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Abstract
Storying family experiences provides a means to explore and support leader identity development. The idea of recalling and reflecting on stories about and from families can surface how orientations to lead are learned early on in life. We report on students' narratives generated during a postgraduate early childhood education leadership course to understand the significance of family storytelling in leader identity development and the awakenings this process encouraged for those involved. Using McCain and Matkin's (2019) concept of retrospective storytelling, narrative inquiry underpinned our analysis of students' family-oriented stories and the identification of two themes regarding their orientation to leadership: the influence of families' hardships, work ethic and selfless actions; and the expectations associated with being the first-born in the family and the assumed responsibilities. Our findings affirm the transformative potential of selecting, telling, and reflecting on family stories to both understand the roots of leadership motivations and develop leader identities. Implications include promoting a narrative-based pedagogy for leadership development that centres on postgraduate students' retrospective storying of family experiences.

Keywords: *Storying family experiences, leader identity, leadership development, narrative*

Introduction

Reflecting on family experiences, legacy stories, and teachings from family elders can help us to understand ourselves as leaders and how leadership potential develops early on in life. Not only are our motivations and predispositions towards leadership informed by our early formative experiences, but our families and childhoods often provide the first experiences that inform our leadership aspirations (Sinclair, 2007). This "going back" (p. 55) may enable us to identify early influences on our predispositions towards leadership and to surface, challenge, or change any unarticulated assumptions regarding our leadership practice and roles. For some cultural communities, looking back in this way and telling stories is a natural way of learning to lead in the present, while for others, it offers a new way of making sense of leader identity and its development.

There is consensus among researchers about the need for leaders to be prepared for their responsibilities, but little consensus regarding how and when leadership should be taught (Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016). We argue that storying family experiences in higher education offers new leaders a potentially transformative tool for leader identity development. We define

"storying family experiences" as the sharing and telling of familial experiences, both past and present, through personal narratives that individuals can draw meaning from. Our argument is informed by Waniganayake's (2014) critique of the lack of leadership professional development courses for early childhood education (ECE) teachers alongside Waniganayake and Stipanovic's (2016) view of postgraduate-level study as a resource for re-imagining leadership preparation to advance leadership in the ECE sector. For this to occur, individuals need opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs, values, and the implications for their future role as leaders. Narratives based on storying family experiences can provide such opportunities.

In this paper, we review literature on storytelling in families and communities, storytelling to support leadership development, and leader identity. Inspired by McCain and Matkin's (2019) framework of retrospective storytelling, we then describe the narrative inquiry methodology we employed as university lecturers and leadership researchers to analyse postgraduate students' leadership narratives, before presenting two main findings. Following this, we describe the significance of the students' stories for their leader identity development using a framework of surfacing, awakening, and transformation. Finally, we conclude with implications for teaching educational leadership in higher education. The inquiry question guiding our paper is: *What is the significance of storying family experiences as a tool for leader identity development?*

Storytelling in families and communities

Humans lead storied lives. This quality makes people natural storytellers who can be characters in their own stories to experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The stories people tell and retell hold cultural significance as they "carry values, convey morals, describe solutions to dilemmas, and shape the patchwork of culture" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 81).

Family stories are often told to socialise and communicate a set of expectations about a family's norms, values, and practices, and the world, while influencing how members understand their leader identity (McCain & Matkin, 2019). Indeed, family is one of the first places where members get a sense of who they are, including by gleaning meaning from both positive and negative family experiences (Thompson et al., 2009). For many cultural communities, oral histories are treasured and passed on to the next generation to be preserved and maintained. This intergenerational transmission of legacy stories—stories that are told, re-told, and accumulate over time, enable family members to gain a sense of their own identities and family culture (Thompson et al., 2009).

