoming a trans child into the school?”, “What reasons do teachers give for these reactions?” and “What support, if any, do teachers feel they need in order to appropriately welcome a trans child to their school?”.

Operational Definitions

To ensure clarity, consistency and accessibility to my dissertation, it is important that the operational definition of ‘trans’ is defined. ‘Trans’ is a recognised umbrella term that refers to anyone whose gender does not match the one they were assigned at birth (Williams, 2014).

When discussing children within this definition it is important to recognise that they may still be realising their gender identity and may not be ready to give themselves a specific label that would fall under the trans umbrella (Castañeda, 2014). It is for this reason that this dissertation will use this specific terminology of ‘trans’.

Review of Existing Literature

Why use ‘trans’?

Reviewing the existing literature relating to trans children, there are various terms used to refer to children who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. The preliminary section of this review therefore supports why this dissertation uses one term throughout.

In much of the literature addressing this topic, authors refer to trans children as exhibiting gender dysphoria or, more recently, Gender Identity Disorder (GID). This terminology is used most prevalently in mental health circles, but is widely used in many other areas of research. However, an underlying problem around using such terminology has been highlighted; Kennedy and Hellen (2010) offer the viewpoint that because many of the commentators that use this term work in the field of mental health, this suggests that trans children are mentally ill or that there is something fundamentally ‘wrong’ with them. They argue that often, research into GID is for the purpose of preventing or eradicating this ‘wrong’ behaviour in children. This may suggest that much of the research surrounding children with GID or gender dysphoria follows a deficit model (Oliver, 1990 in Benjamin and Emejulu, 2012) which suggests children who do not identify with their assigned gender must be ‘fixed’ in some way so that they fit into the societal gender binary. Labelling these children as mentally ill may exacerbate or do very little to alleviate the common feelings experienced by trans children of isolation or the feeling that they are not ‘normal’, which may lead to mental illnesses later in life. Hein and Berger (2012) acknowledge the positive intentions of those who diagnose such disorders in children, recognising that they are fulfilling their duty to assist children either to function successfully as trans, or to change so

that they conform to the gender binary. Nevertheless, they argue that this could be counterproductive, as GID can be a very stigmatising term which may negatively affect these children. They go on to summarise that diagnosis for the purpose of helping a child conform to the gender binary may be equally damaging, and highlight the fact that treatments of GID have been linked to suicide in later life. Drescher (2010) outlines the view that much of the LGBT community has voiced of GID diagnoses; they have expressed concerns about the “unscientific, unethical, and misguided” (2010, pp.428) efforts to have children reject their felt gender identity. Although these allegations could be viewed as extreme, they illustrate why this dissertation has avoided using such terminology. As this is not a paper written for clinical purpose, it may not be appropriate to refer to children using clinical terms. When writing about children who experience gender identity issues, the utmost care should be taken to do so sensitively. Certainly there are other terms that could be used to refer to trans children, e.g. gender variant; however, for the reasons outlined above trans is the definition that will be used throughout this dissertation.

Trans children- how important is it to provide support?

There has been limited research conducted into trans children’s school lives, and even less surrounds their primary school experiences. Existing research identifies primary school years as a time where most trans children start to realise that they are somewhat ‘different’ to their peers, in that they do not feel comfortable living as the gender they were assigned at birth (Luecke, 2011, Menvielle, 2012). In her 2008 paper Kennedy found that 82% of trans adults remember realising that they were not cisgender (identifying as the gender they were assigned at birth) whilst they were in primary school. It is clear, then, that more research is required around trans children in order to destigmatise an issue which is still considered relatively controversial and potentially improve the childhoods of trans people. It is important

to consider that the statistics surrounding the numbers of trans children are difficult to quantify. Brill and Pepper (2008) estimate that one in 500 children are trans, however they do not indicate the age bracket of these children. Herman et. al. (2017) suggest that 0.7% of children identify as trans; the study, however, only refers to children in America and the children involved were aged between 13 and 17 years. We know little about global statistics or indeed about children falling outside this age bracket. In Britain the most recent statistics indicate that around one in 10,000 children are referred to the NHS due to struggling with their gender identity (Carmichael, 2016). Establishing numbers of trans children in Scotland is more challenging as no statistics have been collated, however in recent years there has been a rise in the number of under-18s referred to the NHS as a result of gender identity issues (Duffy, 2015). It is difficult, however, to gain an accurate insight into the exact numbers of trans children. Castañeda offers one reason why this may be the case, writing that “for a child to claim a transgender status...is difficult because the child is always already seen as incomplete” (2014, pp.59). The fact that trans children are taking these years to explore their gender identity can mean that often, children who present as trans may not maintain this gender identity as they grow up. Ehrensaft (2014) categorises trans children as ‘persisters’ or ‘desisters’. She writes that ‘desisters’ are trans children who will not grow up to continue to identify this way, arguing that most may simply be exploring their gender as a precursor to discovering their sexual identity. Conversely, she states that ‘persisters’ are children whose trans identity will remain as they continue to grow and develop. Ehrensaft gives examples of behavioural differences between the two, explaining that ‘persisters’, “showed cross-gender signs as early as the latter half of the first year of life, used the language “I am a girl (boy)”...and were more distraught about the incongruence between their bodies and their perceived gender identities” (2014, pp.578). It is therefore acknowledged that not all children who identify as trans in childhood will continue to do so in adulthood, however as a teacher

in the here and now it is important to provide appropriate support. It is also likely that there may of course be trans children that do not present their feelings openly and will conceal their identities, knowing they do not conform to society's norm (Stewart, 2009 in Kennedy and Hellen, 2010). Therefore, in any data collection of numbers of trans children, it is possible that numbers may exceed what data suggests.

