ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Toward Proactive Support for Transgender and/or Gender Nonconforming Students in Teacher Education: Initial Findings of an Action Research Study

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Despite a relatively supportive social and legal context, and growing societal awareness of gender diversity, transgender and/or gender nonconforming (TGNC) people remain woefully under-represented in the Canadian teaching profession. Many Canadian teacher education programs are taking steps to improve supports for TGNC teacher candidates given the recent addition of gender identity and gender expression protected grounds in almost every piece of Canadian human rights legislation. However, a "reactive" approach dominates, meaning that barriers faced by TGNC teacher candidates tend to be addressed *after* harm has occurred. Our action research project aims to collaboratively shift a teacher education program at a mid-sized Ontario university toward a "proactive" stance where known gender-based barriers are mitigated *before* TGNC teacher candidates encountering them. This article shares findings from the project's first phase, focusing on barriers identified and mitigated four program areas: recruitment, application and orientation; practicum; career planning; and certification and graduation.

Transgender and/or gender nonconforming (TGNC) people face numerous discrimination-related barriers to their social and economic participation in society, including in the areas of employment, housing, medical care, and education (see Gaetz et al. 2016; Grant et al. 2011; Peter, Campbell, and Taylor 2021; Scheim et al. 2021; Taylor et al. 2011). Despite the recently added protections against gender identity- and gender expression-based discrimination in Ontario, Canada's Human Rights Code, there remains much to be done in addressing systemic barriers, including in the preparation of teachers for the province's publicly funded schools. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2014, 7) defines gender identity as "each person's internal and individual experience of gender," and "gender expression" as "how a person publicly presents their gender." Gender identity discrimination protection "is generally required only for transgender people (whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth) and only if their transgender status is apparent, self-declared, or disclosed by another" (Airton et al. 2019, 1157). However, gender expression discrimination protection "may be a universal right" (1157) where every Canadian, whether transgender or not, conceivably has the right to express masculinity or femininity (or both/neither) in their

own way and not experience discrimination (see also Kirkup 2018; Kirkup et al. 2020). These distinct protections each carry implications that are not well understood in provincially regulated public sectors, including the post-secondary institutions where K–12 teachers receive their education and introduction to the teaching profession. This is especially notable in a profession which traditionally has held spoken and unspoken expectations of how to "do gender" in a way that signals professionalism and fitness to serve in this socially valued role (Ingrey 2023; Iskander 2021).

As more K–12 students express or identify their gender in ways that run counter to cisnormative expectations (Goodman et al. 2019), the lack of gender diversity in the teaching profession is becoming a site of considerable tension. Emerging research suggests that TGNC teacher candidates (TCs)—people enrolled in university-based pre-service teacher education program—generally encounter teaching environments and expectations that are gendered in rigid binary ways (e.g., Iskander 2021; Silveira 2019). The present study directly addresses gaps in the literature on gender diversity in teacher education (see Airton and Koecher 2019; Payne, Airton, and Smith 2022), which has yielded findings on program curricula and TGNC TCs' experiences as units of analysis but has typically not turned its attention to program policy, procedures, and structures.

Our study interweaves action research (Loewenson et al. 2014) and evaluative inquiry (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014) to identify and address gender-based barriers in the teacher education program at Queen's University. Queen's is a medium-sized, research-intensive university in the small and majority-white city of Kingston, Ontario. The Faculty of Education welcomes approximately 600 Bachelor of Education students (TCs) into its sixteen month-long after-degree teacher education program each year. Upon graduation TCs are certified to teach in the province by the Ontario College of Teachers. Since 2018, our research team and staff collaborators have been participating in barrier identification and mitigation processes and studying these processes in four key program areas: (1) the application and orientation process, (2) school practicum placement, (3) career planning services, and (4) graduation and certification. The project's central aim is shifting our program from a *reactive* (i.e., *after* a TGNC TC has had a negative experience, including but not limited to gender identity or gender expression discrimination) to a *proactive* approach (i.e., one that mitigates barriers *in advance* of any TC encountering them).

Our project is guided by the following research questions: (1) what structural barriers to transgender and/or gender nonconforming teacher candidates exist within our conventional post-degree, university-based teacher education program? (2) What does the process of identifying and removing these barriers reveal about making *proactive* gender diversity-inclusive changes in teacher education as it is currently organized? In this article, we report on the study's first phase, sharing two sets of findings: barriers to TGNC TCs that exist in teacher education programs (these are addressed in order by the change areas enumerated above) and a meta-finding on the change process itself which accounts for commonalities across the change areas.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Our study uses a conceptual framework of cisnormativity (Bauer et al. 2009) and contributes to the emerging literature on the barriers TGNC individuals face when engaging with education systems—from kindergarten to grade 12 through post-secondary and into professional preparation programs—that struggle to imagine their presence (Blount 2000). Cisnormativity refers to social expectations and structures that assume everyone will (and should) identify with the gender they were assigned at birth throughout their lives (Bauer et al. 2009). Cisnormativity hinges on gender and biological essentialisms which expect: (1) sexed anatomy and gender identity to be congruent, immutable, and fixed at birth and (2) that a person's assigned gender corresponds with a mutually exclusive set of masculine or feminine attributes and desires (Serano 2016; Simmons and White 2014; Worthen 2016).

