Journal of

Higher Education Policy

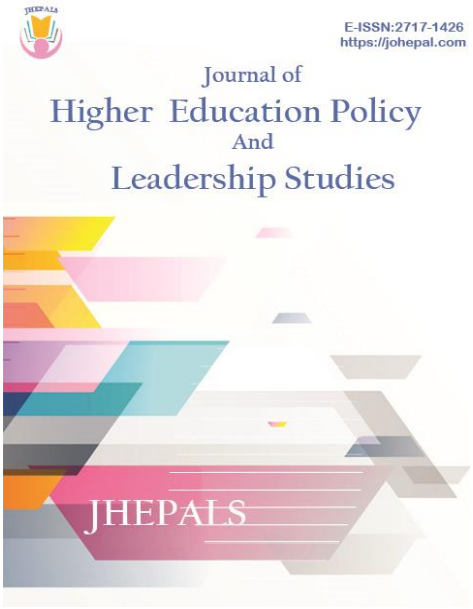
And

Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

https://johepal.com

International Approaches to Developing Leadership Identity, Capacity, and Efficacy



Julie E. Owen [1] *
Email: jowen4@gmu.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1938-4975

Aoi Yamanaka [2] *
Email: ayamanak@gmu.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8202-5070

Momo Waguri [3]
International College of Arts and Sciences, Fukuoka Women's University, JAPAN
Email: waguri@fwu.ac.jp
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4676-7331

* *School of Integrative Studies, George Mason University, USA*

Article Received **2025/02/15** | Article Accepted **2025/05/01** | Published Online **2025/06/30**

Cite article as:

Owen, J. E., Yamanaka, A., & Waguri, M. (2025). International approaches to developing leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *6*(2), 6-22.
https://dx.doi.org/10.61882/johepal.6.2.6

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

International Approaches to Developing Leadership Identity, Capacity, and Efficacy

Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 6 Issue: 2
pp. 6-22
DOI:
10.61882/johepal.6.2.6

Julie E. Owen *
Aoi Yamanaka
Momo Waguri

Abstract

To what degree are leadership identity, efficacy, and capacity shaped by western ideals of individualism, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy? How do cultural norms and stereotypes affect students' leadership development? What differences exist in applying the terms global, international, and transnational to partnerships and leadership learning? This article engages these questions and offers insights from a multi-year Japanese-U.S. partnership which developed strategies for integrating approaches to leadership development both within and across cultural contexts. The article critically examines leadership identity, efficacy, and capacity development of college students in both Japanese and U.S. contexts, and draws inferences for inter- and transnational leadership development. Examples include how the use of narratives and counter-narratives, deep and sustained collaborative international partnerships, and cultivating curiosity work to build a shared understanding of leadership learning and development across cultures.

Keywords: International Leadership; Transnational Leadership; Global Leadership; Leadership Identity; Leadership Capacity; Leadership Efficacy; Women

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

*Corresponding author's email: jowen4@gmu.edu

Introduction

In her compelling book *Redeeming Leadership* (2020), Helena Liu observes that "leadership, or the idea that certain individuals are more fit to influence the minds and govern the lives of others, is inextricably bound up in the European colonial project" (p. 27). She describes how Enlightenment thinking and with its emphasis on linear rationality and objectivity privileges views of leadership that appropriate and dehumanize nonwestern cultures. Western ideals of individualism, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy are embedded in both leadership scholarship and practice (Johnson & Soria, 2020). This article examines an international partnership where faculty collaborators from Japan and the United States explore cultural approaches to women and leadership identity development (Komives et al., 2005, 2006; Owen, 2020, 2023; Waguri et al., 2024). Insights from this collaboration shape recommendations for leadership identity, efficacy, and capacity development of college students both within and across cultures.

In a chapter on *International Perspectives in Leadership Learning* (2023), Roberts and Yamanaka propose a framework for future leadership research that calls for a shift from global to international views of leadership, attends to intersectionality and leadership in international contexts, and suggests more integrative approaches to cross-cultural leadership scholarship and practice. They remind us that advances in students' intercultural competence requires going beyond incidental or episodic interactions across difference to sustained international leadership development. Similarly, Hino (2019) suggests that cognitive differences between the East and West are one source of bias in the study and practice of leadership development. Hino noted, "Westerners are likely to focus on an individual's behaviors, characteristics, and features, rather than on their context and relationships" (p. 138), and suggests that Eastern values of holism and long-term thinking would benefit leadership scholarship. Western enlightenment thinking favors linear versions of causality and a focus on individualism, which often preclude attention to relational and dialectic approaches to leadership. Leadership educators and scholars who ignore contextual and systemic factors in favor of individual leader-centric views may perpetuate this bias.