Establishing numbers of children who identify as trans in Scotland is important as it indicates levels of support that should be available in schools. As research suggests, trans children of primary school age appear to present themselves rarely. This could support an argument that this issue is not of significant importance. However the picture painted by existing research of trans children's lives is one that Hellen (2009) describes as "particularly sad, bleak and desperate" (2009, pp.94) and therefore is one which prompts support for these children, not just in schools but in mental healthcare and in families. Luecke (2011) and Greytak, Kosciw and Diaz (2009) argue that children identifying as trans are at risk of poor attainment and disengagement with school, leading to higher absences. This may be as a result of bullying or harassment, which Grossman and D'Augelli (2006) argue are highly prevalent in schools. Biddulph (2006) supports this, stating "it is hard to imagine...any experience of LGBT young people's schooling in the UK today that does not produce some encounter with harassment" (2006, pp.18). Pauletti, Cooper and Perry (2014) state that cisgender children may see their trans counterparts as a threat to the norm, of lesser value as people and as trying to persuade others to express gender-variance. This can manifest as aggression towards trans children. It has also been identified that teachers may fail to address harassment or bullying, feeling the topic of gender nonconformity is too daunting for them to tackle alone (Meyer, 2008). In a survey of trans people, 45% of respondents thought that teachers had not been provided with sufficient resources to tackle such bullying (Government Equalities Office, 2011). As a result of these factors, bullying may go unaddressed or unreported. As trans children grow into

adults, Sherer (2016) states that feelings of isolation and rejection may be factors in drug or alcohol addiction, homelessness, self-harm, depression, anxiety, or even suicide. Mental health issues may affect trans people at disproportionate levels to those who are cisgendered, and trans children are particularly vulnerable to poor mental health, as outlined by Olson et. al. (2016). However, they also suggest that the high risk of mental health issues in trans children can be reduced if they are allowed to socially transition; meaning that they present as the gender with which they identify through vehicles such as clothing, a chosen name, and pronouns relating to their preferred gender (2016). In a follow-up study, Durwood, McLaughlin and Olson (2017) discovered that children who had socially transitioned reported higher levels of self-esteem than children who had not experienced gender identity issues. Also, Balleur-van Rijn et. al. (2012) found that non-transitioned trans children are at risk of having very low self-image. This suggests that giving trans children appropriate support, as well as the opportunity to express their preferred gender identity, is of significant importance to their health and wellbeing. In light of this, primary schools could see increased numbers of socially transitioned trans children, indicating that support for these children should be readily available, yet the school environment has often been highlighted as another struggle that trans children face. Savage and Schanding (2013) claim that “as microcosms of the larger society in which they are embedded, schools recreate and enforce the...transphobic characteristics of the larger culture” (2013, pp.1). Examining what is taught in schools, Greytak, Kosciw and Diaz (2009) found that only 11% of trans students experienced a curriculum where LGBT issues were given positive coverage, or indeed any coverage at all. Aspects of the school day such as toilet breaks, lining up after breaktime or lunchtime (boys’ or girls’ lines), or getting changed for gym can all present trans children with feelings of fear, helplessness, and unwelcome attention (Cotton, 2014). It is therefore important that teachers

feel prepared and comfortable to address and handle these issues without feeling helpless or unprepared.

Teachers' confidence in supporting trans children and "the big freak-out"

Much of the research surrounding trans children focuses mainly on the roles of their families or mental health workers and less so on the roles of their teachers, despite the fact that children spend such a high proportion of their time in school. Teachers working with trans children clearly require tools to support them, as they are duty-bound to be advocates for trans students as they are for all minorities (Savage and Schanding, 2013). Research suggests, however, that the tools to enable teachers to support these students are limited. Luecke (2011) acknowledges that there is a respectable amount of literature to assist those in the mental health profession but little to assist schools. In their research, Warwick et. al. (2004) found that teachers have very few opportunities to access continuing professional development (CPD) or in-service sessions on LGBT issues. Although Luecke's study only focuses on American schools, and Warwick et. al.'s does not focus solely on trans issues, they both provide some insight to the levels of help and guidance available to teachers in this area. As the current curriculum has a continuing focus on the health and wellbeing of children, teachers have a responsibility to ensure they provide appropriate support for trans children to ensure that as a result, their mental health is good and they can therefore achieve in this curricular area (Scottish Government, 2008). The 'No Outsiders' project was one attempt to offer guidance in supporting LGBT children and education to both teachers and pupils in 16 English primary schools (DePalma, 2013). However, there have not been many instances of similar projects taking place in schools since, potentially as a result of the media backlash that they have faced (Manning, 2015).