Families also tell stories to generate shared understandings about intergenerational experiences and history, including in relation to complexity and change (Armstrong, 2021). This provides one way for younger generations to expect and navigate change. Stories in Indigenous communities commonly point to and honour family elders as leaders (Fraser, 2012). Elders are considered vital to how families and communities work together and how decisions are made for

the good of the group. Elders also guide and inform through their stories and experiences with a sense of knowing that these teachings will guide others and foster kinship ties with the next generation. Indigenous scholar, Young Leon (2012) argued that leadership develops from listening to and learning from the cultural teachings of the elders and ancestors, the gifts they leave with the community, and the responsibilities they hand to family and community members. Hence, elders' stories hold power as they convey their unique worldview and skills of cultural leadership to the family and future generations (Fraser, 2012).

The oral sharing of sayings, proverbial expressions, stories, and collective memories provides a means for learning about leadership in many cultural communities. For example, Māori Indigenous communities in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) draw meaning from creative expressions such as: "Te tohu o te rangatira, he manaaki. The sign of a chief is generosity" (Glover, 2013, p. 86). For Glover, this expression evokes an image of leaders looking out for others, protecting, nurturing them, and knowing when to step up and stand back. It also reflects a Māori view of respecting others as potential leaders, including those within their own homes (Glover, 2013). Similarly, Pacific communities in NZ, those with ancestral ties to their Pacific Island homelands, draw meaning from leadership sayings that value service to others. For example, one Samoan proverb: "O le ala i le pule o le tautua—the pathway to leadership is through service" conveys that leadership from a Samoan perspective is learned through service (*tautua*) to the family and community, not by serving one's own interests. Samoan children are taught that service is critical to family life and, as they grow older, they learn that one must serve the family and related members *(aiga)* before becoming a leader or village chief *(matai)* (Taleni et al., 2018).

Storytelling to support leadership development

Stories not only shape us; they help us to make sense of our leadership and the influence we may have on others (Armstrong, 2021). Stories provide a tool to enhance self-awareness as a leader, while resonating with and informing others (Armstrong, 2021). In ECE in NZ, storytelling as a narrative method is a common approach to assessing children's learning (Carr, 2001). Yet, the use of storytelling for leadership development features more in the organisational literature than in the educational literature, suggesting it has potential for greater utilisation in education, including ECE.

The potential of storytelling to support leadership development is evident in the organisational literature. For example, Auvinen et al. (2012) found that leaders could use storytelling with their organisation members to motivate, inspire, resolve conflict, influence other leaders, discover a focus, and establish trust. The leaders' intentional use of storytelling supported their leadership development by breaking down barriers with colleagues and supporting their interactions. Similarly, Snyder et al. (2017) found that storytelling assisted organisation leaders to build a values-based culture of innovation and sustainability by making complex situations and ideas accessible to all,

making values and principles embedded in a culture more visible, and providing a platform for understanding different perspectives. Although these ideas derive from outside of education, we contend that storytelling provides a powerful tool for preparing new leaders in education and ECE.

Leader identity

Storytelling can inform one's developing leader identity (Armstrong, 2021). Identity is a much debated and multi-faceted concept. For our purposes, we adopt Gee's (2018) definition of identity as "a way of being in the world connected to special ways of doing and knowing" (p. 76). Therefore, leader identities provide an organising framework for how leaders, or those undertaking leadership activity, understand their own ways-of-being, doing and knowing in relation to their work, relationships, commitments, and priorities. Understanding how leader identities are formed and change over time has informed recent scholarship seeking to make sense of and support leadership development (McCain & Matkin, 2019; Priest & Seemiller, 2018). These studies focused on the process of becoming a leader by understanding identity development as an ongoing, relational, and social process.

Leader identities are not fixed, related to defined characteristics or behaviours, nor biologically determined (Cooper, 2020). Rather, they are formed in a reciprocal relationship between the person's "activities, norms, values and standards" or their ways of knowing, being and doing, and relevant professional communities (Gee, 2018, p. 74), their past and present experiences, and the sense they make of these. These experiences include early leadership experiences and the socialisation processes that occur within families (McCain & Matkin, 2019; Sinclair, 2007). Priest and Seemilller (2018) described leader identity development as "a dynamic process of interpretation and reinterpretation of experience" (p. 94). In addition to experience, Cooper (2020) pointed to the place of reflective activity and the role of emotion and affect in how identities are shaped, surmising that identity development is an evolving process influenced by internal and external factors. As educational leadership is about people and relationships, then emotion becomes an important factor in understanding leadership and what it means to be a leader in a particular social context (Crawford, 2011). These perspectives on leader identity highlight its "locally occasioned, fluid and ever-changing nature" (de Fina et al., 2006, p. 3) and suggest that a leader identity is not something that someone has but is something that someone does repeatedly and becomes continually.