Each of these western biases are present in much of the leadership education literature around college student leadership identity development (Komives et al., 2005, 2006; Owen, 2023). This article explores how leadership identity, efficacy, and capacity are experienced in eastern, western, and transnational contexts. Note that, though the words "international" and "transnational" may be used interchangeably in the leadership literature, we use "international" to refer to interactions between two countries, cultures or contexts, and "transnational" to refer to exchanges across more than two cultures or contexts. In business literature, some suggest the use of "multinational" to refer to organizations that have branches in several countries serving those countries specific needs, and "transnational" to refer to organizations that work across many countries to produce a single product or outcome such as car parts manufactured in many countries but eventually assembled in one place (Rouse, 2019). Regardless, we prefer nomenclature that values the "coexistence" of countries and cultures, rather than the disappearance of cultures and boundaries sometimes implied in the use of terms like global leadership (Rouse, 2019, p. 2).

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

Reflexivity

As part of our exploration of inter- and transnational student leadership development, we wanted to share a bit about our own identities and how they shape our work as leadership scholars and educators. Julie identifies as a white, currently able, middle-class, cisgender woman working in the academy. She is committed to using her voice to advocate for positive social change leading to more equitable leadership for all and to consider how identities and social power shape practice. For Julie, leadership scholarship is constantly evolving, and her recent perturbations have been about the role of identities and expertise in shaping and codifying leadership knowledge, development and application. Who decides what leadership approaches are "legitimate"? How can we more effectively honor cultures and contexts in leadership learning? For more on this important topic, see Irwin et al. (2023) and Fricker's (2007) work on epistemic injustice.

Aoi identifies as a currently able, Asian, heterosexual, international, non-native English speaking, instructional faculty who straddles the divide between two different cultures—American and Japanese. Due to this, Aoi often perceives her own ways of knowing as (slightly) different from others in the United States. Aoi constantly questions western-centric perspectives in leadership education, highlighting their historical roots in colonialism, individualism, and neoliberalism and explores how these perspectives have dominated global leadership discourse, often marginalizing Indigenous and non-western approaches. For Aoi, leadership is a part of advocacy.

Momo identifies as a "non-typical" Japanese faculty member of the *Ainu* descent, a cisgender woman whose values and perspectives have been deeply shaped by her experiences living in the United States and Sri Lanka. She teaches at a women's university in Japan, supporting students in becoming their best selves through both curricular and co-curricular programs. Momo has strived to integrate critical and liberatory approaches into student leadership development, where conventional narratives often emphasize skill-building with minimal attention to systemic oppression. She co-founded the Women AND Leadership Project (WALP) alongside two colleagues, creating spaces for dialogue and learning for those engaged in leadership education. As part of WALP's initiatives, she and her colleagues recently published the Japanese translation of Owen (2020/Waguri et al., 2024), further expanding access to critical perspectives in leadership education studies.

As a collective writing team, we represent a diverse set of identities, experiences, and approaches that shape our views of leadership learning and development. Each of us has learned from each other about ways our identities and nationalities shape our work as leadership scholars and educators. As we share a critical epistemological approach to leadership education, we commit to interrogating western assumptions about leadership, especially when working in international contexts and communities. We feel that leadership development should be contextually informed and constantly evolving.

The Leadership Learning Framework (LLF)

The leadership learning framework (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; 2024) was intentionally designed to be inclusive of multiple perspectives and contexts. The six core components of the LLF include leadership knowledge, leadership development, leadership training, leadership observation, leadership engagement, and leadership metacognition. Though

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

primarily developed by U.S. scholars for use in western leadership development programs, the model centers learning from experiences, such as through direct engagement, indirect observation, relational development, competency-based training, and metacognition (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2024). By allowing multiple pathways for meaning making, the LLF invites flexible application across contexts and cultures.

This section examines to what degree the LLF dimensions of leadership identity, efficacy, and capacity apply across international contexts. We first define the concept as presented in the LLF, examine how these dimensions may be experienced in eastern and western cultures, offer short examples, and draw inferences for inter- and transnational leadership development.