In educational systems permeated by cisnormativity, TGNC students often take the role of the "sacrificial lamb" in their school, outing themselves and exposing themselves to scrutiny in order to educate staff and pave the way for others (Meyer, Tilland-Stafford, and Airton 2016). Similarly, TGNC people who are training to become teachers find themselves in teacher education programs where instructors, staff, practices, policies, and structures are often unprepared to support them (Payne, Airton, and Smith 2022). Teacher education courses typically include little curricular content on transgender peoples' lives and experiences (Gorski et al. 2013, Macgillivray and Jennings 2008), or content that may unhelpfully conflate being transgender with being non-heterosexual (Kean 2020) by broadly addressing the needs of "LGBTQ" students writ large. In fact, the presence and contributions of TGNC TCs themselves may serve as a significant "gender diversity curriculum" for cisgender peers (Bartholomaeus et al. 2017; Murray 2011; Payne, Airton, and Smith 2022). Further, the scant research on teacher education administrators' preparedness to support TGNC TCs suggests that such is greatly lacking in universities (Horn et al. 2010; Shedlock 2013) and the school districts in which TGNC TCs must be placed to complete mandatory practicum or practice teaching placements (Hart and Hart 2018).

Current literature (see Payne, Airton, and Smith 2022 for an exhaustive review) paints a picture of TGNC TCs battling unique stressors and obstacles as they work through program requirements, despite the inclusion of human rights protections for minoritized gender expressions and gender identities across many jurisdictions (Airton et al. 2019; Meyer and Keenan 2018). For example, navigating legal names on student records and misgendering by professors are common experiences (e.g., Silveira 2019). Keenan (2017) introduced the language of drag to describe how cisnormativity and rigid gender binary expectations create specific gender boxes which TGNC TCs are expected to fit into to receive recognition as teachers. Keenan argues that these expectations inhibit TGNC TCs' ability to express their gender in the name of "professionalism." Iskander's (2021) ground-breaking study with nonbinary TCs uncovered gatekeeping behaviours from program staff and instructors via suggestions that disclosing one's self as trans and/or nonbinary would be a detriment to entering the career. Murray's (2011) research followed a trans TC—Jack—who was peer-supported during on-campus coursework, but struggled with the decision to come out to his students on practicum for fear of community and parent backlash; Jack, like many others, ultimately decided that he could "pass" more easily as female and did not come

out. Khayatt and Iskander (2020) further note the lack of TGNC representation among in-service teachers which reinforces messages that the teaching profession is no place for gender diversity. Iskander notes how these experiences ultimately discouraged them from continuing into a career at the K–12 education level despite successfully completing their program and having a history as a successful trans activist in high school (Khayatt and Iskander 2020).

Overall, pre-service TCs, both cisgender and transgender, are increasingly advocating within their programs for education and supports related to gender diversity; however, TGNC TCs experience obstacles precisely related to their gender identities and gender expressions due to pervasive cisnormativity in their programs and the teaching profession, including historically (Blount 2000). Research on teacher education programs and not only TGNC TCs' experiences within them is needed to interrogate and disrupt the cisnormativity shaping policy, procedure and structures. This approach is in line with calls for researchers in trans studies to take cisnormativity as their object of analysis rather than trans people themselves (Cumming-Potvin and Martino 2018; Serano 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The study features a purposeful interweaving of action research (Loewenson et al. 2014) and evaluative inquiry (Paydon and Ensminger 2021; Preskill and Torres 1999). These complementary approaches intentionally bring together multiple voices and people representing varied roles in shared inquiry for the purpose of taking action and working toward positive outcomes. These approaches recognize our position as researchers who are also community members, embedded within the context we are seeking to understand and change. In this section we describe the two approaches and their complementarity before describing data collection.

Action research and evaluative inquiry

Action research (Bell et al. 2008; Levin and Greenwood 2008; Luce-Kapler, Sumara, and Davis 2002) is a systematic process of inquiry that is conducted by, with and for those who are taking a particular action. A primary characteristic of action research is researchers working with others in a particular context to create knowledge (Anderson 2015). Community members whose roles do not typically include research serve as key contributors in understanding challenges and negotiating power dynamics. Levin and Greenwood (2008, 10) assert that an "action researcher works directly with problem owners in collaborative problem identification and knowledge generation processes. By so doing, action researchers necessarily demonstrate, enact, and justify their values and professional skills in front of a collaborating group that includes a 'public' that is capable of judging them." The epistemology underlying action research speaks to the belief that knowledge can be created through lived experience, and that collaborative experiences brought to bear on the research process can foster knowledge in context (Bell et al. 2008; Jacobs 2016; Wells 2015).

Evaluative inquiry (Paydon and Ensminger 2021) focuses on embedded and continuous learning to support change in a complex institutional environment (Patton 2011) and examine complex interventions in sites with diverse populations (Yin 1994).

For the past three decades, evaluative inquiry has been recognized as an approach that brings organizational communities together through dialogue and reflective practice (Argyris 1991; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014; Goh et al. 2004; Preskill and Torres 1999; Schön 1987; Senge 2006). Evaluative inquiry emerged alongside other forms of evaluation that, like action research, emphasise the value of a joint approach in effecting change (e.g., Cousins and Earl 1992; Fetterman et al. 2014; Gamble 2008; Greene 1998; King et al. 2007; O'Sullivan 2012; Patton 2011; Shulha et al. 2016). This literature often pairs evaluative inquiry with organizational learning to create contexts within organizations that foster communication, learning, and growth toward organizational change at multiple levels (Cousins et al. 2014a; Paydon and Ensminger 2021). Intertwining action research with evaluative inquiry enabled our research team to draw on the knowledge, expertise, capacities, and insights of multiple people and roles in our teacher education program.

Data and the participant-collaborator role

Data for this study were both generated and collected through our collaboration with internal participant-collaborators: people whose daily work would be affected by the change process as barriers to TGNC TCs' participation and wellbeing were removed. Data were initially generated through a barrier-mapping exercise in March 2019 to identify where a TGNC TC (prospective or current) would likely experience a gender-related barrier within the B.Ed. program (Wright and Wallis 2019). This exercise enabled the identification of the four change areas, and of participant-collaborators who had student-facing roles in Student Services, the Practicum Office, and the Office of the Associate Dean of Teacher Education. All were invited to take part. Worth noting, however, is that the informed consent process guaranteed that data was collected solely pertaining to a participant collaborator's duties and responsibilities related to their staff role; personal views about gender diversity and personal experiences of the change process were not under study. This is not to say that any participant collaborator necessarily holds views contrary to the aims of the project, but that structures and processes, not individual staff members themselves, were objects of study.

