

“A Professional Obligation” Exploring Current Practices of Educational Psychologists with gender diverse children and young people in the UK

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Abstract

Aims: The current study aimed to answer three research questions exploring what EP and trainee EPs (TEPs) are doing in their work with gender diverse CYP, what informs their practice, and what should be included in guidance moving forwards to support their practice.

Method/Rationale: Educational psychologists (EPs) are ideally situated to support schools and school staff in their work with gender diverse children and young people but lack professional guidance informing this work, risking a diversity of approaches. Using a vignette as part of an online survey, the current study aimed to explore what EP and trainee EPs (TEPs) are doing in their work with gender diverse CYP, what informs their practice, and what should be included in guidance moving forwards to support their practice.

Findings: Qualitative data from 75 EP/TEPs, were analysed using thematic analysis. The themes highlighted the large disparities in current EP practice with gender diverse CYP and the sense of uncertainty many have in this work, though their actions were informed by similar ideas such as psychology, research, and legislation.

Limitations: The use of a vignette and self-selection inherent in a broad survey of this nature might have yielded a somewhat unrepresentative sample of EPs.

Conclusions: The current study emphasises the considerable variation in practices adopted by EPs when working with gender diverse CYP and amplifies calls for professional guidance for EPs working with this community.

Keywords: Transgender; gender diverse; educational psychology; guidance; affirmation

Introduction

Gender diverse communities are becoming increasingly visible within society and the media (Yavuz, 2016); these communities include any individuals whose gender identities do not align with the sex they were assigned at birth including those identifying beyond the traditional binary model of gender (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022). The most recent UK census data indicated that 262,000 (0.5%) individuals over the age of 16 identify with a gender different to their sex registered at birth (ONS, 2021). There has also been a significant increase in children and young people (CYP) openly identifying as gender diverse (Twist & de Graaf, 2019), including in schools (Meyer & Leonardi, 2018). Although exact numbers are hard to estimate (Sagzan, 2019), schools are now more likely than ever to encounter gender diverse CYP, as are Educational Psychologists (EPs).

As gender diverse communities become more visible their stories are better heard (McBride, 2021) and we begin to understand how challenging their school experiences can be. At an individual level, gender diverse CYP are at increased risk of discrimination, bullying, and victimisation, compared to their cisgender peers (Day et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2015). At an institutional level, gender diverse CYP experience marginalisation and disadvantage due to the cisnormative discourse that dominates education systems (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Kosciw & Pizmony-Levy, 2016; McBride, 2021). In a literature review of the school experiences of gender diverse youth however, McBride (2021) emphasised the dominance of US-based research in the field. Within the UK, the Stonewall (2017) School Report detailed the experiences of 3,713 LGBT CYP, including 500 gender diverse adolescents, using a large-scale survey. The School Report outlined that 64 per cent of gender diverse pupils had been bullied at school, over half of all pupils surveyed reported hearing transphobic language frequently or often at school, and 77 per cent of pupils had not received teaching around gender diversity in school. Together this depicts an environment where 33 per cent of gender diverse pupils report not feeling safe in school, and over half do not enjoy going to school or feel part of their school community (Stonewall, 2017). More recent qualitative research paints a similar picture, where the school experiences of gender diverse CYP in the UK are often characterised by discrimination, victimisation, and delegitimisation at an individual and systemic level (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Horton, 2022).

The challenging school experiences of gender diverse youth are of course associated with poorer outcomes. Gender diverse CYP experience higher rates of mental health difficulties including anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide (Connolly et al., 2016; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2018; Nodin et al., 2015; Rivas-Koehl et al.,

2022; Stonewall, 2017; Yunger et al., 2004) as well as poorer academic outcomes (Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2020).

While school experiences for gender diverse CYP can be negative, schools can also be protective. Stonewall (2017) report that when gender diversity was included in school's curriculum this was associated with reduced incidences of bullying. Gender inclusive school policies and curricula have further been associated with improved school environment, attendance, and achievement for gender diverse CYP (Greytak et al., 2013; Johns et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2010). Additionally, having supportive teachers or a trusted adult in school has been associated with more positive school experiences (Goodrich, 2012; McGuire et al., 2010), increased academic performance (Goodrich, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2018) and improved wellbeing (Dessel et al., 2017; Rivas-Koehl et al., 2022) in gender diverse populations. McBride (2021) outlined that affirming school experiences where gender diverse CYP feel accepted, validated, and included both in interactions with others and the wider institution, is vital for supporting their sense of belonging and thus improving outcomes.