Scholars researching lifespan development of leadership contend that leader identity development begins in childhood (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) or is specifically tied to the way young people are parented (Liu et al., 2019). Liu et al.'s focus on Chinese adolescents highlighted that being perceived as a leader at any time of life may be an initial step on the journey towards developing a leader identity. Other scholars proposed that early experiences with family potentially foster the drive to take on leadership responsibilities later in life. For example, Hyvärinen and Uusiautti

(2014) analysed the narratives of 10 Finnish female leaders to explore how their experiences in their childhood homes informed their development as a leader. Core features of their narratives were found to underpin their predisposition towards becoming a leader later in life, including: a sense of safety fostered by caring, concerned, and present parents; encouragement to learn, study and work; and a positive attitude towards work as something valuable. These findings suggest the important role that childhood experiences in the home play in fostering early dispositions towards being a leader. The idea of storying a leader's origins to understand their pathways to leadership was also central to Zheng et al.'s (2021) exploration of 92 leaders' narratives of becoming and being leaders. Zheng et al. found that the leaders' narratives illuminated clear links between their current enactment of leadership and their past experiences. Furthering these ideas, we focus on narratives of family experiences to understand potential sources of motivation for leadership and leader identity in education and ECE.

Narrative inquiry methodology

Stories can be both the phenomenon of interest and the method of inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Our qualitative approach focuses on narrative inquiry to understand leadership and its motivations (Auvinen et al., 2012). Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology, providing an opportunity to think about how we connect with one another in storied ways, and allowing us to understand what it is like to be the other and ourselves (Clandinin, 2013). This relationality can be between people and their worlds; in the connections between past, present, and future, including in the intergenerational space; between people and place, between events and feelings associated with those events; between each of us and our physical worlds; even in "our cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23). The stories at the heart of this paper touch on many of these aspects of relationality.

Our narrative data was collected from consenting postgraduate students' work based on an autobiographical task. Narrative approaches are increasingly seen as unique opportunities for individuals to "make sense of and come to understand their identity as a leader" (Armstrong & McCain, 2021, p. 62). Our work aligns with McCain and Matkin's (2019) argument that narrative approaches can "provide intersectionality across a multitude of dimensions that impact identity" (p. 166) including culture, gender, disability, religion, and social class. We draw inspiration from their narrative framework, which acknowledges leadership development as beginning in childhood/adolescence through the influence of family as the first cultural setting. This framework focuses not on skill-building, which McCain and Matkin argued is common in leader identity research, but on "how emerging adults construct and make sense of their leader identity" through family narratives (p. 159). We foreground adults (postgraduate students) studying ECE leadership in higher education, their family-oriented narratives, and potential links to their personal values, beliefs, and orientations to leadership.

The impetus for this paper came from the first two authors' reflection on students' assessment work in an elective postgraduate course on leadership in ECE that they taught on at the University of Auckland. The third author is an academic colleague and a former student of a different iteration of the course, who provided an outsider's perspective to ensure trustworthiness in the data analysis. The 21 students in the cohort comprised NZ-based and international students. The assessment task [see Appendix] required them to respond to a scholarly quotation about leadership by identifying and critically reflecting on their motivations and orientations to leadership. Students were prompted to recall their early experiences and leadership lessons learned from their own lives. Our approach responds to Giles and Morrison's (2010) call for valuing postgraduate students' stories and interpretation as a basis for learning about the relational, contextual, and experiential nature of educational leadership, while attending to the transformational effect of such a process on students' "way-of-being" (p. 66) as aspiring leaders.