In total, 31 staff completed the LOI process, in addition to the seven members of the core research team (authors). Taken together, our varying roles and backgrounds (e.g., teaching courses or having been a TC in our own program, collaborating on research, and/or experiencing forms of gender-based discrimination) surfaced different vantage points on the barriers faced by TGNC TCs. Notably, current and past research team members included cisgender and transgender young adults who are graduate students and recent graduates of the teacher education program under study, working alongside cisgender and transgender faculty members.

We generated and collected multiple forms of data across the change areas including: meeting minutes; communications; research plans and timelines; observational data/field notes made during the change process; notes from collegial dialogues and experience sharing; ongoing participant-collaborator reflections about change process collected informally; existing and readily available Faculty data on the B.Ed. program; Faculty documents and policies, both staff/instructor-facing and student-facing; and a two-hour focus group facilitated at the end of year one by a facilitator external to the research team. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), we used the

phases of thematic analysis whereby we first familiarized ourselves with the data and generated initial codes through inductive descriptive coding across the various change areas in a systematic fashion. The same codebook was applied across the entire data set. After inductive coding was completed, we reviewed all data by change area to yield an account of the barriers to TGNC TCs in each change area: the first findings shared below. We then identified a meta-finding across all four change areas that emerged from studying the first phase of our change process.

FINDINGS

In this section, we share findings in response to our first research question. These findings are organized by change area. Below, each section: (i) illustrates identified barriers to TGNC TC success and well-being identified *before* the change process; and (ii) describes completed or planned changes *in response* to the identified barriers since the initial barrier mapping process. The section concludes with a meta-finding on the change process—that we were able to make primarily document-based changes—and what this entails for welcoming TGNC TCs in teacher education and the profession more broadly. This meta-finding answers our second research question.

Recruitment, application, and orientation before the change process

The first point of exposure to the B.Ed. program begins during initial recruitment. Every fall, the Faculty staffs a booth at the Ontario Universities Fair, where a representative from Student Services greets potential applicants, answers questions, and circulates program materials. Before the change process, program recruitment and advertising materials lacked any visible signalling that gender diversity is welcome and expected in the program, and, by extension, in the teaching profession. For example, there was no imagery depicting gender nonconforming individuals, no information and signage pertaining to relevant supports and clubs on campus, and no building maps indicated the location of all-gender washrooms.

Recruitment webinars allow for more individualized questions from prospective applicants, and, at any time, potential applicants are welcome to come to the Faculty, where a Student Services representative can offer a tour of the building during which prospective applicants can chat informally with staff about the program and what it is like to be a TC at Queen's. These are many applicants' first interactions with our program. However, before the change process, staff responsible for conducting recruitment webinars (before and after acceptance), staff at the Ontario Universities Fair booth, and staff leading Faculty tours lacked specific training and guidance on gender diversity-inclusive practices.

Interested applicants apply through a third-party website called the Teacher Education Application System (TEAS), administered by the Ontario Ministry of Education. TEAS applications collect legal name and sex/gender information, which is copied to the database from the university's online portal called SOLUS Student Centre (hereafter, SOLUS) upon an admission offer. Offer letters are generated by Student Services using the applicant's TEAS information, meaning that offer letters and initial communications use the student's legal name. Before the change process, the legal

name, title, and "gender"[1] required by the TEAS system were also used by program staff in several orientation processes including publicly, without offering TCs information how that information would be used. However, application information may not reflect a TC's gender identity. TCs can indicate a preferred name and title in SOLUS, but navigating this process was unclear and inaccessible. If accepted, Consecutive B.Ed. students start the 16-month program in May. Undecided successful applicants have an additional opportunity to ask questions during online webinars usually facilitated by the Associate Dean of Teacher Education.

Once an offer of admission is accepted, a professional name tag is created for each TC by Student Services; using a query function in SOLUS, the TC's prefix (or title) is collected for their name tag, as well as their first and last names. The TC's name tag is distributed during orientation, and it is expected that TCs wear their name tags during practicum placements (showing the side with a title) and suggested—but rarely followed through—during on-campus course work (showing the side with their first name). Creating name tags prior to students arriving on campus did not allow for TCs to ensure this information is correct before name tags were printed and distributed.

Orientation consists of three full days of programming: a combination of whole-cohort sessions in the Faculty auditorium, as well as breakout group sessions and optional social activities. A key aspect of orientation is preparing TCs for the first practicum, and the entire incoming TC cohort is instructed on professional conduct, including dress and grooming. Questions are typically not invited from TCs during the sessions, and practicum preparation before the change process offered no relevant information to TGNC TCs. The B.Ed. Handbook, provided at orientation, outlines academic and professional expectations for TCs both inside and outside of the classroom, as well as resources and opportunities available to students on the Queen's campus. This included information about TCs' expected professionalism, conduct, academic integrity, accommodations, and necessary essential skills. The latter portion of the Handbook contained contact information for services and supports available to students but lacked any information about gender expression and gender identity human rights nor related resources and campus, local community supports, or guidance on navigating the expectations of a rigidly gendered profession. We also noted the omission of "gender expression" in sections that itemized protected grounds in human rights legislation (see Airton et al. 2019); this is inaccurate and omits the gender expression discrimination often experienced by cisgender gender nonconforming TCs as well.

