

Teaching pronoun use in gender-neutral classrooms: An autoethnographic needs analysis

Terry Tuttle | PanSIG Nagano | July 9, 2022

Overview and Content Considerations



- Autoethnography introduction
- My experiences: woman, man, student, teacher
- Activity ideas & group discussion

Will contain: Discussions of transphobia/transmisia, dysphoria, prejudice

Why gender?

Unique among individual differences because:

- No marked default state
- Unavoidable
- Relevant to students' daily lives
(Grote, 2020)

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a yellow pencil, poised to write on a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook is open, showing lined pages. A semi-transparent purple rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the hand and the text box.

Autoethnography

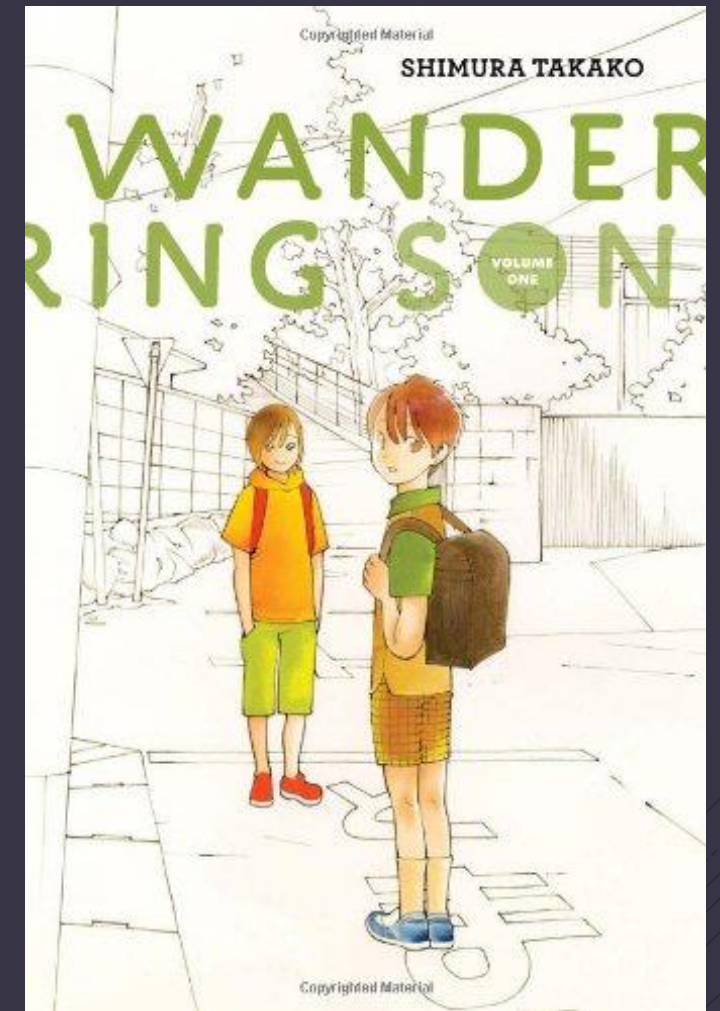
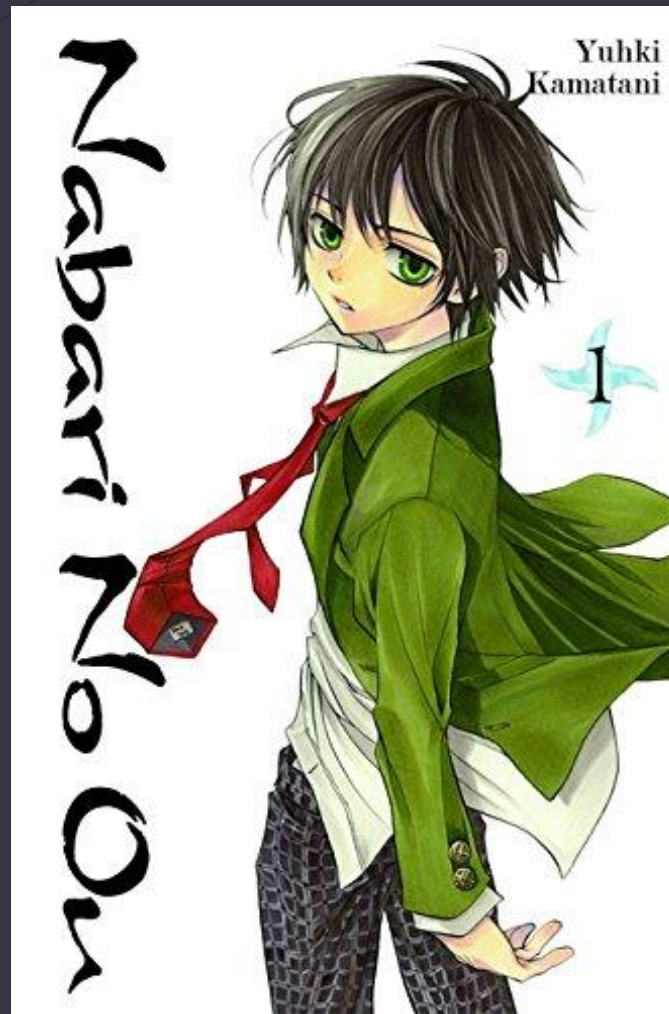
An account that “[uses] personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience”
— Ellis et al., 2011