Leader and Leadership Identity

The LLF defines leader identity as who you are as a leader (Guthrie et al., 2021). Leader identity refers to an individual's self-perception as a leader and the aspect of their identity or self-concept related to their leadership role (Day et al., 2009). As a result, it is shaped by their positionality, how they embody their leadership role, and how others perceive and respond to it (Owen, 2023). This framework emphasizes that leadership identities are influenced by both individual growth and shared experiences (Beatty et al., 2020; Guthrie et al., 2021; Owen, 2023). In other words, leadership identities are linked to the development of individuals' ability to effectively fulfill leadership roles and responsibilities within an organization by enhancing their knowledge, skills, and competencies related to leadership (Owen, 2023).

Since leader and leadership identity are intertwined with social identities, as well as other aspects of identity—such as profession, familial relationships, and affiliations (Guthrie et al., 2021)—cultural and contextual forces play a significant role in shaping their development. Sociological forces reinforce dominant cultural norms in leadership, constraining the recognition and practice of diverse leadership approaches (Rocco & Priest, 2023). These constraints also limit leadership engagement and self-efficacy for individuals with marginalized identities, those who do not conform to dominant leadership prototypes, and those who do not align with prevailing leadership narratives (Rocco & Priest, 2023). To foster more inclusive leadership identity development, it is essential to explicitly address identity, equity, and power by examining how social identities and ideologies shape leadership growth and how systemic and institutional injustices influence perceptions of leadership and identity (Owen, 2023).

However, leader and leadership identity become more complex in inter- and transnational contexts, as much of the leadership literature originates from western cultures, particularly North America. This has led to the dominance of western-centric perspectives in leadership studies (Hino, 2019), even when considering the impacts of institutional and systemic injustice. Historically, education systems worldwide have served colonial interests by reinforcing uniform social structures centered on authority and leadership. This approach has hindered leader and leadership identity development in transnational contexts, where concepts of power and aspiration often diverge from western notions of civilization and colonial frameworks (Prakash & Esteva Figueroa, 2008).

As a result, there has been a global emphasis on adapting leadership styles to accommodate cultural diversity while still conforming to western norms (Dugan, 2018). For

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

example, in the 20th century, feminism was unpopular among Asian women activists due to its association with western ideals, which were seen as overly individualistic, anti-male, and anti-family. Cambodian leaders feared it would harm their culture (Jacobsen, 2010), while in Singapore, it was viewed as a threat to social morality (Lyons, 2010). Consequently, Asian activists developed their own feminist frameworks, such as womanist in Malaysia and feminolog in China, shaped by local religion, culture, and history (Roces, 2010). Although Western feminism has since become more inclusive, Asian activists continue to define feminism in ways that reflect their unique contexts (Roces, 2010). This phenomenon remains prominent today and continues to influence leader and leadership identity development in Asia.

In many East Asian cultures, particularly Japan, leadership emphasizes moral integrity, virtue, harmony, humility, and collective well-being. These values are often misrepresented (Owen, 2020) or perceived as signs of weak leadership when viewed through a western lens. Furthermore, due to dominant western leadership models and cultural norms in Japan that reinforce power imbalances between men and women, many Japanese female college students internalize the belief that they are "not suited to be a leader." Socially constructed ideas about what a leader should be shape their expectations, leading them to believe that they must possess specific skills to be considered leaders rather than recognizing leadership as a developmental process.

Moreover, Japan's collectivistic culture, with its emphasis on harmony and humility, often discourages these students from identifying as leaders or embracing their leadership identity. At the same time, the influence of dominant western leadership models in Japan complicates students' leadership identity development, as they are exposed to individualistic and hierarchical leadership frameworks while being embedded in a culture that values collectivism and social harmony. As a result, Japanese women college students experience a complex negotiation between these conflicting influences, making their leader and leadership identity development particularly challenging. While leadership education in the United States encourages critical reflection on western civilization's reliance on individualism, colonialism, and modernism (Roberts & Yamanaka, 2023) and their influence on leader and leadership identity development, individualism may, paradoxically, play a role in shaping Japanese female college students' understanding of their own leader and leadership identity.

How do these individuals deconstruct these ideas that are socially constructed and distorted? To challenge these socially constructed distortions, dissonance plays a key role. Taylor and Reynolds (2019), using a Black feminist perspective, describe dissonance as the tension individuals feel when confronting conflicting beliefs, motivating them to reassess internalized distortions (Festinger, 1962). They outline three principles for reframing dissonance: (1) recognizing the need to unlearn societal myths (e.g., the belief that hard work guarantees success), (2) shifting social justice learning to systemic issues rather than individual efforts, and (3) acknowledging how power legitimizes dominant narratives (Taylor & Reynolds, 2019). Experiencing dissonance allows individuals to reclaim what was lost by critically examining and dismantling imposed societal distortions.