Recruitment, application, orientation after the change process

The change process in this area addressed countless messages TGNC TCs receive from the Faculty before and shortly after arriving: that they are unexpected here. Such messages came in documents provided to applicants/TCs and were delivered by program staff and administrators in formal communications and presentations. Necessary document-based changes identified with staff collaborators took place in recruitment

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1   The quotes convey that the information collected here was assumed to be a TC's sex on their legal identification documents—male or female—and not gender: man, woman, nonbinary, gender-fluid, etc.

Figure 1. Text added to the B.Ed. Handbook as part of the change process

materials, prospective student webinars, Faculty tours, and orientation. As a critical document provided to all TCs on their first day of orientation, the Handbook saw multiple changes to include text and language anticipating TGNC TCs' arrival in the Faculty and the teaching profession. Initial edits involved adding "gender expression" to the list of protected grounds which TCs are expected to respect during practicum and generally as members of the teaching profession. A section (see Figure 1) was also added to the handbook that combats the latent cisheteronormativity within expectations for teacher conduct and professionalism (see Mizzi 2016), and a section titled "Gender and Sexuality Diversity Resources" that explicitly acknowledges the presence of TCs who may require them.

Unsurprisingly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow for identified changes to be enacted in webinars and campus tours. University closure forced these activities to change format or be cancelled altogether. The pandemic's extreme disruption prevented us from requesting time and energy from staff participant-collaborators to pursue TGNC TC-specific changes while they were learning to navigate their now fully online workplace. At the time of writing, however, participant-collaborators have changed recruitment texts, initiated changes to imagery and scripts for campus tours and orientation; updated name tag creation and dissemination practices; and integrated resources and events for TGNC (and LGBQ+) TCs into orientation events for the past two years.

Practicum before the change process

In our 16-month B.Ed. program, each TC completes four school practicum placements with increasing responsibility for instruction and assessment. The first practicum (summer one) takes place immediately upon entry to the program in May after mere days of orientation; it is observation-based, with the goal of acclimating TCs to school life in the role of a teacher. Given that often over 350 students must be placed immediately after they arrive on campus, placement begins weeks before arrival and therefore without staff or instructors getting to know incoming TCs and their needs. Sending TCs out to schools so quickly means that they have likely not connected with supportive program faculty or staff as resources should difficulties arise that a Faculty Liaison, School Liaison, or host teacher may be ill-equipped to address;[2] here, the structure presumes that these connections are unnecessary because such difficulties are unlikely, which is not the case for many TGNC TCs.

As above, the limited preparation offered before the May practicum began typically did not address gender expression or gender identity discrimination as barriers to participating in the teaching profession, or how to act in defence of one's human rights if a host teacher or other staff member in a position of power is the locus of discrimination, whether active or passive, intentional or unintentional. However, TCs were counselled at the outset and again throughout the program that any negative communication about their host teacher must be kept confidential. This is because, under section 18.1.b of a Regulation made under the Teaching Profession Act in Ontario, an adverse report about a fellow Ontario Teachers Federation (OTF) member requires a formal letter be sent to the principal, which names the source of the complaint.[3] Although OTF member status is beyond the purview of any program, a corresponding lack of any workplace human rights education may directly disincentivize TGNC TCs from seeking support if they do experience discrimination or harassment from a school staff member during practicum.

Before the change process, a TC's first observational practicum was not informed by any knowledge of them as a person beyond their physical address in their selected school board's catchment area. While some information about a TC (Catholic or public school board preference, Primary/Junior or Intermediate/Senior teaching division, whether they have access to a car) was gathered via a Practicum Registration Form, the form produced TGNCs' presence and gender-related needs as unthinkable. While "preferred name" was solicited, the examples provided on the form ("Bob, Katie, Joe, Liz") conveyed the expectation that this field was to be used only for diminutives

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2   A Faculty Liaison is an instructor hired by Queen's who visits TCs in their placements for the purpose of observing their teaching and offering any needed support. A School Liaison is a school staff member who coordinates all TCs' placements at their school. A host teacher is the classroom teacher who directly supervises a TC and solely evaluates their practicum performance.

3   TCs are Associate Members of the Federation, which is an umbrella organization of all four Ontario teacher unions; while all teachers are nominally OTF members, the Federation does not function like a union and provides no individual support to its members. TCs are not members of unions (e.g., Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario) and as such would not be supported by any union during a harassment investigation, etc.

of conventional gendered names (e.g., Robert, Katherine, Joseph, Elizabeth), not for an altogether different name from one's legal documents, which is the case for many transgender people. "Title" was solicited, but no examples offered, leaving a TGNC TC with no sense of whether gender-neutral titles were welcome or even known about by the form's end users. While there was a Special Circumstances box, the accompanying text clearly discouraged its use by TGNC TCs. Its instructions dictated brevity (i.e., "Be as brief as possible"), and examples mostly related to parenting or marriage: "Please indicate below if there are special needs of which the Practicum Office needs to be aware (i.e. single parent, medical condition, child-care responsibilities, married candidate, etc.)." While a TGNC TC may experience gender dysphoria, we infer most would be highly unlikely to disclose this as a "medical condition" in a box of this kind when it was not clear where information collected via the Practicum Registration Form would go or how it would be used.

Initial practicum placement was also not facilitated by any knowledge of prospective host teachers—upon whose reference a future career in that board may depend—including whether they possess the requisite capacities and disposition to provide a TGNC TC with a practicum experience conducive to their learning. For example, a host teacher may be unable to recognize gender expression- or gender identity-related discrimination as barriers to a TGNC TC's success if—but, more likely, when—these arise. Even if a TGNC TC does not experience harassment from their host teacher—which does take place—having to educate an unprepared host teacher who, for example, consistently misgenders them can stress a pivotal hierarchal relationship critical to a TC's practicum success and career induction.