On course completion, to avoid power issues, the first author (Course Director) approached in writing 11 of the students for their voluntary permission to use excerpts from their narratives, which would be de-identified, for the purpose of this paper. These 11 were approached because the content of their narratives was relevant to our inquiry question and reflected diverse experiences with their families. We acknowledge that as an assessed assignment, these narratives may have been somewhat selective. Written consent accompanied by positive responses were received from nine of the 11 students, providing nine narratives for us to explore and learn from. These students came from diverse cultures and a range of career backgrounds, including but not limited to education.

For collective data analysis, we applied Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis approach. First, we each familiarised ourselves with the data (the nine narratives) by reading and re-reading the scripts. We then collectively identified, discussed, reflected on, and debated our initial codes. Following this, the first author alphabetically assigned three assignments to each author to re-read and formally code on their own before coming back together to discuss coding decisions as a group. Once we reached consensus about which codes to publish as findings, we generated two overarching themes: 1) the influence of hardship, work ethic, and selfless actions of elders in their families; and 2) the expectations associated with being the first-born child in their family and the assumed responsibilities.

As a relational process, narrative inquiry is also an ethical process. Hence, we uphold our social responsibilities by acknowledging our relationality with these students and their stories, and approached their storytelling, our reading of it, and our presentation of their words, in ethical ways (Clandinin, 2013). All students were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to use, and to read and comment on a draft of this paper before submission to ensure they were still in agreement with our use of their work.

Findings

The hardship, work ethic, and selfless actions of family elders

Many students viewed the hardship, work ethic, and selfless actions of family elders as a source of leadership inspiration. For example, Jill (pseudonym) felt inspired by her grandfather overcoming poverty and his commitment to community:

> I am proud of my grandpa's generation, who made life hopeful despite having nothing in hand. They watched each other's back while doing farm work during wartime; they shared everything in a significant shortage of life necessities; they took [to] each other like real siblings. People's spirit of sharing and uniting to overcome difficulties made them alive and resisted the bitter life.

Jill's storytelling encouraged her to reflect on her grandfather's generation about their "spirit of sharing and uniting to overcome difficulties," realising that this attitude helped them to feel "alive" and resist a "bitter life," important lessons for her leader identity.

While Jill felt a mix of emotions, including shock, as she reflected on these family experiences, she realised these had helped her to "acknowledge myself and the source of my leadership" while challenging her thinking:

> I was shocked by the influence of childhood. Honestly, I [had] many doubts while reading related literature for the first time. However, I changed my mind after recalling my past and re-reading those materials. There should be valuable and subtle impacts originating from childhood, even if they are somehow indefinable.

Similarly, Penny storied the challenges her grandparents had faced, specifically when the local government wanted to shut down a museum in China that her grandfather founded. She described her *nai nai* (Chinese - grandmother) as their core family leader, who modelled moral actions of *shanliang* (kindness) and *fuwu* (serve others). Penny described how her grandmother had used these attributes to support Penny's grandfather through these hard times. Penny acknowledged her grandmother's moral dedication, service to the community, strength, and courage to never give up. She further reflected on this experience:

> [My] grandmother's moral behaviour planted deep roots in my teaching and leadership practice. I show great respect and trust towards the leader's model moral behaviour in the organisations, I advocate moral behaviours at my working field, and strongly believe that good leaders must first become good servants, (Greenleaf, 1998), which links to *fuwu* (serve others).

Storying in this way, therefore, had made Penny aware of the impact of these family experiences on her leadership practice.

Sally shared that her "current orientation to leadership" had also been influenced by her grandmother, a school principal who was "meticulous about work and pursued perfection", expecting this from herself and others. Her grandmother's advice, which came as part of a reprimand to Sally for not working hard enough, was that women needed to "put in double or even triple effort" to be recognised in a male dominated society. Sally acknowledged the role her grandmother had in encouraging her to "work harder" and follow the same path as her grandmother, "a successful female leader."