High School

- Closeted (not openly trans)
- Little (in-person) community
- Little discussion of gender in language instruction
- No chance to change pronouns (in any language)



Metroethnic
subcultures:
Manga & anime
as introduction to
queer identities



University Japanese Class



University policy

- No support for "unofficial" name change
- Students emailed teachers before class to address name/pronoun "preferences"



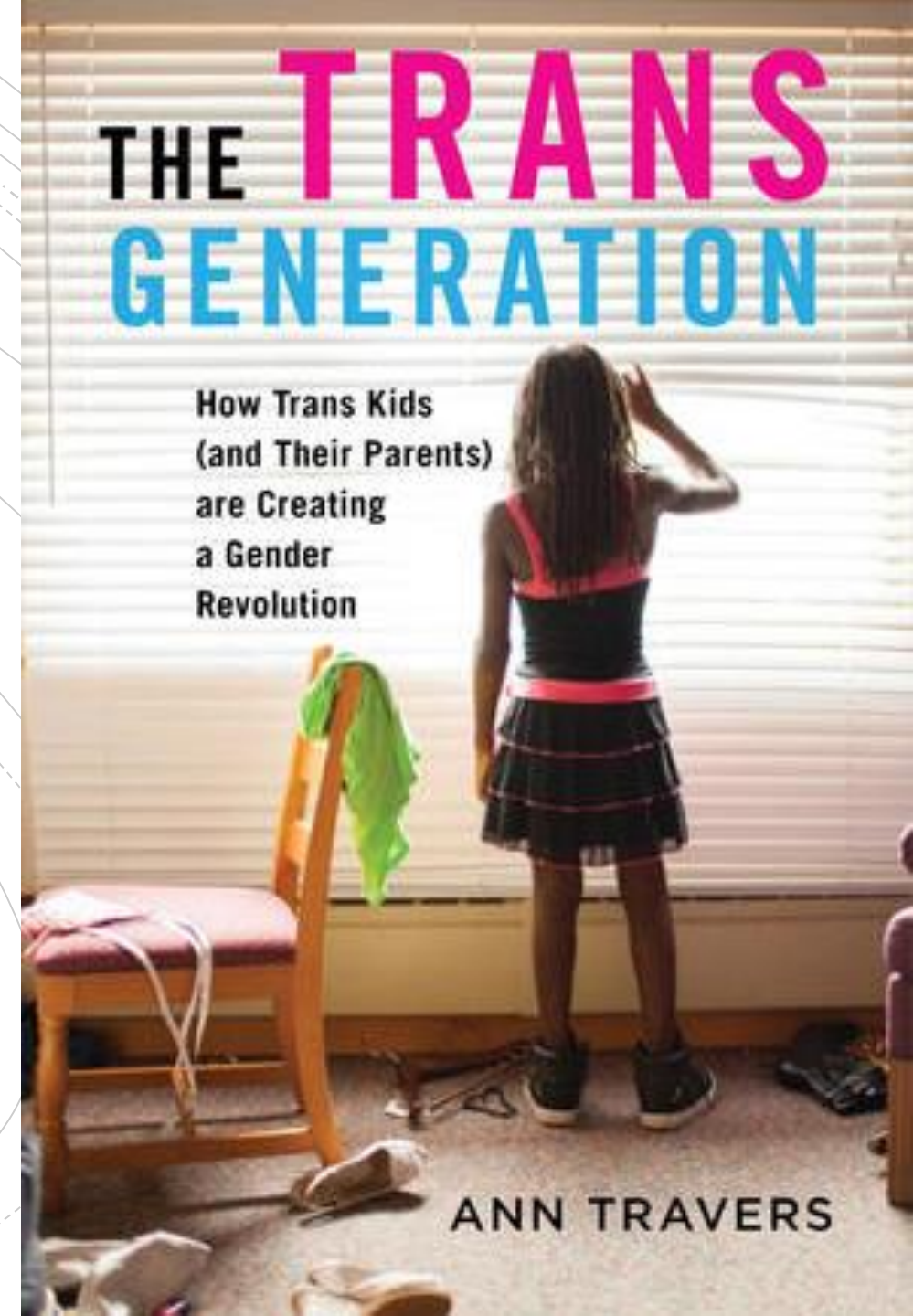
ALT status: Interpersonal & professional precarity

- Closeted (but gender unquestioned)
- Uncertainty about response to disclosure
- As an English “expert,” can I simply teach *my* norms?