Intentionally recruiting a suitable host teacher for a TGNC TC was impossible in most instances because a growing number of school boards in Ontario and across Canada allow direct contact about placements only with a central school board office, not with schools or prospective associate teachers. Before the change process, which boards are centrally placing and which are not was withheld from TCs as they made their initial school board selection. This was to avoid introducing confusion into the already complex task of initial placement. As such, many TCs unknowingly selected only centrally placing school boards, meaning that practicum staff knowledge of prior TGNC TCs' successful (or disastrous) school placements could not guide future placements. In boards that are *not* centrally placing, practicum staff also struggled to activate their rich knowledge of partner school climates and host teacher suitability because of an understandable reluctance to maintain a written record of past negative experiences; this emerged as a reputational and relational concern, in that a "red flag" list of schools where past TGNC TCs had experienced discrimination could be thought defamatory or, if accessed via a Freedom of Information and Privacy Act request, damage a crucial placement relationship with a school board. Without these relationships and the practicum placements they provide, a program cannot run. Whether or not a host teacher had any prior experience of—or better yet, success with—supporting a TGNC TC was irrelevant, however; as above, there was no discernible way for a TGNC TC to make themselves known as such to practicum staff in advance.

After selection and still well before arrival, TCs who selected centrally placing boards had their legal names, preferred first names, titles and local addresses shared with a board. Board personnel assigned TCs to schools, conveying TC information di-

rectly to principals and assigned host teachers. TCs were instructed not to contact their host teacher far in advance, but just prior to arriving on the first day, where they are typically greeted by a School Liaison. The School Liaison was instructed in the Practicum Handbook to "provide a tour of the school, provide a placement schedule for each teacher candidate and the Faculty Liaison, discuss expectations and responsibilities with the teacher candidates concerning the practicum, and provide copies of policies and procedures" including teacher "dress code." Being discouraged from contacting the school meant that, upon a TGNC TC's arrival, a typical School Liaison likely had no idea that they were expecting a TC who may require an all-gender washroom, who may not align with the Liaison's or host teacher's expectations for men's or women's physical appearance or gender expression, or who may have a nonbinary title or pronouns. The school may not have all-gender washrooms for staff, which would only become apparent as a barrier (if applicable) once a TGNC TC had arrived on site.

It is uncommon for TCs to have contact with any B.Ed. program instructors or staff during practicum, apart from the Faculty Liaison. During the initial May observational practicum and in all three subsequent practicum placements, a Faculty Liaison visited and supported TCs, and checked in with the School Liaison and host teacher in support of each TC's progress. While a Faculty Liaison can serve as a reference when a TC enters the teacher job market, the host teacher is solely responsible for assessing practicum performance, and their letter of reference is a standard enclosure in future job applications. Its absence is noticeable and noticed by potential employers.

Before the change process, the second, third, and fourth school practicums (fall, winter, and summer two) typically took place in a different school from summer one and involved teaching as opposed to observing and assisting. TCs completed a Background Form to assist boards and schools with locating suitable placements for their remaining practicums. One's response to each question below could be up 1,500 characters long (including spaces):

1. What special strengths, interests/talents (e.g., athletics, arts, travel, computers, etc.), and experiences will you bring to the students and staff in your associate school?
2. Academic background (not marks): (Do not list all university courses, only those supporting your subjects.)

While the Background Form may have offered the opportunity for a TC to signal identities and community memberships that disrupt the profession's latent expectations (e.g., that teachers are white, straight, cisgender, gender-conforming, non-disabled, a speaker of English with a "local" accent, etc.), the Form's examples only invited subject-area related knowledge and skills. Further, the Form was only sent if a TC would be at a new school (i.e., not the summer one school); in other words, TCs were not re-asked if anything had changed such that they may require a new Background Form, and it was unclear how and when information within it could be changed prior to subsequent placements. For TGNC TCs, key information like their names, pronouns, and gendered titles may have changed in the meantime, but this possibility was systematically erased.

Practicum after the change process

With staff collaborators, we made changes that would hopefully signal the Practicum Office's gender diversity competency and openness to hearing from TGNC TCs about their needs very early on. Our research team conducted a close reading of the Practicum Handbook, Practicum Registration Form, and Background Form and (1) made changes that would embed TC gender diversity as an expectation and (2) identified places where TGNC TCs could be invited to approach Practicum Office staff to request a placement that considered their unique barriers. For example, "Mx." was added as a title option, the binary preferred name examples were deleted, and the "Special Circumstances" instructions on the Registration Form were updated to include the following: "Candidates who may face barriers related to their gender identity and/or gender expression may also use this space to request consideration." On the Background Form, the invitation to share experiences was edited to indicate that "personal, professional, or community-based" experiences were welcome.

Changes made to the Practicum Handbook (see Figure 2) were intended to address the issue of School Liaisons being unprepared to support and altogether not expecting TGNC TCs. Text (italicized in Figure 2) was added to the Handbook in two places (TC responsibilities and School Liaison responsibilities). In addition to advising School Liaisons on how common norms of professionalism may constitute illegal discrimination, this text also offers TCs a clear indication of what they should experience in a placement where gender identity and gender expression discrimination are mitigated at the outset. This is critical in summer one, given that there is no time to build supportive relationships with program instructors and staff before arriving at their practicum school. Our intention prior to the onset of COVID-19 was to work with the Practicum Office to explicitly 'signpost' these changes to those receiving the Handbook, encouraging School Liaisons to contact the office with questions or concerns. The insertions, we reasoned, could be used to perhaps prevent a negative situation for a TGNC TC in advance (e.g., only learning that the host school does not have an all-gender washroom once a nonbinary TC has already arrived, or that the school's climate is presently or particularly hostile and unsafe for transgender people).