Positive memories of the influence of family elders were also evident in Maggie's narrative. Maggie wrote about the influence of women in her family, including her grandmother, inspired by their experiences of adversity and hardship. She described these family elders as "guiding spirits" and "unannounced leaders" in her life, illuminating their influence on her values and leadership:

> I have been truly inspired from my family's humble yet honoured background, the grit and courage women put up in adversity, their undying faith in times of hardships, strength to carry out heavy tasks shoulder to shoulder with menfolk and their decision-making abilities for the good of the family.
>
> They are the guiding spirits, the unannounced leaders who instilled in me the qualities of positivity, courage, patience, strong-mindedness, self-confidence, fearlessness, commitment, and integrity that have become the strength of my character. Under the guiding spirits of my personal heroes who influenced my life and my reflections of leadership, I strive to lead others and make a positive difference.

William's grandmother raised him while his parents worked in another city. He shared how his grandmother's childhood was marked by "political unrest, wars, poverty, [and] disasters" which had "shaped her disposition vastly." As he reflected on his grandmother's family leadership, he noted that as an elder she had "absolute priority to make decisions for our family" but "usually acted as an advice-giver rather than a dictator." William recalled that:

> She shared her wisdom with our families when we were dealing with things she was familiar with and let others decide if she was not. Since she knew that she could not catch up with the fast-changing world, she carefully maintained the hard-earned peacefulness by less interfering in other family members' business.

Her leadership philosophy extended to raising William who remembered how "she always encouraged me to make my own decisions and respected them as long as they were reasonable." This was sometimes experienced as a burden by a young William whose childhood was "composed of making decisions, taking responsibility for the wrong decisions and reflections."

Writing about the value of storytelling in his own leadership development, William demonstrated that good could come out of adversity by admitting that recalling childhood

experiences could be "challenging and painful sometimes" but that reflecting on them offered him the "freedom to grow and lead differently." He concluded by observing that "all of these experiences may fade away as time goes on, but I know they will always be there at the bottom of my heart and remind me if I am off track."

In summary, storying historical, family influence on values and ways-of-being regarding the hardships, work ethic and selfless actions of family elders had prompted Jill, Penny, Sally, Maggie, and William to engage in a process of sense-making about their own leader identity development.

Being the first-born in the family and the assumed responsibilities

Another theme identified centred on what being the first-born in the family meant in terms of leadership. This was about taking responsibility and being responsible for others. Taylor, the first born of four children, felt this placement came with the responsibility "to role model to my siblings and to do everything right as my siblings would look up to me." In striving to meet her siblings' expectations, Taylor reflected on how she had "developed high expectations for myself and others" and that although this had "given her the confidence to lead" it also led to her "biggest challenge … managing my expectations of both myself and others," early on in her teaching career. Through these reflections, Taylor realised that leaders "cannot do everything, and leadership involves providing others with the opportunity to develop, grow and lead."

Similarly, Lena expressed that being the eldest child in her family meant it was her "duty to take care of my elderly grandmother." She reflected on important teachings from her grandmother about faith and a strong sense of community:

> My leadership was influenced by my grandmother urging me to take part in everything that related to the church or the community. My grandma became an influential Christian woman [who] shared her gift of inspiring stories, preaching, biblical verses, sermon, and wisdom. She uplifted and encouraged women to be their own leader, either a minister, teacher, spokesperson, or to be in the workforce. It showed me ownership, collectiveness, teamwork, and contribution as components of effective leadership.

Through her storytelling, Lena described utilising the wisdom she was gifted from her grandmother as a family elder to inform her own values-based leadership practice and leader identity:

> I use skills adopted from my grandmother and have applied them also in a Pasifika early childhood education settings and cultural events. Within my youth team they are encouraged to be spiritual, humble, have faith, and practise their cultural values.

The storytelling process had enhanced Lena's awareness of her developing leader identity and encouraged her to consider her "strengths and weaknesses as a leader" including "reciprocal communication with [her] peers … where different interests clash."

Jessica's narrative focused on being the eldest cousin in the family, explaining that "the eldest child in the next generation is the 'bellwether' who is responsible for leading and being the role model for all the younger ones." While she gained a sense of achievement and self-esteem from these early family leadership experiences, the responsibility was also "boring and stressful" and felt like a "weight on my shoulders."