Along with the LLF, the culturally relevant leadership learning (CRLL; Bertrand Jones et al., 2016) also addresses systemic issues in leadership education. The CRLL examines power

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

dynamics across five organizational dimensions: history, diversity, psychological climate, behavior, and structure. These factors shape leadership identity, efficacy, and capability. CRLL provides the context ("where/when") for leadership learning, while the process ("how") involves designing intentional learning experiences (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021). Through CRLL, students adopt a socially just perspective, identifying and analyzing injustices within these dimensions based on their lived experiences.

As students engage with dissonance, they reflect with peers and mentors, fostering dialogue and self-awareness (Yamanaka et al., 2024). These reflections are essential for leadership identity development in inter- and transnational contexts, deepening their understanding of systemic forces such as colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism. This process encourages students to acknowledge, interrogate, and reconstruct their leadership approaches, fostering greater awareness of how privilege and oppression shape leadership identity. Without this critical engagement, deep leadership identity development cannot occur (Owen, 2023).

Leadership Efficacy

The LLF defines leadership efficacy as one's belief in their own ability to engage in leadership and the skill to yield a desired result (Guthrie & Devies, 2024). The MSL Insight Report (Dugan et al., 2013) states that leadership self-efficacy is "a key predictor of gains in leadership capacity as well as a factor in whether or not students actually enact leadership behaviors" (p. 20). In essence, individuals with greater leadership efficacy are more likely to engage in leadership processes. Dugan (2024) draws a clear distinction between "leader efficacy" and "leadership efficacy", pointing out that while the both are about internal beliefs, the former is about serving in a positional role whereas the latter is associated with internal beliefs about group processes.

The conflation of these two concepts is particularly prevalent in Japan, where leadership is often perceived as an individual trait or a position rather than a process. This is reflected in the language itself: the katakana term rīdāshippu, derived from English, is frequently used to denote leadership as a personal attribute, much like in phrases such as "She has leadership" or "Her leadership is…". This distinction is evident in reflective comments from Japanese students studying leadership development at a women's university. One student expressed this common perception by stating "I used to think of leadership as a solitary task carried out by a single person—one against others" (Fukuoka Women's University [FWU], 2024, p. 7). She further reflected,

> I thought leadership was something only talented people with charisma or popularity could demonstrate—something for those who could attract and guide others. Since I'm not even comfortable speaking in front of people, I never believed leadership was something I had within me.

However, through exposure to relational and social change leadership theories—"western" conceptualizations of leadership—her understanding shifted. Participating in a year-long co-curricular leadership program, along with hearing from a guest speaker in class, helped her recognize the deep connection between self-awareness, interpersonal engagement, and leadership practice. As she described, "I became clearly aware of what it means to take leadership of my own life" (FWU, 2024, p. 7). She realized that leadership is

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

not confined to formal roles or structured learning environments but can be enacted in everyday interactions:

> Leadership can be practiced in common university settings as well as in daily life. It's not limited to specific spaces with leadership learning objectives or to people who are already 'woke' to the concept. Leadership happens everywhere because life itself requires engaging with others. In English classes and the Japanese constitution course, where we often work in groups, as well as in our dorm life, where we take turns doing chores and planning events, I try to communicate in ways that encourage active participation."

She concluded, "I now enjoy deepening my personal engagement with leadership through practice and self-reflection" (FWU, 2024, p. 7).

Like this student, many others (FWU, 2021-2024) have noted that their early experiences, particularly in junior high and high school, shaped their perceptions of leadership. In these environments, leadership was often imposed through teacher-appointed positions, such as class representatives or event organizers, reinforcing a top-down, task-oriented view of leadership. As a result, many Japanese women students entered university with low leadership self-efficacy, believing that leadership was reserved for a select few.