There appears to be little research into attitudes and opinions of teachers to trans issues; although in Scotland it is a requirement that they are committed to social justice in all areas, as stated by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (2012). However, McCabe and Rubinson (2008) found that in a study of 81 graduate teachers, most had little knowledge of LGBT issues and limited access to professional training, resources or other support that would enable them to overcome this. This could pose a question as to how well teachers can support trans children if there is limited help or information available for them to develop professionally in this area.

So if there are so few resources to help teachers support trans students, what are their reactions when faced with welcoming one into their classroom? A study by Payne and Smith (2014) attempted to address this. In their preliminary research they discovered common feelings of discomfort, fear or anxiety in teachers when presented with a child whose gender appeared to be an 'other'; an alternative to the gender binary which is dictated to be the norm. Paechter (1998) also discusses the idea of an 'other' as a social group which is very much a minority, one which is not considered to be central to society and therefore has very little influence within it. Paechter describes the 'other' as being feared by those who hold authority, mirroring Payne and Smith's idea of trans children being that 'other' in the school environment that causes teachers anxiety. Their research intended to uncover the reasons for what they called a "big freak-out" (2014, pp.1) at the prospect of teaching a trans child in the elementary school². This was done through interviews with educators that had previously worked with trans children. Educator fear was identified as stemming from many areas: lack of preparation to accommodate trans children, an absence of policy, framework, or procedure surrounding supporting trans children, a feeling of needing to 'hide' trans children from their peers or indeed the community, discomfort at how to breach this topic with other children,

² For reference: in Scotland, the educational equivalent would be Primary 2- Primary 7.

and a worry about backlash from the wider community. They concluded by calling for more education for teachers around gender, and for teachers to become more aware of how much of the school's structure and routine relies on the existence of a gender binary; and from there, for teachers to make an effort to begin to dismantle it.

Payne and Smith's research could be considered incredibly significant, as it contributed to what is a small body of research which looks at teachers' attitudes and responses to trans children in school. In this dissertation, I aim to contribute to such research. Despite extensive searches, I was unable to find any data on teachers' perceptions of trans children in Scotland, or indeed Britain. Therefore to fill this perceived gap, I sought to base my research on the study that Payne and Smith conducted, but in the context of a Scottish primary school.

Methodology

In conducting my research, I chose to use an interpretivist approach, as my main aim was to understand teachers' understandings of this topic, which Thomas (2009) identifies as a key area of this paradigm. As a result, the methods I used attempted to stay in keeping with this approach.

Participants

Research was conducted in an Edinburgh primary school during a twelve-week placement. Seven teachers participated including the school's headteacher. Three of the participants were men and four were women. Participants were selected based on convenience, outlined by Salkind (2012); however other factors included time constraints, teacher availability, and the basis of the strong professional relationships I had developed with participants during placement. I was cautious of conducting research with teachers with whom I was less familiar around a topic that may already be seen as controversial or challenging to discuss (Ryan, Patraw and Bednar, 2013), therefore I based my participants on who would most likely feel at ease with me, and accordingly would not be intimidated by my research topic. Establishing a good relationship between interviewee and interviewer before commencing research is recommended by Oakley (1981, in Bryman, 2008) and allowed me to focus on a balance between task involvement and good rapport with the interviewee, as recommended by Wellington (2000). As my research concerns a smaller sample of participants than Payne and Smith's study, I do not intend to generalise its results. Instead I will illustrate that the themes that appear are common in one primary school, and suggest that there is a possibility that these may be present in other primary schools in Scotland. From there I will make my recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

Before I began my research I ensured I read and adhered to the British Educational Research Association (2011) ethical guidelines. When approaching each participant about participation in my research, I supplied an information sheet³ with a brief overview of my topic and research aims, and emphasised they could take some time to consider before consenting. In keeping with ethical guidelines, each participant gave written informed consent before their interview. This involved clearly informing them of their rights as an interviewee⁴. No participants opted to skip any questions or prematurely terminate the interview process.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured audio recorded individual interviews. Interviews revolved around a fictional case study of a trans (male to female) child named Rain, who was scheduled to arrive at the school in a months' time⁵. Participants were hypothetically teaching the primary 4 class into which she would be arriving. For my interview with the school's headteacher, I changed this scenario to illustrate that Rain would simply be joining the school. Participants were given limited information about Rain, in order to keep discussion as open-ended as possible and to allow different topics to arise spontaneously. Interview questions⁶ were based on this scenario which then provided a springboard to further questioning. They were also designed to address my three research questions. Interviews were beneficial in this instance as they offered participants a conduit by which they could discuss a topic at length and give clarity to any answers they may offer face to face (Robson, 2002). I felt this was especially important given the nature of the topic as it is one where participants often take great care when discussing, in order to properly convey their point to

³ See Appendix 1

⁴ See Appendix 2 for a copy of this consent form.

⁵ See Appendix 3.