Educational psychologists (EPs) are arguably well placed to support gender diverse young people directly and to support schools and school staff to improve the experiences and outcomes of gender diverse CYP through the application of an evidence-based understanding of psychology (Leonard, 2022; Yavuz, 2016). Given their key role in this area, research has begun exploring the views and experiences of EPs related to gender diverse practice (e.g., Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022; Gavin, 2021; Sagzan, 2019). Sagzan (2019) interviewed eight EPs and identified several roles EPs felt they had in supporting schools' work with gender diverse CYP, including raising awareness, knowledge and understanding, promoting wellbeing, developing provision, challenging school practice, and supporting staff to manage difficulty. Allen-Biddell and Bond (2022) further suggested EPs have a role to empower gender diverse CYP through their work and create support systems around the CYP. Similarly, across the world, school-based psychologists are adopting positions of advocacy for gender diverse CYP (Beck, 2018; González, 2016; Swindle, 2022).

Despite their positioning to support gender diverse CYP, there is currently no published professional body guidance to guide EPs in this work. The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2019) has produced 'Guidelines for Psychologists Working with Gender, Sexuality and Relationship Diversity' however this is restricted to adults and young people aged 18 years and over. Whilst some local authorities have released their own guidance for

schools supporting gender diverse CYP, following these is not compulsory and many have been withdrawn following legal challenge and negative press.

Professional guidance provides an important framework for best practice and in its absence, EPs face uncertainty regarding appropriate and recommended approaches or strategies; this uncertainty can lead to significant disparities in practice. Indeed, even amongst the eight EPs Sagzan (2019) interviewed, significant differences were noted in their narratives. To ensure consistent practices for gender diverse CYP, it is important to explore the current approaches employed by EPs in the UK. Whilst in recent years there has been an increase in theses and research exploring the topic, the majority of these have been conducted outside the UK (Earnshaw et al., 2020; Mackie et al., 2021; Swindle, 2022; Yannalfo, 2019). Of those conducted in the UK, studies have been small-scale, often focussed on a single local authority or area (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022; Court, 2019; Sagzan, 2019) or have included a range of different educational professionals (Bowskill, 2017; Gavin, 2021). The aim of the current study is thus to extend previous research to explore the following research questions:

1. What are EP and trainee EPs (TEPs) doing in their work with gender diverse CYP?
2. What informs EP/TEP practice with gender diverse CYP, in the absence of professional body guidance?
3. What should be included in guidance for EPs working with gender diverse CYP to support practice moving forwards?

Method

Design and procedure

This study utilised a qualitative design, with survey data being collected using open-ended questions to explore EP and TEP practice with gender diverse CYP. The survey data were collected anonymously through the Qualtrics platform, between August and December 2022. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Southampton Ethics Committee (ERGO: 74979).

Participants

Participants were recruited through appropriate gatekeepers including Principal EPs and training co-ordinators across the UK, who shared information with EPs and TEPs in their local authority or training programmes. Participants were also recruited through the

Educational Psychology email forum (EPNET). A poster or short summary of the study was provided, along with a link to the Qualtrics survey.

Survey

The survey was created by reading existing literature and Local Authority guidance in the area, discussing with supervisors, and consulting EPs with experience of working with gender diverse CYP, to ensure the survey had practical relevance and that the presented vignette reflected a realistic example of EP work.

The survey was divided into sections. The first section collected demographic information from participants, while the second section investigated previous experience and training related to working with gender diverse CYP. The third section presented a vignette to the participants (see Figure 1) and asked them open-ended questions about their possible actions, the factors that informed their thinking, and their opinions about future guidance. The vignette explored practice regarding name and pronoun use, bathroom and changing facilities, social transition, and bullying.

Insert Figure 1 here.

Data analysis

We explored the qualitative data using ‘medium q’ or ‘codebook’ thematic analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2023; Clarke & Braun, 2018). TA is a flexible approach to qualitative data analysis, and we chose a codebook methodology to combine a structured, inductive approach to coding based on pre-determined research questions, refining codes throughout the process when needed (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Morgan, 2022) to produce themes that were meaningful to the research questions, whilst maintaining flexibility to adapt analysis to participants responses (Byrne, 2022). Further, this approach enabled descriptive and summative analysis of data, well suited to applied research by aiming to provide relevant and accessible implications for practitioners (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

The process of data analysis was based broadly on the six stages of TA outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2023) with data pertaining to each research question being analysed separately.