Practicum staff members carry and use knowledge of schools where TGNC TCs have experienced unliveable placements, including to the extent of requiring "covert extrication": removal from a placement in such a way as to not alert the host teacher or school administrators of the reasons, as this could trigger a formal adverse reporting process which would identify the TC as the source of an accusation. Extrication has been accomplished by and with practicum staff support so as to prevent further harm to a TGNC TC as well as their future employment prospects in that school board. While a "red flag" list was not possible, we initiated a "green flag" list of trans-competent host teachers and schools friendly to gender diversity. Given that targeted placement is only possible in boards that are not centrally placing, and that our local public school board was not centrally placing,[4] the first author and practicum staff pooled their networks and memories to populate a list of green-flagged teachers and schools. This was created in case a TGNC TC "picked up what we were putting down" with our docu-

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4   At the time of publication, the board has followed most other Ontario school boards into some form of centralized placement. The work of managing this new barrier is ongoing.

Roles & Responsibilities of School Liaisons

Orientation

- distribute the candidates' background information forms to the appropriate Associate Teachers
- welcome Teacher Candidates and introduce them to the school community
- Consult with the Teacher Candidate about the name, title (e.g., Ms., Mr., Mx.) and pronouns (e.g., she, he, they) to be used when they are in the school, including preferred first name for colleagues' use, and last name with title to be used with students. It is best to ask this of the TC in person regardless of the information that you may have received in advance.
- introduce the Teacher Candidate to the school community, using all of the above information (name, title, pronouns)
- provide a tour of the school; show Teacher Candidates the locations of all washrooms in the school, including but those accessible to staff as well as students; be sure to include all-gender washrooms.
- provide a placement schedule for each Teacher Candidate and the Faculty Liaison
- discuss expectations and responsibilities with the Teacher Candidates concerning the practicum
- provide copies of policies and procedures (first aid and emergencies; fire drills; harassment, equity, curriculum documents; *dress code; use of materials)

In keeping with the Ontario Human Rights Code, our program welcomes and supports Teacher Candidates who are transgender, and who are gender non-conforming. If your school's staff dress code contains different expectations for staff members on the basis of gender, it may not apply to a Teacher Candidate. Teacher Candidates understand that they are expected to dress/groom in a way that does not inhibit them from carrying out their duties during school hours; if a Teacher Candidate requires feedback about professional dress and grooming, please focus feedback on practical considerations.

Figure 2. Text added to and edited in the Practicum Handbook during the change process

ment-based changes and contacted the Practicum Office before completing the Practicum Registration Form, or learned after summer one that it is possible in our Faculty to access a more supportive process for subsequent placements once we have had time to get to know TCs better. Furthermore, after learning more about the barriers facing TGNC TCs by participating in the action research process, practicum staff have kept an open line of communication with the first author—a transgender professor—so that they can advise on placement as needed; we note, however, that this is not a structural or necessarily sustainable solution.

Career planning before the change process

Like all teacher education programs, ours assists TCs with the process of finding employment after graduation. Career planning services typically begin with course presentations in which Academic and Career Advisors talk about available supports and highlight upcoming career-related events. These include optional workshops throughout the year on topics such as job search strategies, teaching in independent and international schools, teaching-adjacent careers, and supply or substitute teaching.

Before the change process, TGNC TC-specific concerns such as name discrepancies on documents, disclosure of one's gender identity or transgender status in the hiring process, and how to navigate gender expression in a historically conservative profession were not addressed at any time within the Faculty's career programming. While all TCs were given the option of making an appointment with an Advisor for one-on-one support with career planning, staff participant-collaborators shared that they felt unprepared to support TGNC TCs with processes such as interviewing, resume development, and cover letter writing.

Until 2021, Student Services hosted two career-related events each year: Teachers' Overseas Recruiting Fair (TORF) and Options Career Fair. TORF was an on-site fair held at the Faculty of Education in January that brought together international school recruiters and locals interested in teaching internationally, including TCs and in-service teachers. In some countries represented at TORF, laws enable the arrest of people suspected of being queer or transgender, and in some cases for being gender nonconforming. Before the change process, international school recruiters were not required to disclose information related to local laws that may criminalize and endanger TGNC and/or 2SLGBQ+ staff members, if hired. TGNC TCs had to conduct their own research leading to decisions that may impact their future safety or wellbeing. Given that interviewing actively took place at TORF, time available for this research was minimal. Options Career Fair (Options), the second career-related event, largely brought in school boards from Canadian provinces to host booths and give presentations. Much like TORF, interviewing and on-site hiring could occur. The name tags and registration materials used at both TORF and Options did not invite pronouns or preferred first names. This created a complicated relationship been employers and TGNC TCs who may use a name other than the one printed on their name tag and wish to be interviewed on site.

In addition to teaching internationally or at out-of-province public secular school boards, TCs have the option of teaching in publicly funded Ontario Catholic schools. TGNC TCs so interested have questions about working for Catholic school boards, including considerations for applying therein given that adherence to Catholic doctrine in one's conduct is named in board employment contracts (Callaghan 2018; Ruiz and Bleasdale 2022). Prior to the change process, staff participant-collaborators reported feeling unprepared to answer questions and support TGNC TCs who wished to explore teaching in Catholic schools. Taken together, these barriers meant that Faculty programming and supports conveyed a message that TGNC TCs were absent from the program because basic issues pertaining to their career induction were unknown and unaddressed.

Career planning after the change process

As part of the change process, the first author developed a mini-professional development series for Advisors. Five sessions were planned from March to May 2020, spanning all barriers highlighted above; the plan included topics and advanced reading or viewing materials to be debriefed with the first author. The series was however cancelled to due fatigue and adaptation-related workloads during the early COVID-19 pandemic. Both Advisors who initially collaborated would go on to leave their positions during the pandemic, with four new Advisors onboarded by Fall 2021; all but one did not participate in the original barrier mapping process and until June 2023 had no familiarity with our project.