⁶ See Appendix 4.

avoid misinterpretation. In contrast, methods such as questionnaires may have provided me with less valuable data, as they provide few opportunities for participants to clarify what certain questions mean, and also rely on the distributor to interpret responses in a certain way which may not convey the meaning that the respondent intended (Cohen and Manion, 1989). They may also have a low response rate, meaning researchers may end up with smaller amounts of data (Wellington, 2000). Questionnaires are largely thought to be a good way of conducting surface levels of questioning (Walker, 1989), however through my research I wanted to gain a more in-depth look at teacher attitudes and opinions, therefore I selected this interview format.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the interviews was transcribed⁷ from the audio recordings taken during interviews. The data was then analysed using open coding, as recommended by Kvale (2007). Interview transcripts were colour-coded in order to establish common themes in the data and subsequently to categorise these, an approach recommended by Coles and McGrath (2010)⁸. Colour coding was used as shown in Fig. 1.

Colour	Code
Blue	Issue not being a priority- the focus is on something else
Yellow	Initial Reactions
Light Green	Thinking about other children
Orange	The need for more support
Teal	Being open about the situation
Peach	Anticipatory vs Reactionary
Dark Green	Support that staff feel would be beneficial

Fig. 1- Colour coding used to sort data into categories.

⁷ An extract of a transcription is shown in Appendix 5

⁸ An example is shown in Appendix 6.

I then created tables for my codes, allowing data to be easily organised and viewed (Gillham, 2000), as shown in Fig. 2.

Open Code	Quotes to Support	Additional Comments
Initial Reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Well, it’d be all about preparing the school community for her so she feels welcomed and part of things”- Alan, p.1 • “My initial reaction? Erm...well you would look to find more information about Rain” – Jack, p.1 • “Probably, um, wondering how I’m going to- how this is all going to play out with the other children... what are they going to know about Rain, what is Rain going to be telling them about...herself”- Lydia, p.1 • “I think my initial reaction would be how best to support that child”- Lorna, p.1 • “Excited! I like to welcome new children into my class, and hope that Rain feels welcomed!”- Elayne, p.1 • “Probably, em...just concern, because I’ve never come across it. So I wouldn’t have any idea really of how to approach that situation.”- Juliet, p.1 • “I suppose initially that’s just the main thing is that, it is not a completely neutral piece of information that you’re dealing with. I suppose I might want to think about the children that I have in my class and what kind of support they might need in order to best understand and what that understanding should be like”- Ruairidh, p.1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most teachers’ initial reactions involved immediately thinking of some way in which to support Rain. We can infer from this that from the scenario they were given, teachers knew this case was unique and that it would not be enough to simply begin focussing solely on her learning which Ruairidh highlighted in his own response. Teachers knew that this child would need support in other areas as well. • All teachers stated that Rain would be welcomed to the school, but only Elayne outwardly expressed excitement at Rain’s arrival to the school. What can we take from this? • Juliet outwardly expressed her concern around the situation and that she had not ever been confronted with it before. This already indicates that if there is support available for teachers, it is offered reactively rather than proactively. • A few teachers mentioned other children, or the school community, as the first thing they would think about if welcoming a trans child to the school. This indicates an awareness of the reactions of other children and how they could affect Rain’s development at the school, or indeed her daily school life.

Fig. 2- Template of table used to code data.

In analysing responses I looked to find data which would answer my research questions. By organising data this way it became easier to link certain themes together and to analyse how they answered my research questions.

Limitations

There are some limitations to using interviews as a data collection method. They allow researchers to gain in-depth levels of data (Kvale, 2007); however in this case I did not manage to gain a good breadth of responses as a result of having seven participants. As a result, sweeping statements cannot be made. I sought to combat this by ensuring that I did not make large generalisations in my findings, and making modest claims. It should be noted that

participants' responses may not have provided a full picture of their views surrounding the topic and therefore inferences must be made which could be affected by interviewer bias (Cohen and Manion, 1989). It is also impossible to know whether or not participants were supplying their fixed opinions during interviews. In order to minimise bias I avoided hypothesising any of my results and instead focused on research questions which could generate a variety of answers, and used probing instead of prompting in my interviews which Parsons (1984) identifies as good practice to avoid bias. I also used a narrative approach when presenting my findings, in order to convey an exploration of possible ideas rather than one strict interpretation.

If I were to carry out a follow-up piece of research, I would consider using interviews and questionnaires to collect data. In doing so, a more comprehensive picture of attitudes and opinions may become evident, and the drawbacks of both methods would be mitigated.

Findings and Discussion

In order to provide a well-structured review of my findings, they are organised under the common themes which I identified in the school. Many of these have features which link together, therefore the structure of this chapter will show a logical progression of my findings.

Initial reactions of teachers

The interviewees' most common reaction to the news that a trans child would be joining their class was an immediate acknowledgement that this event was distinctive and that some form of support would be needed for this child, then looking for suitable support for Rain and wondering how this would be sourced. The fact that most teachers immediately put the needs of the child as their top priority was significant, as this did not convey the supposed fear that Payne and Smith (2014) had found was so prevalent amongst teachers in American schools. Instead, teachers knew that this was a different and unique situation, but they were very much focused on making sure the school was ready to welcome Rain appropriately. They may have been fearful of the situation but none of the teachers expressed such feelings. This can be seen as a very positive thing for this school; the immediate willingness and commitment of its staff and indeed its headteacher to provide a trans child with the support they would require, which Riley et. al. (2013) identify as one of their most pressing needs.