Findings

Overall, 121 participants started the survey and completed some or all of sections one and two regarding demographics and previous experience. Seventy-five participants responded

to some or all the qualitative questions in section three relating to the vignette. An exploration of this data showed no differences between the participants who provided responses to the vignette and those who did not. Each question in Section 3 had between 60 and 75 responses.

The demographic information for the 75 participants who responded to some or all of questions related to the vignette is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here.

Thematic analysis

Responses relating to each of the research questions were analysed separately to maintain their focus. Each research question therefore has its own set of themes generated from participant responses, in the form of topic summaries. Although themes are presented separately for each research question they are interlinked, and these relationships will be discussed throughout the findings and discussion. Participants were both trainee and qualified EPs, however, for the purpose of writing up the findings all respondents will be referred to as EPs. See Figure 1 for a summary of research questions and themes.

Insert Figure 1 here.

RQ1: What are EP/TEPs doing in their work with gender diverse CYP?

Eight themes were generated in relation to this research question and were drawn from what EPs indicated they would do in response to the survey vignette.

Affirming or taking a middle ground. Several EPs indicated that they would affirm the YPs gender identity using “the pupil’s preferred names and pronouns” and recommending school staff do the same. EPs also reported they would “recommend that they use the female toilets as this is the gender that they identity as” and “the YP should be supported to express their own identity”. Affirmation was often reported in relation to respecting the CYP’s wishes, validating their experiences, and following their lead. Alongside affirming the YP’s gender identity, EPs indicated they would “explain why I think this is in the best interests of the CYP”, citing research and legislation where necessary, with some acknowledging they would consider the capacity of the YP in this decision. In taking an affirming standpoint, some EPs reported that they would try to shift perspectives of others, supporting stakeholders to see the CYP’s perspective, challenging others who may disagree, and supporting school staff to advocate for the CYP.

It is worth noting that EPs in this study appeared to show greater consensus for affirmation related to name and pronoun use and less consensus around social transition and facility use. Indeed, many EPs suggested they would try to find a middle ground when navigating opposing views and some reported a desire to affirm the CYP's gender identity but reflected that in practice they may instead search for a middle ground. For name and pronoun use for example, EPs indicated they might "avoid using pronouns", write "different reports" for the CYP and parent, "use both names", "remove gender" or names from the report, or use gender neutral pronouns. Similarly, a range of options were considered for finding a middle ground for facility use, including providing "gender neutral spaces", with some EPs suggesting "it shouldn't be the disabled toilet" and others recommending "use of disabled toilets" for the CYP. Further, EPs indicated that although they might affirm in the moment, they would remain open-minded and ensure the YP knows they can change their mind in the future should they wish.

Not affirming gender identity. In contrast to the previous theme, some EPs reported that they would not affirm the CYP's gender identity and indicated that they would use the CYP's birth name or pronouns and recommend the school does the same. They would also suggest that the pupil would need to use facilities in line with their biological sex. For some EPs, this was linked to suggestions that schools must maintain single sex spaces for pupils or concerns that affirming the CYP's gender identity would "increase likelihood or drive for medical intervention" and therefore schools should not be supporting social transition without clinical guidance. For other EPs, their viewpoints were associated with a gender essentialist view, and indicated they would raise "concerns that the school are supporting the idea that female or male are identities and not biological realities".

Following parental wishes. Some EPs were reluctant to affirm the gender identity of CYP if this went against parental wishes; these EPs positioned parents as the decision makers and suggested that "they have parental rights and power in decision making" or that it was "up to parents working with their child" to make such decisions. Some EPs reported that even if their preference was for affirmation, they felt "school would not be in a position to go against parents' wishes". Further, there was a view shared by some EPs, that "parents should always be involved in decision making around the child" and that "schools should not support social transition without parental consent".