Themes

- Precarity (Travers, 2018) and shifting needs
- Learning about subculture, self through the lens of other cultures
- Tension between self-disclosure and safety, privacy





Themes

- **Ambiguity and Precarity vs. Certainty**
 - Ambiguity of perception
 - Ambiguity of response
 - Fluid identities
- **Self-Expression vs. Privacy**
- **Shifting “norms”**

A purple speech bubble graphic with a white border and a small tail pointing downwards. It is positioned on the left side of the slide, overlapping a background of faint, concentric circles.

Thoughts on Teaching Policies



Commit to developing your awareness of marginalized identities

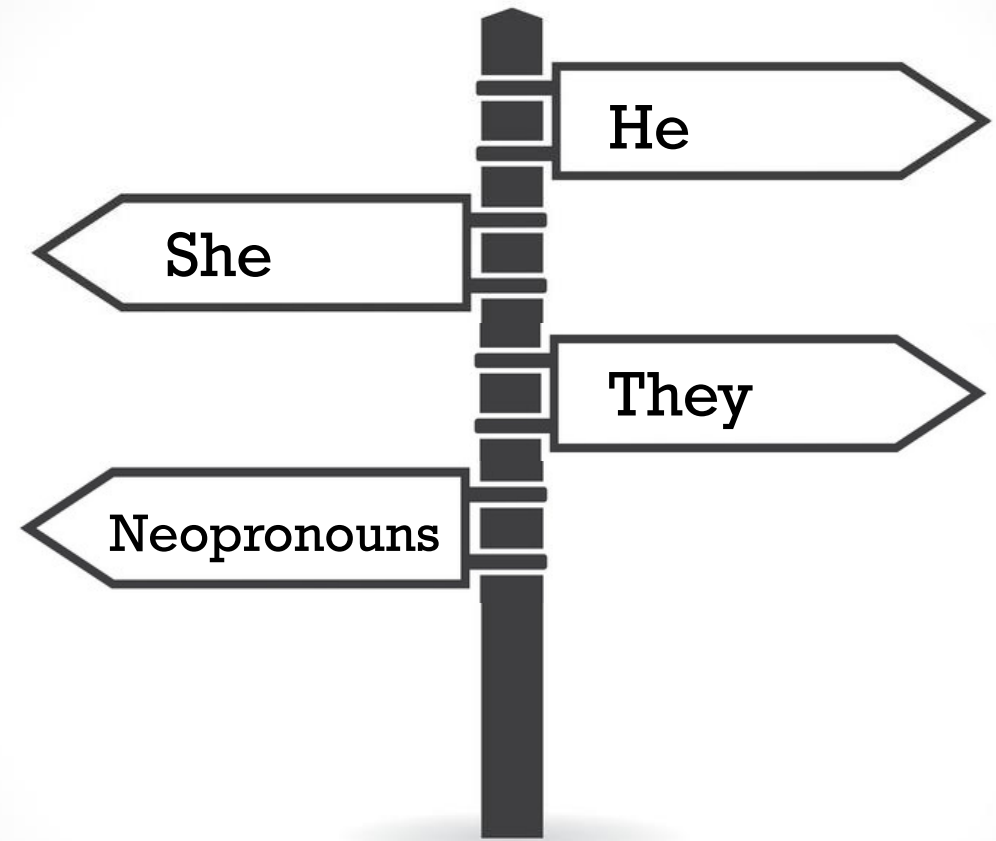
- This can (and needs to) be a gradual and painless process
- Follow people on social media who talk about their experiences
- Ideas for local information: university groups, Pride parades

- Implicit learning of inclusive language
- Model use of “they,” gender-neutral language when appropriate
- Also model recovery from mistakes as casual and low-stress
- “Let me look that up and get back to you”

Encourage
(and model)
incremental
changes &
imperfection

Pronoun Signposting: Pros and Cons

- Part of a gender-friendly classroom (Airton, 2019)
- May pressure students to “out” and/or misgender themselves
- Pronouns can be situational in English too!



The background features a series of concentric circles in light gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a ripple effect. A large purple speech bubble is centered on the page, containing the text "Ideas for Activities".

Ideas for Activities

The background of the slide features several thin, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a modern, abstract design.

Model conversation negotiating pronouns

- Include a model conversation where one person politely corrects a person on their pronoun use for a third (not present) party
 - Less direct/confrontational
 - Realistic, and pragmatically ideal
 - Raises awareness for conversations around the topic

Using Realia:

- Celebrities
- Social media bios
- Discussion of meaning of “pronoun,” other terms in discourse (pragmatic awareness-raising)



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@TheElliotPage

He/They

linktr.ee/theressomethin...  Joined February 2011

735 Following 1.9M Followers



Human Library

- “Check out” people and listen to their stories and experiences
- Organize for a school/group with visiting speakers
- Ask students to choose an “area of expertise” and hold interviews



Photo by [Antenna](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Q&A and Discussion

Thank you for coming today.

Sources and Resources:

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