This initial acknowledgement of something 'different' about Rain that needed to be addressed was somewhat contrasted by Elayne's first reaction,

“(I would be)Excited! I like to welcome new children into my class, and hope that Rain feels welcomed!”

Elayne's reaction should not, however, immediately be interpreted to mean that she intended to treat this child in the same way as others in her class, i.e. failing to acknowledge her unique support needs. Rather, it may simply illustrate what she feels is the most important thing for Rain in that situation; arriving into a class with a positive, caring environment where she would feel safe, and to know that her teacher was a person she could trust. Riley et. al. (2013) identify this as an important factor in supporting a trans child. Elayne's excitement can therefore be taken as very encouraging for a trans child arriving into her class. So too can the first thoughts teachers had of the initial action they would take to make sure Rain would be supported in school, which included,

"preparing the school community for her so she feels welcomed and part of things."

"you would look to find more information about Rain...a parent, probably would be my first (point of contact)."

"I might want to think about the children that I have in my class and what kind of support they might need in order to best understand and what that understanding should be like."

This can be interpreted to mean that hopefully, for a reasonable amount of teachers, they would be able to formulate some form of preliminary action plan to ensure that any trans child would arrive at school with a welcoming environment awaiting them, and would have measures in place to support and help them. However a couple of teachers expressed some concerns,

Juliet: *"(My first reaction would be) just concern, because I've never come across it. So I wouldn't have any idea really of how to approach that situation."*

Lydia: *"Probably wondering how this is all going to play out with the other children...what are they going to know about Rain, what is Rain going to be telling them"*

These two teachers expressed their apprehension about different areas of the situation. Juliet had more concern about the situation as a whole and seemed to convey worry about the fact that she had no experience dealing with anything like it. This could mean that as a teacher, she was fretful that she consequently may not be doing all she could be to support a trans child. Teachers in Payne and Smith's (2014) study also voiced this concern. This could be an indicator of the 'fear' that they discussed in their findings, although none of my participants verbally expressed 'fear' therefore it is difficult to make such an assumption. Lydia, on the other hand, was more concerned about the reactions of other children towards Rain, and later revealed that she was worried about how the environment in the classroom would be affected if other children reacted negatively to Rain's situation. This is a very valid concern, as Grossman and D'Augelli (2006) and Biddulph (2006) identified bullying or harassment by other children as an issue that commonly affects trans children in school. As the other teachers in my study discussed the scenario at more length, almost all of them began to mention other children in the school, and how they may be affected by the arrival of a trans child.

Taking other children into account

A prevalent theme in the data was mentions of other children in the school and their potential responses to Rain's arrival, something which was also found to be common in Payne and Smith's (2014) data. The teachers who participated in my interviews were very aware that other children in the class or school would pick up on and potentially ask about Rain's situation; however there were two main opinions as to how that would develop. Some teachers were confident that children in the school would be accepting of Rain and that there would not be many significant issues around her integration,

“children- particularly at this age, P4, they’re very accommodating, very understanding, just go along with any kind of needs of any child, so that wouldn’t necessarily be that difficult.”

“knowing our children, they’re very accepting.”

However other teachers expressed concern around how children may react, and seemed worried about potential incidents,

“there’s going to be situations where (Rain) may be called names or just feel(s) different”

“I guess I can see a lot of potential problems in class...because I just know how cruel children can be.”

One possibility for this difference in reaction between teachers could be their own experience with differing classes and children, which may have affected how they regarded this situation. It should be acknowledged that no two classes are the same and so the classes that one teacher has taught may be quite different to the classes taught by another. Therefore the experiences of a trans child in one class may be different to that of a trans child in another. Ruairidh acknowledged this, stating,

“It would really, really heavily depend on how (Rain) would be received...I would imagine a lot of pupils that I teach right now would...know to follow a cue of being supportive and tolerant...in another school setting where maybe that wouldn’t be the case, I would say that it would be very, very difficult.”

Ruairidh is correct in his view that establishing a supportive setting for any trans child would not be a straightforward endeavour. Relating to Savage and Schanding’s (2013) argument, schools are fundamentally places which are forever in danger of reproducing the transphobic tendencies of society. As children are products of this society, there are inherent challenges in educating them about the complex topic of gender. As has been shown in Pauletti, Cooper,

and Perry's (2014) study, there is the potential for cisgender children to react badly to trans children as a result of the preconceptions they hold about them, which could result in aggressive behaviour or bullying. Teachers therefore expressed legitimate concerns about the reactions of other children. Fortunately my findings did not correlate with Meyer's 2008 study which suggested that teachers may not address such gender-based harassment. Some of the teachers interviewed mentioned that they would be very willing to confront such incidences; however many also felt that they would perhaps not know how best to address questions from children who may simply be curious about Rain. This indicated a potential lack of training surrounding trans issues. Nevertheless, many of the interviewees identified an approach of being open with children as a prospective way of addressing questions about Rain before they arose,

Lydia: *"the problems occur when it's not been discussed and when it's not openly discussed, and that's when the bullying and the nastiness (occurs)...if the children don't know and understand about this, then...I just don't think it's a good way forward."*

Lorna: *"for children, usually I find if things are explained and if it's all open and perfectly...transparent, then there's not an issue."*