Working together. Several EPs reported a desire to work with stakeholders, including parents and school staff; having “a conversation with parents” to understand their views and give “everyone a voice” were felt to be “fundamental”. There was recognition that finding ways to “maintain a positive relationship with parents” would be important, and that part of the EP role here could be to “sit with this level of anxiety confusion and conflicts and help create safe spaces for people to reflect on and process these feelings”. Some EPs viewed the aim of this as guiding parents to see and respect “the YP’s wishes” and offering “insight into the positive effects of social transitioning on trans young people’s mental health and wellbeing”. For other EPs the aim was to facilitate a joint problem-solving meeting with parents, staff, and the CYP, to co-construct a way forward and try to “come to a joint decision”. EPs discussed ways in which they would work systemically, often focussing on policy, suggesting they would look to the school’s “own policy on this issue, or if they do not have them, I would encourage them to establish one”.

Direct work with or support for the CYP. EPs considered how they might support the CYP directly; this included “speaking to the pupil in the first instance” and gathering “the child’s views”, as well as supporting “them in demonstrating informed, reasoned actions”. Many EPs considered it important to make sure that the child felt “heard and acknowledged”.

Furthermore, some EPs suggested that the CYP receive “supportive work around identity”, “counselling”, or “therapeutic support”. Within school, EPs considered how a “circle of friends approach” may support the CYP following bullying, as well as recommending the CYP has a “trusted adult in school who they felt comfortable talking to” and “a safe space to go to in school and a support network within and around school”.

Signposting when beyond my role. Several EPs noted that they would signpost parents and schools to “gender specialist services such as Stonewall, GIDS and mermaids”, relevant guidance or resources “such as the [*Local Authority*] inclusion pack”, or to “specialist support through mental health services”. Signposting by EPs was often associated with the idea that individuals were not “comfortable recommending a course of action”, that it was “outside my area of expertise and role” and “I don’t think it is my place to make this recommendation”. This notion of being outside the EP role was reported most in relation to toilet and facilities use and social transition, and comparatively less in terms of name/pronoun use and bullying in this study.

Managing uncertainty. Whilst EPs throughout the study reported various actions they would take in response to the vignette, several EPs expressed uncertainty about how to handle the case, recognising the challenge: "this is a tricky one", "I genuinely don't know", "I am unsure what I would do". To manage these uncertainties, many EPs suggested they would look to colleagues, research, policies, or guidance to inform their work. There was also uncertainty where EPs personally "believe this is the child's right" but were "not sure where the law stands".

RQ2: What informs TEP/EP practice with gender diverse CYP?

Five themes were generated in response to research question two; see figure 1 for a list of themes, these are detailed further below. Whilst the actions EPs might take differed considerably (detailed in RQ1), what drove their practice did not. Given the similarities in what informed practice, participants responses to all elements of the vignette and related questions, relevant to research question two, were analysed together, rather than being analysed separately based on what they indicated they might do (e.g., affirm, not affirm, follow parental wishes, etc.).

Prioritising person-centred practice. Many EPs, particularly those who suggested they would affirm the CYP's gender identity, attributed their decision to a person-centred or child-centred approach to their work. Respecting the YP's wishes was deemed to be important to several EPs in their decision making, with greater consensus for this in relation to name and pronoun use than other areas. In being person-centred, numerous EPs cited that their decisions were informed by prioritising the CYP's wellbeing, either acknowledging that not affirming their gender could cause more distress and harm or highlighting the value of feeling safe, accepted, respected, and supported, to the CYP's mental health and belonging.

Although EPs who suggested they would not affirm the CYPs gender identity did not specifically cite being person-centred in their decision making, some mentioned their concerns about the negative impact affirmation could have for the CYP, indicating they were similarly driven by keeping the CYP's best interests at heart. With a desire to keep CYPs' best interests central, some EPs mentioned their decision would also be informed by the age, consent, and capacity of the CYP.

The way in which EPs perceived their role also informed differing practice in relation to the case presented in the vignette. Various EPs felt that their reports are written for the CYP and that "the student is the primary client", with some seeing "our role as an advocate and voice of YP", often associated with EPs affirming the YP's gender identity.

For other EPs, their role was viewed as creating safe spaces for people to collaborate on next steps and to draw on a “consultation model for deciding on actions”, whereas some suggested their role was more systemic and about “stepping back and looking at issues as whole school” or that they have “professional obligation to consider alternative hypotheses”. EPs also cited a need for “defensible decision making” as an influencing factor informing their practice.