The change process led to the addition of two items to the questionnaire completed by international school recruiters at TORF:

- "The jurisdiction in which our school (etc.) is located and/or in which a successful TORF attendee would be teaching has enacted laws that criminalize same-sex sexual activity, that require persons to use bathrooms or other gendered facilities that correspond with their assigned sex at birth (as op-

posed to their gender identity or legally-changed sex on a Canadian or other birth certificate), and/or that otherwise create a hostile legal environment for LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer) people. Select one: Yes, No, I don't know.

- If you answered 'Yes' or 'I don't know' to the above question, can you suggest a website or other resource for prospective candidates to access in order to inform their decision-making process?"

Responses were made available to any interested TC attendees, providing TGNC TCs and Advisors with the requisite information to make decisions, or offer advice, respectively. The assumption that a TC or teacher attending TORF is necessarily cisgender and heterosexual was disrupted by the necessity of providing this information. Similarly, TORF name tags attendees included optional pronoun spaces. Regardless of these efforts, TORF is no longer offered by the Faculty of Education as of 2022 for reasons unrelated to the topic of this article. The changes made with staff collaborators may endure as learnings for other schools that partner with schools in other countries, and for all staff members who worked on TORF and who remain at the Faculty.

Certification and graduation before the change process

Four months before the end of the program, TCs apply to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). Completing any application that involves the collection of legal name(s), common names, and gender markers poses unique barriers for TGNC TCs. Indeed, a majority of TGNC people do not report a linear gender transition (Scheim and Bauer 2015) such that, at the time of their applications to the OCT and to graduate from Queen's, many TGNC TCs may not be ready to nor feel safe publicly disclosing their chosen first name (if applicable) and/or their gender identity.

TCs are first made aware of the certification process during an annual presentation from an OCT representative given to over 400 TCs in an auditorium. The presentation covers a variety of OCT-related matters (e.g., role of the OCT, ethical standards, and professional misconduct) but only briefly outlines the OCT application: one presentation slide providing tips such as "don't wait," "declare all your past and present names," and "pay your fees." Typically, TCs begin to complete their OCT applications following this OCT presentation.

Before the change process, TGNC TCs received no guidance or invitation to learn more about how their own circumstances might affect certification. Many filled out the OCT application form using a legal name that they no longer use in their daily life. Staff did not know whether the information a TC provided upon application could be changed and were unprepared to answer such questions. Few (34%) TGNC people in Ontario have completed a legal name change given the cost and barriers associated with this process (Scheim and Bauer 2015), meaning that TGNC TCs who want to change their legal name may not have had the opportunity to do so by the time they apply to the OCT or apply to graduate. This means that diploma, transcript, Convocation program, and OCT certification documents as well as the public searchable record of all OCT-certified teachers may all contain a TC's deadname, outing them as transgender.

The application to graduate begins after TCs apply to be certified by the OCT. A TC's legal name appears on their diploma, on their transcript, and in the convocation

program. To change the name on official documents, TCs must submit a name change form with supporting information by an early deadline. Convocation typically takes place in a location where there are no all-gender washrooms, and information about facilities in nearby buildings was not provided to attendees of the convocation before the change process, nor were any in-building washrooms designated all-gender for the day. During the convocation ceremony, names are read out, one at a time, from a card that each graduand passes to the reader. The name is written by the graduand along with a phonetic pronunciation, if desired.

Certification and graduation after the change process

Changes in this area resulting from our research largely pertained to locating and sharing information with TGNC TCs. We created a TGNC TCs Frequently Asked Questions resource that has now been disseminated as a model to teacher education programs across Canada, many of which report creating their own. The FAQ clarifies exactly when and how a TC's gender-related information is collected, used, and shared centrally by the University, the Faculty of Education, and the OCT. Additional sections clarify how a TGNC TC may seek support for gender identity and/or gender expression discrimination or harassment at any point in their B.Ed., whether in the Faculty or during practicum, whether they can use a gender-neutral title such as Mx. or other options, and how to manage gendered dress and grooming expectations. It was not possible to source all answers from public websites; some required staff participant-collaborators writing to contacts within the OCT, for example. Sourcing definitive answers required a level of labour and insider knowledge which illustrated how inaccessible this process can be for TCs.

META-FINDING: COPING WITH BUT NOT CHANGING STRUCTURES

This section shares a meta-finding about our change process which answers our second research question: what does the process of identifying and removing these barriers reveal about making *proactive* gender diversity-inclusive changes in teacher education as it is currently organized? The meta-finding is as follows: *most of the changes we were able to make are document-based*, whether editing existing documents or creating new ones. We edited documents to make information more transparent and easier to find for TGNC TCs (e.g., the B.Ed. Handbook provided during orientation, the Practicum Handbook, etc.), and we changed documents so that TGNC TCs can indicate a need for specialized supports (e.g., the Practicum Registration Form) or share relevant information with the program (e.g., preferred names, pronouns). We also edited documents with non-TC users in mind, such as the Associate Teacher and School Liaison sections in the Practicum Handbook, and the TORF overseas school registration form. Lastly, we created documents (e.g., the TGNC TC Frequently Asked Questions document) to collect information TGNC TCs require but that is not generally offered via ordinary program communications.

Document-based changes are ways to cope with structural barriers in teacher education, but do not change cisnormative structures that simply do not imagine a TC could be TGNC. For example, during recruitment, application, and orientation before the change process, information relevant to TGNC TCs was not provided. Students

are offered many opportunities to ask questions during recruitment fairs, webinars, Faculty tours, and at orientation; in theory, this provides opportunities for prospective and newly admitted TGNC TCs to raise specialized concerns. However, the public setting would require that TGNC people asking such questions "out" themselves to others whom they do not yet know. As questions are not typically encouraged during orientation presentations conveying key information about "professional conduct," teacher dress and grooming, and being careful about sharing "private" information with students on practicum the following week, we doubt that TGNC TCs would avail themselves of a question period even if it were offered. If they did, a speaker or facilitator may not have answers to TGNC TCs' questions, producing both question and questioner as unexpected and therefore not belonging in teacher education. After all, if TGNC people were expected in the teaching profession, these answers would be known.