Other teachers spoke freely about the conversation they would have with the children, implying that this would be a learning experience shared with Rain's class and potentially the school. Openness and discussion is highly recommended by Ryan, Patraw and Bednar (2013), as they argue it goes a long way to break down gender stereotypes within the school. It may also be the case that such openness may go some way to addressing the institutional transphobia that Savage and Schanding (2013) argue is so embedded in schools. This honesty is contrasting to the action taken by some of the teachers in Payne and Smith's (2014) research, where there were some cases of trans children being 'stealth' within schools and

their situation being kept quiet around other children, parents and the wider school community. This does indicate a potential obstacle to being open with children; if the trans child in question is not as confident as Rain was in this scenario, and is not yet 'out', then that child has the right to their privacy and so may not wish to make their trans identity public knowledge. It then becomes the ethical responsibility of the school to respect that. Teachers in my study did acknowledge that every situation is different, and that they would want also to respect the privacy of Rain and her family. Research has shown that it does become easier to deconstruct the stigma of a trans child in the school when it is openly discussed with other children. As well as Ryan, Patraw and Bednar's (2013) research, Nixon (2009, in DePalma and Atkinson, 2009) identified that teachers who are not open about gender difference will unwittingly communicate feelings of unease to the children they teach, establishing gender nonconforming children as the 'other', which Paechter (1998) cites as inducing fear in people who do not fall into their demographic. On the other hand, it is natural that parents may not wish their child to be openly trans at school, fearing that they risk being othered for that very fact. Therefore privacy should be respected in cases where it has been requested, but a general willingness to be open about gender diversity issues with children, as displayed by staff at this school, should be considered a progressive step. However, such discussions should be supported by appropriate tools, resources and training. Juliet mentioned this in her interview, saying that more structured guidelines on how to have these discussions with children would be a helpful resource. In the remainder of the data, all teachers spoke about the need for some form of provisions in order to ensure that Rain's time at school would be happy.

The need for more support

Teachers in my study highlighted the fact that they did not feel fully confident or prepared to face at least one area of Rain's situation, whether it be fielding comments from parents, discussing the issue with children, making sure Rain gets the right support, ensuring that all is being done for her that could be being done, or indeed all of these. Payne and Smith (2014) identified lack of teacher preparation as one of the main areas educators fear. Six of the seven staff interviewed identified welcoming a trans child as something they had never faced in the classroom. This may explain such lack of preparation; having never been presented with the situation before and consequently feeling unsure as to how to manage it. However, Lorna explained that she had once taught a child who could have been described as trans, yet she concluded that if she were in the same position today, she would still not feel completely prepared to offer support despite her previous experience. She explained her feelings, reflecting on the situation she had faced,

"I'm pretty sure there was nothing available then because I would have wondered then, what else could or should I be doing, and I wasn't necessarily finding anything."

Therefore it should be noted that past experience alone may not be enough to give teachers complete confidence in supporting a trans child. Indeed Lorna, and all other class teachers that were interviewed, mentioned that more support for teachers should be available. When asked what form this support should take, teachers mentioned:

- resources or guidelines to help discuss gender issues in class
- data from previous case studies to see how other schools supported trans children
- online resources where teachers can obtain more information about the help a trans child would need

- help, advice and an idea of what good practice looks like from professionals who have experience in supporting trans children, or potentially even a key contact
- a professional development course surrounding trans issues.

Therefore even though teachers mentioned that they would not be as prepared as they would wish to welcome a trans child, they still had a good understanding of where they felt they needed CPD. Yet my research found that none of my participants who were class teachers had ever been offered development opportunities in this area, supporting the findings of Warwick et. al. (2004) and Luecke (2011), who conclude that such opportunities are rare. However, many teachers acknowledged that this may be a result of the small number of trans children presenting in primary schools, as discussed in Brill and Pepper (2008), Herman et. al. (2017), and Carmichael (2016). Headteacher Alan identified that he had been offered development opportunities in this area; however he explained why he had turned these opportunities down,

“there has been over the years a lot of information about the council’s LGBT stance and there have been things to go to at weekends, and I’ve looked at them but I’ve never gone because- it sounds terrible, but it’s not been a priority for the school”

As the school’s headteacher, Alan clearly realises that there are more pressing issues in his school which require the attention of the staff, and this should be appreciated. Looking to the future however, it may be that numbers of trans children will continue to rise (Duffy, 2015), and so training in this area may become a higher priority. Juliet seemed to recognise this in her interview, stating,

“I think as things are becoming less stigmatic, there will be more children who will be in this kind of situation, so it needs to be addressed, basically.”

At this point, however, support for teachers seems to be offered after they are presented with a trans child in their class, as Luecke (2011) and Payne and Smith (2014) identify. Ruairidh emphasised that support should be anticipatory rather than reactionary. He explained what may happen if this situation was not anticipated and if teachers only had generally inclusive attitudes towards Rain,

“you might...blunder into strategies that don't actually work very well, or you'd be trying to figure it out as you go along and problem-solve rather than anticipating and pre-empting things.”