Jessica was able to make meaningful connections between these "unconscious" early experiences with her "desire of becoming a good leader" who respects, listens to, and cares for others. However, she revealed that the pressure of these early experiences remained somewhat of an obstacle to her taking on professional leadership roles:

> The teachings from my father and the experience I gained through looking after younger cousins helped mould me into someone that is kind, respectful, willing to listen and care about others. However, the pressure of being a leader that needs to be the perfect "bellwether" and make the right decisions feels like a heavy weight on my shoulders. The desire of becoming a good leader is always there, deep in my heart; however, lack of self-confidence, fear of failure and disappointment from others are my "unconscious drive" stopping me from stepping up into more leadership roles.

The opportunity to recall and confront her past experiences offered Jessica the opportunity to understand and free herself from these. She explained that recalling these experiences was:

> … a chance to understand my past, to unshackle me from it so that I could surmount my "unconscious drive" to be able to develop and deepen my leadership. Moving forward, pushing myself to take small leadership responsibilities to build on my confidence as a leader will be the starting point for my new journey in leadership.

Building on the idea that experiences can be challenging yet still insightful, Xingjin as an only child chose to see her family's high expectations and pressure on her to succeed as a source of leadership inspiration. Xingjin explained how the pathway of her childhood and negative experiences had taught her about resilience and honesty. She reflected on the hard work, dedication, and commitment her parents had shown her so that she could have the opportunity to learn how to play an instrument. She also felt at times being an only child meant there was a great deal of pressure on her. Xingjin's storying of her family experiences made her realise the impact on her current leadership beliefs.

> Looking back, I am grateful for going through the unique experience at a young age. It brought me great pain at that time, but what it taught me about leadership was priceless.… Through going back to my early experiences, I gained a better understanding of my current leadership orientations. More importantly, I had clearer self-knowledge on my strengths and vulnerabilities.

In summary, Taylor, Lena, Jessica, and Xingjin's storytelling revealed the significant influence their position in the family had on their ideas, understandings, and practice of leadership, including responsibilities, and addressing expectations.

Discussion

Surfacin stories and awakening leader identity

As our findings show, several students selected meaningful intergenerational stories about family members' resilience to adversity and hardship to share as sources of their leadership orientations. McCain and Matkin (2019) describe these kinds of stories as "family legacy stories" (p. 164) that communicate important intergenerational wisdom, and reiterate shared cultural experiences, values, and beliefs. Such legacy stories were apparent, for example, when Jill wrote about her grandfather enduring hardship by uniting with others and staying hopeful and when Maggie wrote of her grandmother facing adversity and hardship with grit and courage. Similarly, William wrote about his grandmother's experiences with hardship, and the lesson of resilience he took from it. Family-oriented stories can illuminate unique experiences in which "actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes" (Armstrong & McCain, 2021, p. 61). Surfacing such stories provided our students with an opportunity to reflect on the lessons they embody and connections with their own leader identity. By selecting and retelling family legacy stories, the students were able to reflect on the themes that emerged, including unity, hope, courage, and grit, in relation to their developing leader identities.

The students' narratives revealed commonly shared leadership beliefs and values that included kindness, love, compassion and caring for others, and open mindedness. For example, Jessica pointed out that the values of kindness, open mindedness, respectfulness, and being a life-long learner that her father had passed onto her, guided her leadership practices today, revealing how surfacing them through storytelling had reinforced them. Penny reflected on the values of moral behaviour learned from her grandmother, such as *shanliang* – kindness and *fuwu* – to serve others. Jill's narrative highlighted the value of helping self and others, appreciation for learning, and self-acknowledgement, resonating with Taylor's uptake of responsibility for her siblings and then colleagues. McCain and Matkin (2019) reinforce the value of learning about and understanding cultural norms, values and practices in family-oriented stories and the influence these can have on leader identity. The beliefs and values evident in these students' narratives align with Deal and Peterson's (2016) idea of foregrounding cultural values and morals to support leader identity. From these stories, the students were able to reflect on long-held beliefs and values related to their families and make connections to their knowledge and understanding of their developing leader identities.