Document-based changes may enable TGNC-relevant information to be elicited and provided but are merely a coping mechanism intended to make teacher education structures slightly less harmful to a population hitherto unimaginable within it: less harmful because they prevent a TGNC TC from having to publicly or privately out themself, and because they show a TGNC TC they are expected. For example, changes to the Practicum Registration Form endeavour to signal to TGNC TCs that they can share information that may lead to a specialized placement: where there is capacity to support an out or apparent TGNC person learning to teach. The TGNC TC FAQ lets TCs know where to seek support if they experience gender identity- or gender expression-based discrimination on practicum, and the B.Ed. Handbook distributed at orientation echoes this information. However, these changes are necessary because our program's length—a mere sixteen months—requires that TCs must be placed in schools before they arrive on campus, and they go out to practicum within mere days of arriving.

Placements must be organized long before TCs form relationships with staff and instructors through which needs can surface and resources can activate. Furthermore, an increasing number of Ontario school boards—as well as other large urban boards across Canada—are enacting centralized placement policies that prevent program staff or instructors from matching TCs to particular schools and host teachers. Centralized placement combines with program length and sequence to produce an expectation that any TC can be 'slotted in' to any school. However, schools remain distinctively hostile spaces for many TGNC people who are at a high and virtually predictable risk of discrimination in schools. Placement respecting this risk is conceivably a TGNC TC's human right in the province of Ontario due to gender identity and gender expression anti-discrimination protections but requires intentional pairing of TCs with schools and host teachers. Structurally, this is impossible in most cases. And so, instead of making structural changes (e.g., to our program's length or sequence, to how TGNC TCs are placed in schools, etc.), we largely changed documents.

Overall, document-based changes are supportive but normalize coping with structures that assume all TCs are cisgender and gender-conforming. That said, working on document-based changes alongside the research team grew staff participant-collaborators' understanding of gender diversity and related barriers in teacher education, and fostered strong relationships. Since our initial change process, participant-collaborators have undertaken changes or reached out to us for assistance with a

gender diversity-specific issue because they are now aware of barriers faced by TGNC TCs and committed to proactively mitigating them as much as possible. However, of the initial group of staff participant-collaborators (*N*=18) who participated in the professional development and timeline exercise that launched the action research project in 2018, by September 2022 three-quarters had left the Faculty or changed roles. The COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated this attrition, with a wave of early retirements or increased stressors that made some roles untenable for staff due to personal factors and responsibilities. The change process depends on staff taking initiative, and the research team being able to identify staff who are prepared to support TGNC TCs because they had participated in this project.

Dependence on particular staff further reveals our work to be coping with but not changing structures that systematically discriminate against TGNC TCs and likely TCs from other groups under-represented in the profession. COVID-19 not only exacerbated staff attrition but brought our project to an absolute standstill given that our changes are not structural but depend on staff initiative. As an example, a structural barrier is the OCT collecting gender information from applicants; if this barrier were removed, staff would not need to know how to support a TGNC TC who has questions about that process. In turn, our research team would not need to on-board successive new staff members to ensure that they know this information and can "walk beside" a TGNC TC. As with so many other structural barriers, because it exists, we cope by mitigating the message it sends: that TGNC TCs are out of place in a profession that still does not expect them.

CONCLUSION

We conclude with recommendations. In light of our meta-finding, our recommendations below for teacher education programs are few because they engage larger structural issues with which we and our participant-collaborators daily cope as we labour to prevent foreseeable harm to TGNC TCs preparing to join a profession that remains cisnormative. Therefore, our first recommendation is not for individual programs, but for the teacher education "systems": that program administrators—deans, associate deans, directors, etc.—across programs take action together to change structures and processes established by school boards, certification and oversight bodies, education ministries or departments and any other entities that have—however inadvertently—created barriers to TGNC TCs.

Our first program-level recommendation involves program sequence and addresses the many barriers resulting from having to assign TGNC TCs to schools for first practicum long before they arrive on campus with few days on site for orientation. A substantial coursework block on campus at the start of a program would combat the cisnormative assumption that TCs require little support prior to entering high-stakes situations in sites where TGNC people face considerable discrimination and harassment: K–12 schools. A second recommendation to programs is that TGNC TCs are placed in schools with the maximum degree of intentionality born of the expectation, at this time, that they will face gender identity and/or gender expression discrimination or even harassment in schools. Even in programs where many partner school boards are centrally placing, there exist creative possibilities for mitigating this

entirely foreseeable harm. Lastly, our final recommendation to programs is that each complete a barrier mapping exercise comparable to that which began our own action research project. In addition to surfacing unique barriers in our facilities, bespoke online systems and documents, participation greatly enhanced staff participant-collaborators' capacities and confidence in relation to supporting TGNC TCs. This is a worthy and enduring outcome of the change process.

In sharing our findings, we hope that other teacher education programs within and beyond Canada are better supported in undertaking change processes of their own. While we remain encouraged by what we have achieved with participant-collaborators, we offer a caution. The aspects of a teacher education program that might be most transparently 'about' gender diversity, gender identity, gender expression or transgender lives and issues may not contain the most pressing barriers to TGNC TCs' well-being. Rather, how long a program takes, how rigid its structure, or the timing of its practicum placements require foundational reconsideration, so that welcoming TGNC people into this profession is not solely enabled by the laudable yet exhaustible efforts of transgender people and willing cisgender collaborators working within a program. We must all act from the knowledge that "the harm of teacher education for transgender and/or gender nonconforming candidates is so endemic that it is barely apparent as harm, because it is so much a part of 'just what happens' when one is learning to teach" (Airton and Martin 2022, 297).

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