It can be assumed that Ruairidh was concerned over how utilising tools which are not tried and tested may affect Rain. Other teachers that were interviewed did accept that it may not always be possible to make time to ensure the school has an action plan for a trans child arriving, as a result of time, finances and working time agreements. Some teachers also pointed out that children can often arrive at a new school with very little notice, and so teachers have to work quickly to accommodate them. If a trans child were to arrive in this manner, it may limit the ability of the school to provide appropriate support. Ultimately if this scenario were to arise, the teachers at this school seem to understand what they would need to deliver for a trans child (Riley et.al., 2013), and have positive attitudes towards her situation that indicate that she would be supported well. Alan also acknowledged this in his interview, stating;

“knowing our staff and where we've gone in terms of our diversity, equality and anti-bullying policy, I think the school's in a pretty good position (to welcome a trans child)”.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to investigate how prepared teachers felt to welcome a trans child to their classroom. Overall, many teachers at this Scottish primary school expressed that this was an area in which they felt they would greatly benefit from advice and resources, as many did not feel as confident or prepared to face such a situation as they would wish. It should be noted, however, that the breadth of their initial reactions show a willingness, enthusiasm and commitment to accommodate and provide appropriate support for a trans child. This can be viewed as a positive step towards trans rights in this school, and a step towards deconstructing the institutionalised transphobia that Savage and Schanding (2013) claim is present in schools. However, it cannot be assumed that these attitudes are present in other Edinburgh schools; it has to be acknowledged that only a small sample of teachers were interviewed, and so these results cannot be generalised. What may be presumed, however, is the need for more training and resources for teachers concerning trans education. Teachers in this particular school reported not having been offered either in their careers, and therefore it can tentatively be assumed that teachers in other schools in its cluster, and perhaps within the local authority area, have had a similar experience. It should be acknowledged that there may be some exceptions; at this school, the headteacher legitimately had higher priorities for staff development, however it may be that there are other schools in Edinburgh that for whatever reason see education for staff about trans issues as one of their top priorities. Ultimately a sweeping generalisation cannot be made, but it is an area that any follow-up research should address so that wider implications can be drawn.

When I began my research, I initially felt that similarly to Payne and Smith (2014) I would conclude by calling for teachers to be trained in supporting trans children, to ensure that these children are validated and therefore have the best possible educational experience, rendering

them less vulnerable to the many dangers trans people can face (Sherer, 2016). However, my research does identify barriers such as time constraints and huge workloads that already exist for staff, so it may not be realistic or fair to recommend intensive anticipatory training for teachers until numbers of trans children who present in primary schools begin to increase. This should not mean that professional development in this aspect is ignored completely. Teachers should be given opportunities to become more familiar with trans issues, and such opportunities should be publicised well to ensure that teachers are aware of what is available. In my research, teachers mentioned that online resources would be useful. This, then, would allow teachers to educate themselves on their own terms, without the time commitment that compulsory training would demand. A simple internet search does reveal that there are many good online resources, with UK Trans Info (2017) and Stonewall (Bartram, 2015) providing detailed support for teachers to meet the needs of trans students. Locally, Edinburgh City Council worked with LGBT Youth (2015) to provide a comprehensive guide to supporting LGBT children, which provided an in-depth look at meeting the needs of trans students. Clearly there is a wealth of online resources, however a glance at the City of Edinburgh Council's (2017) CPD directory reveals that there are no opportunities for teacher education in not just trans, but any LGBT issues. This should ideally be made available so that teachers can enrol in individual training if they wish. In my own practice, this research has inspired me to continue to read around trans issues to ensure that if I ever welcome a trans child into my class, I will be able to give them as positive an environment and as much support as possible. Until then, I can only strive to create a classroom which is a positive and safe space for all children, where they can learn to accept and celebrate the differences of others. As the Scottish Government has called for 2017 to be a "year of progress" for trans rights (Kerr, 2016), Scotland's people should strive to be a beacon of progression and humanity in the movement for trans equality, setting an example for future generations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- information sheet given to teachers about my research project

Hello!

As you may know I am in my fourth year of my undergrad degree, and whilst I am on placement I am required to carry out research relating to my dissertation. I am hoping that part of this research can take the form of interviews with staff at this school. I would be incredibly grateful if you were willing to be interviewed as part of my dissertation research. My dissertation aims to gauge how supportive and inclusive an environment primary school currently is for trans children. It also aims to discover how much support, resources and training there is available for teachers in order to help them feel more comfortable or prepared to support a trans child. All interview questions would be surrounding these topics. Your name would not be disclosed and all information and views you gave would be confidential. If you have any questions before you decide whether or not to participate please feel free to send me an email at [name deleted]@yahoo.com or just ask me in school.

If you decide that you would be willing to participate in an interview, then you are more than welcome to email me or to just let me know at school, and from there we can arrange a time that this could take place. If an interview is something you would not be interested in, please do not feel you have to supply a reason as to why not- I am aware this subject area can be a difficult one to discuss.

Thank you for your interest!

[name deleted]

Appendix 2- consent form which teachers signed before participating in an interview.



By signing this form I consent to being interviewed for the purposes of this dissertation, and have been made aware that:

- This interview will be audio recorded, with all tapes being confidential and only used for the purposes of this dissertation. They will be destroyed one year after the interviewer's graduation.
- Any names discussed or referred to within this interview (including the interviewee's) will be kept completely confidential and pseudonyms will be used within this dissertation to maintain this confidentiality.
- This interview can be terminated at any time upon request by the interviewee, and similarly any questions asked of the interviewee can be skipped upon their request.