Students' storytelling also surfaced shared values of culture, traditional values and spirituality, and their connection to acts of service. This was evident, for example, when Lena storied being

encouraged by her grandmother to be involved in the church and community and when she drew on her grandmother's teachings to support her role as a youth leader. Deal and Peterson (2016) identified some of the roles that storytelling of culture and history give affordances to, for example, the idea of sparking action through transmitting values and reinforcing core values and beliefs. Lena reflected on her cultural and spiritual values from her grandmother and identified these as significant influences on her leader identity. In many Pasifika cultures the seeds of leadership are first developed in service to family and community. In Samoan contexts this value is expressed as *tautua* (Taleni et al., 2018). In choosing to tell stories about her grandmother's experiences and advice in relation to service, Lena was connecting to culturally situated leadership values including the importance of commitment to and sacrifice for her own people, community, and society.

Clear values of hard work, service and commitment were reflected on in relation to leader identity. William had gleaned the value of hard work, especially in the pursuit of perfection. Maggie realised she had taken on her father's values of hard work, service, and sacrifice. Xingjin experienced the value of resilience and honesty. She also acknowledged her parents' influence on the values of hard work, dedication, and commitment. These stories of hard work, service and resilience in the family align with Thompson et al. (2009) who explained that young adults learn lessons from family sharing of legacy stories, which are commonly based on notions such as hard work ethic, caring for others, and a sense of community. Reflecting on their stories touting similar values had influenced the students' surfacing and awakening of their leader identity. Armstrong (2021) referred to this idea as the identity work of thoughtful leaders where through storytelling they can examine their self and their culture.

Many of the students' stories touched on how influential a grandparent was, foregrounding the significant role that family elders can play in developing leader identity. This was most evident, for example, when William considered his grandmother's influence in raising him and encouraging independence as both a gift, but he still had leadership lessons to learn. Maggie honoured the leadership of the many women elders in her family. Penny reflected on her grandparents' teaching that through strength and courage, you don't need to give up. Fraser (2012) acknowledged the significance of listening to and learning from elders' stories and how these shape and support individuals' leadership development and identity. The students' recalling, retelling, and reflecting on their beliefs in these ways concur with Young Leon's (2012) suggestion that elders' stories play a powerful role in communicating a rich worldview and passing on experiences of cultural leadership. By storying family experiences, the students were awakened to the idea of family elders as leadership teachers and trusted guides in their developing leader identity.

Transformation of leader identity

Findings show that our students engaged in a process of leader identity work. This work involved connecting with and reflecting on past family experiences that conveyed certain meanings, values,

and beliefs. Such learning supports individuals to make sense of and give meaning to who they are as aspiring leaders (Zheng et al., 2021). Promoting storytelling as a transformative method for leader identity development requires a consideration for how the students' thinking about and orientations to their leader identity were potentially transformed. First, the retrospective family storytelling (McCain & Matkin, 2019) that our students engaged in was one of deep reflection and emotion (Cooper, 2020), including vulnerability and honesty, which allowed for greater awareness of self and others. For example, William acknowledged that looking back was challenging but at the same time, he was open to growth and for his story to become a reminder of his past.

For Jill, her emotions progressed from sorrow to pride, to shock and surprise, and then to joy as she articulated what she knew of her family story. This process revealed storytelling as an emotional process of increasing self-awareness. Stories are relational tools that represent the interconnected stories of our lives and those stories that "live in us, in our bodies, as we move and live in the world" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 22). Storying our experiences can illuminate how we use emotions to inform our decision-making and navigate relationships with others. This learning can enhance our understanding of ourselves and others and potentially lead to more empathetic practices of leadership in education (Crawford, 2011). These ideas highlight the embodied and emotional nature of identity stories that allow us to connect and reconnect with ourselves and others each time our stories are told. Our students showed us this in relation to their developing leader selves.