Personal views, values, and experiences. EPs’ personal views and experiences sometimes intertwined with their professional views and influenced their approach, with many EPs reporting personal experiences such as “being a parent”, “attending pride”, “my own gender identity experience”, and knowing transgender or LGBTQ+ people personally, as informing their thinking and decision making. These experiences supported them to understand the experiences and perspectives of gender diverse individuals and influenced their decisions, with some speaking of a “strong commitment to promoting trans rights”.

EPs’ “own values and beliefs” were a further significant influence informing their practice. Where EPs specified these, values and principles such as “inclusion and valuing diversity”, “respect for equality”, “I will not misgender a young person”, and “my values (about children's right to make some decisions about their own identity and presentation, about trans girls being girls)” were shared. Contrasting views were also shared by EPs, such as a belief that “the ideological position now being offered as CPD to most EPs, leading to policies and practice which I believe are harming YP”.

EPs’ view of gender also impacted their practice, with a range of diverging views being shared. Some EPs indicated their view that gender is biologically determined and based in DNA, whereas others discussed gender as being something individuals can define for themselves.

Relevant legislation and guidance. In line with previous themes, legislation was associated with a range of practice and what was considered ‘relevant’ likely interacted with EPs’ personal and professional views and values. Indeed, The Equality Act, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) were mentioned by several EPs. From these documents, EPs discussed the rights of transgender pupils as a protected characteristic, putting pupil voice at the centre of practice, as well as parents’ rights to be involved and make decisions, leading to a range of practice being adopted from current legislation. EPs similarly referenced guidance such as the BPS Guidelines for Psychologists Working with Gender, Sexuality and Relationship Diversity and specific local authority guidance as informing

their decision making. Many EPs also mentioned the law or legal guidance more broadly as impacting various decisions with frequent consideration and contrasting views as to who's rights to prioritise; child, parent, others that decisions might impact, or trying to balance the rights of all involved.

Existing knowledge and understanding of gender diversity. The decision-making process of several EPs was informed by their current knowledge and understanding of gender diversity, which likely interacted with previous themes discussed. The media and social media coverage of gender, and online resources, were cited as the source of understanding for some EPs, whereas others referred to psychological theories or research as building their knowledge. EPs did not always specify the literature they relied upon, referring to “published research”, “relevant psychological theory”, or “familiarity with literature” to inform their decision-making process. Nonetheless, when specificity was provided, there was variation among EPs in terms of what they used and considered as ‘relevant’, as was observed in the approach to the legislation. Reference to the Cass review was made by EPs in terms of enacting caution to affirm CYP’s gender identity, as well as reference to literature supporting an association between social transition and a drive for medical intervention and the desistance of gender diverse individuals. Conversely, EPs guided by “evidence-based practice about mental health and gender identity and trauma associated with having to mask and not be your authentic self” referred to the detrimental effects of not affirming CYP’s gender identity on their mental health, wellbeing, identity, and belonging. Various psychological theories such as motivation, self-determination theory, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, narrative psychology, belonging, and the power-threat meaning framework, were also drawn upon by EPs when considering what guided their decision making, though again these were generally not expanded upon.

Confidence. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not confident at all) to 5 (completely confident) how they would have felt if this were a real case with which they were faced. Overall, the ratings indicated that participants felt slightly to somewhat confident in their approach to the vignette ($M=2.74$, $SD=1.10$; see table 2 for further breakdown of responses).

Insert Table 2 here.

RQ3: What should be included in guidance for EPs working with gender diverse CYP?

The 11 themes are outlined in table 3 below, with the most commonly mentioned first.

Insert Table 3 here.

Following the question about guidance, EPs were asked more generally what would support their future practice working with gender diverse CYP. Overall, 60 participants answered this question: 22 mentioned more training or CPD opportunities; 26 mentioned more experience (including casework, peer supervision and discussion, and learning from gender diverse individuals); 25 mentioned clear guidance, and 4 mentioned more research.

Discussion

The current study reemphasises the considerable variation in practices adopted by EPs when working with gender diverse CYP. EPs in the current study suggested a wide range of approaches they might undertake with gender diverse CYP, some opposing and conflicting, some complementary, yet a prevailing sense of uncertainty permeated many of the suggestions. Despite the range of responses, EPs predominantly demonstrated a common reliance on psychology, research, and legislation. However, there were variations in the sources consulted, and relevance attached, leading to divergent actions and approaches.