Signature of interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Signature of interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3- scenario given to teachers to refer to during interviews



(Image obtained from Google)

This is Rain. You arrive at school to the news that in a months' time you will be welcoming her to your Primary 4 class. You learn through information given by Rain's previous school that although Rain's assigned gender is male, Rain stresses that she is a girl, and feels comfortable wearing skirts and dresses as her uniform.

Appendix 4- interview questions

Interview Questions

- Before we start, do you have any questions you would like to ask me?
- You arrive at school to the news that in a months' time you will be welcoming a new child to your Primary 4 class, Rain. You learn through information given by Rain's previous school that although Rain's assigned gender is male, Rain stresses that she is a girl, and feels comfortable wearing skirts and dresses as her uniform. What is your initial reaction to the news that Rain will be joining your class?
- Have you had any previous experience of teaching a child who displayed similar behaviour to Rain?
- **IF YES**, how did you welcome that child to the classroom?
- Have you had any training or been given any resources at all that would prepare you to provide a supportive teaching and learning environment for Rain?
- Right now, how prepared would you feel to welcome Rain to your class?
- **PROBE ADDITIONS:** Both in terms of knowledge of her situation and how to support her.
- What do you think are the most important things to consider when supporting Rain?
- Do you think training or resources (at local, cluster, or school level) would be useful to help you fully support Rain?
- **IF YES**, what training or resources do you think would be useful?
- **IF ASKED TO REPHRASE:** what, if anything, do you think you would benefit from being trained on or given resources to support you with?
- **PROBE QUESTION:** what are your views on the amount of training or resources that are available to help teachers in this aspect?
- Thank you so much for your time, comments and answers, I really appreciate it. Is there anything more you'd like to add that I haven't thought to ask you?

Appendix 5- extract from one interview; example of transcription.

Before we start, do you have any questions for me at all?

No!

Okay, have a look at this for me. This is Rain, and you have basically arrived at school to the news that in a months' time, you will be welcoming her to your Primary 4 class. You learn through information given by Rain's previous school that although Rain's assigned gender is male, she stresses that she is a girl, and feels comfortable wearing skirts and dresses as her uniform. So just hearing about this scenario, what is your initial reaction to the news that Rain will be joining your class?

My initial reaction? Erm...well you would look to find more information about Rain, if she is...erm- a parent, probably would be my kind of first- given her age, she'd be about eight years old or so, erm, find out what their thoughts are, and how- obviously she is, if she's wearing dresses at school previously, then erm...probably speak to management as well, just to confirm everything and check everything's okay, but then, presumably going with her being known as a girl, we'd just set up that, as any new start...as any new pupil would start.

Have you had any previous experience with a child displaying a similar sort of behaviour to Rain?

Not at all. Erm, I've been predominantly erm, through my postgrad, been very much in the younger stages, erm, this year I've been kind of primary 1 to primary 7 at this time, but, erm, this is my probationer school as well so I haven't taught in many other schools, em I was up in [location deleted], in two schools there, it was primary 4 and primary 1, and I've been in primary 1 or 2 for four out of the six years I've been here. So, erm...not that that would mean that there's...less or more likely to see this, but no. Not at all.

Have you ever been given any training or been offered any resources that would prepare you to provide a supportive teaching and learning environment for Rain?

I think lots of our, erm...lots of kind of supporting comes from having that situation put in front of you first and then looking for something then after, in fact, if you've got a diabetic child, you kind of go on the diabetes training, then if- you know, you don't really always get the opportunity to see things first. So that would be- erm, yeah, it can sometimes be a bit like that. So even if that was something you could look out for, I'm sure you'd find training or support networks if you were looking for that, but no, I've never- I've not heard of anything but I've not been looking for anything either.

Appendix 6- example of colour coding used on interview transcriptions.

person, that child, and therefore as always just trying to be reflective about what's the best- what's the best bit, from anything that is available.

Right now, how prepared would you feel?

Not as prepared as I would like to be. Yeah, definitely not, I think, er...I would probably feel that I wanted to have done a lot of thinking and a lot of preparation prior to her arrival, because... when a new pupil arrives you obviously want them to feel welcome and that it's not as surprise and that everybody's just looking forward to seeing them, and all of that, erm, so I would be wanting to do that anyway, but I think given that this particular child was likely to need a bit of support or a little bit of explanation if issues were to be discussed with the other children for example, just if they hadn't had experience of a child wanting to dress as- as the other gender, then how would they react to that, and to make sure that that was going to be a supportive environment rather than a threatening one or a questioning one, or a puzzled- you know, whatever, I'm talking about prejudices and my own thoughts are in there too, clearly, but for children, usually I find if things are explained and if it's all open and perfectly...um, transparent, then there's not an issue, because everybody understands that we're all different, or that we're all unique and that we're all ourselves, and therefore that's a good thing that we need to help each other to celebrate, and it shouldn't be ever something that's going to be stressful, so I would want to avoid that most of all I think, erm...uh-huh. It's pretty inconclusive, but there you go!