Having time to reflect on such stories is fundamental to the process of transformation of leader identity (Cooper, 2020). Armstrong (2021) emphasised that stories which are supported by reflection have potential to communicate emotions, reframe expectations, and shift reality. As part of this deeply reflective process, our students' realisations and enhanced awareness from telling their stories, encouraged them to take control of factors they could either embrace or reject as part of their developing leader identity and orientations to being a leader. For example, the high expectation placed on Jessica to perform leadership as "the perfect bellwether" was something she was willing to accept as part of her past, but not necessarily to incorporate into her transformed orientation to being a leader. This burden on her was something she had decided to free herself from, to unleash the confidence she felt she needed to be a good leader today. Similarly, Xingjin's recall of the pressures placed on her as a young child revealed some emotional tension for her. Yet, storying her family experiences enabled her to transform a negative experience into one that could fuel and foster a strong and resilient leader identity. Like all the students, Jessica and Xingjin were sharing their stories with us for the very first time and were able to use the storytelling process to "unshackle" themselves from what might have become their enduring narratives of leadership. These insights align with Clandinin's (2013) idea that if we share and change our stories, we quite possibly change who we are and even those with whom we are in a relationship.

As motivated readers of this work, we were collectively moved and awakened by our students' stories (Armstrong, 2021). We recognised and appreciated the trust given to us as receivers of these cultural prompts that had informed their leader identity development. Beyond thinking "about" their stories, we were inspired by Clandinin (2013) to think "with" these stories where we allowed the narrative to influence us. We were able to think about not only the story we were engaged in, but also our own leader narratives that were unfolding in the process. We were open to thinking "with" their stories by utilising them ourselves as reflective prompts to contemplate the sources of our own leadership motivations.

Conclusion and implications

To address our question, *What is the significance of storying family experiences as a tool for leader identity development?* we set out to explore retrospective family storytelling in educational leadership development. Based on analysis of students' narratives, we learned that engaging with and reflecting on the past in a supportive context can be transformational for leader identity development. The context was assessment in a leadership postgraduate course in higher education that supported the relational, contextual, and experiential nature of educational leadership (Giles & Morrison, 2010). While some students may feel uncomfortable to share personal insights in this way, we ensured they made the ultimate choice about what and how much to share with us. We believe the course task afforded these students a rare opportunity to reflect on early experiences that they believed informed their orientation to being a leader. In doing so, they learned how to articulate origins of their leadership orientations while learning more about the self and others in the development of their leader identity.

Our findings affirm the value of a narrative-based approach to leadership learning as a pedagogical strategy in higher education. This approach involved students surfacing their early orientations, assumptions, and values regarding leadership in family-oriented stories, being awakened to their developing leader identity and to the role of family elders as leadership guides, and through these processes, transforming their ways-of-being as aspiring leaders. Importantly, the true potential of these stories for leader identity development may only be fully realised over time. Clandinin (2013) explains we tend to become "awake" (p. 27) to stories as these stories are being lived out, composed, told, and retold over time. Therefore, we encourage opportunities for leadership students in and outside of higher education to recall and retell their family-oriented stories, so that they may experience the fuller benefits of a reflective looking back and forward regarding being a leader in education.

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Appendix

Assignment task:

Sinclair (2007) states that:

> *By attending to early life from birth to early adulthood, including to families, parental and sibling relations, we learn a lot about our basic predisposition towards leadership. Whether individuals aspire to leadership themselves or feel deeply distrustful of people in authority, whether they withdraw, rebel, challenge, attack or defer, often replays an earlier history. It is not that our orientation to leadership is set and unable to be changed by an early age, but by going back and paying attention to the experiences that have shaped our early life, we can begin to unshackle ourselves from them. They cease to become the unconscious drivers of our relation to leadership, and become more available for us to modify and adapt to contemporary circumstances (p. 56).*

Respond to Sinclair's (2007) statement by identifying and critically reflecting upon two to three experiences from your own life that you believe have shaped your current orientation to "being a leader". Draw on relevant literature to inform your critical autobiographical narrative.

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