The current findings build on previous research suggesting EPs have an important and wide-reaching role in supporting gender diverse CYP (Sagzan, 2019; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022; Bowskill, 2017). Many of the actions and approaches EPs suggested aligned with previous research, highlighting the importance of affirming experiences (McBride, 2021), appropriate language, name, and pronoun use (Leonard, 2019), having trusted and supportive adults in school (Stonewall, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2018), and seeing gender diversity reflected across the curriculum, environment, and policies (Greytak et al., 2013; Johns et al., 2018; Stonewall, 2017).

Whilst several EPs in the current study endorsed an affirmative approach to support, particularly regarding name and pronoun use, others enacted more caution about affirming the CYPs gender identity and many were unsure how to respond. A cautious approach to this work and lack of confidence in the area, has similarly been discussed in previous research exploring EPs views (Sagzan, 2019; Shi & Doud, 2017). Further, in line with previous research, EPs personal and professional values (Betts, 2013; Sagzan, 2019; Beck, 2018), previous experiences (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022), and views of gender (Reisner et al., 2020; Sagzan, 2019) appeared to influence their practice. Consequently, as demonstrated by the range of responses to the vignette, schools are likely receiving inconsistent support around gender diversity potentially resulting in inequitable outcomes and experiences for gender diverse CYP.

Implications for Practice

The diversity of actions EPs would take around gender diverse CYP highlight a need for central professional body guidance for EPs working with gender diverse CYP to ensure consistent and effective support is in place. In addition to the need for guidance, EPs in the current study, as well as previous research, indicated their lack of knowledge posed a challenge and stressed a need for greater training (Bowskill, 2017; Court, 2019; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2015; Sagzan, 2019). This is important, as research has shown that increased knowledge of gender diversity is associated with more positive attitudes towards, and greater confidence working with, gender diverse individuals (Bowers et al., 2015; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2015).

Given the findings from this study and others (Betts, 2013; González, 2016; Sagzan, 2019) suggest that the emphasis on one's own values and beliefs guides practice, asking EPs to reflect on their own beliefs and biases around gender, a recommendation endorsed by EPs in the current study, may be a helpful starting point for professional growth and development. Opportunities to discuss views around gender with colleagues in open and non-judgemental ways may also be supportive. Reflexivity was viewed by participants in Sagzan's (2019) study as being needed to prevent stereotypes influencing EPs' work, with a suggestion that EPs who were not able to overcome prejudicial views to support and affirm gender diverse CYP may seek to refer the work to a colleague. Furthermore, research indicates that both personal and professional experience with gender diverse individuals is linked with more positive attitudes towards gender diversity (Hackimer et al., 2021; Bowers et al., 2015; Riggs & Bartholomeus, 2015). In the current study, such experiences appeared to give EPs greater insight into the experiences of gender diverse individuals.

Strengths and limitations and future research

The use of a vignette as part of an anonymous survey and the recruitment of participants from across the UK, with a variety of roles and demographics was a strength of the current study and extended previous research. The vignette was realistic and allowed those without direct experience to participate and reflect on their practice and enabled EPs with potentially differing views to share these safely and comfortably. Yet, at the same time, the vignette offered a simplified case of a binary transgender female pupil, where in practice work is multi-dimensional and the values and beliefs around other gender diverse CYP may have not been captured. For example, there is evidence that non-binary gender diverse individuals encounter additional challenges within educational systems (Bower-

Brown et al., 2021). Further research exploring these challenges within the specific context of EPs work would be valuable and beneficial as well as the wider systemic roles EPs could undertake to enhance outcomes for gender diverse CYP.

Finally, as previously mentioned, over three quarters of participants in the current study had experience of working with gender diverse CYP and/or had received training in the area. Whilst this may reflect an increase in visibility of gender diverse individuals in schools and a trend towards training in the area, it may also indicate that those with these experiences felt more comfortable responding to the survey. Future research would therefore benefit from further considering how to support those who are yet to experience training and work in the area.

Conclusion

The current study echoes previous research emphasising the crucial and varied role EPs have in supporting gender diverse CYP. While EPs did identify various actions they would undertake, a significant number also expressed feelings of uncertainty and a lack of confidence when addressing the gender diverse scenario, recognising the influence of their own views and values on their practice and highlighted the importance of reflexivity to support future work. As part of ensuring more equitable and consistent practice for gender diverse CYP, EPs highlighted the need for increased training and published guidance from their governing bodies.

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