Engaging with alternative frameworks of leadership—ones that emphasize relational, process-driven, and socially conscious approaches such as the LLF —has been transformative for these students. It has liberated them from rigid, exclusionary notions of leadership and allowed them to see themselves as active participants in leadership processes. By critically examining their prior assumptions, reflecting on their evolving perceptions, and being introduced to diverse (including "western") ways of conceptualizing and practicing leadership, students can develop a more inclusive and informed understanding of leadership. This, in turn, holds significant implications for inter- and transnational leadership development, especially when underlying values of transnational leadership are "reciprocity and social justice" (Roberts & Yamanaka, 2023).

Leadership Capacity

In the LLF, Guthrie et al. (2021) describe leadership capacity as the "the ability to hold, contain, or absorb something or the ability to retain knowledge" (p. 11). Dugan et al. (2013) define it as "the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with the ability to engage in leadership" (p.6). So, separate from one's leadership identity, efficacy, and motivations, does a person have the knowledge and skills to enact leadership? Leadership capacity develops through learning opportunities like engagement experiences, observations, trainings, and development experiences (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). The knowledge and skills needed to advance leadership may be experienced very differently in eastern/Japanese and western/US cultures.

For example, a significant issue in Japan is the commodification of rīdāshippu ryoku (leadership capacity) within the job-search industry. Komikawa (2021) warns of the increasing "erosion" of university career support and education by corporate interests. Human resource firms offering career support services to universities have reinforced a dominant narrative that prioritizes specific competencies—namely, abilities and skills

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

deemed essential for successful employment. This narrative aligns with the Japanese government's higher education reforms since 2008, which emphasize "learning outcomes" and encourage universities to articulate the specific skills students are expected to acquire through their curricula.

Critics argue that Japan's meritocratic job-hunting culture has placed immense pressure on students to market themselves by showcasing a set of predefined skills, often dictated by corporate expectations. In this context, rīdāshippu ryoku has emerged as one of the most sought-after attributes in self-promotion during the job-hunting process (Teshigahara & Isono, 2022; Hokkaido Shimbun Press, 2023). This trend raises concerns about the instrumentalization of leadership capacity, reducing it to a marketable skill rather than a meaningful, context-dependent practice.

A version of this is also present in U.S. job search processes. Certainly, leadership experiences, skills, and abilities remain high on U. S. employers' desired credentials when hiring college graduates (National Association of Colleges & Employers [NACE], 2024), yet what they mean by leadership skills likely varies greatly across industries and sectors. For many employers, “leadership” is a euphemism for a panoply of other capacities such as communication, problem-solving, decision-making, relationship building, team-work, self-awareness, resilience, integrity and others (Leis & Wormington, 2024). NACE’s (2024) definition of leadership capacity is to “recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals” (p.5). It includes inspiration, persuasion, motivation, innovation, and role modeling. It makes one wonder if leadership functions as a gate-keeping tool in the U.S. as well.

Leadership learning involves the complex interplay between leadership capacity, motivation, identity, efficacy, and enactment (Dugan, 2024). Leadership capacity development can be bolstered or constrained by one’s leadership efficacy, motivation, and leader/leadership identity development. It also involves aspects of human and interpersonal development such as values and identity development (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). It can refer to the process of expanding people’s abilities to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes (Day et al., 2009). It is evident that cultural forces play a role in how one develops and experiences leadership capacity. Owen et al. (2017) noted,

> If leadership learning is to be culturally relevant, and takes place within larger structures of inequality, it suggests additional capacities for leadership learning are needed. Individual leadership capacities might be expanded to include core concepts from critical social theory. Dugan (2024) suggests students learn: to interrogate stocks of knowledge or dominant narratives that govern how individuals view, interpret, and experience the world; to wrestle with concepts such as ideology and hegemony which function to uphold social inequalities; and to address social location or how intersecting identities shape how one approaches the world. Davis and Harrison (2013) suggest capacities such as intersubjectivity, critical reflexivity, sociopolitical competence, activism and agency, redistribution of power, and interest conversion are essential to leading change. How are students developing these capacities of leadership in programs, courses, and institutions? Culturally relevant leadership learning requires an expanded set of core competencies beyond those of traditional leadership education. (p. 50)

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

In the U.S., leadership capacity is typically developed and assessed on an individual level. Yet in non-western counties, such as Japan, collective capacities for leadership may be more relevant. Ospina et al. (2012) suggest collective leadership capacities such as reframing discourse, bridging differences, and unleashing human energies, along with group level and intro-organizational functions such as organizing, public policy advocacy, and community building, such that "a shared understanding of leadership is co-constructed and enacted in service of social change goals" (Dugan, 2024, p. 284). Both individual and collective capacities for culturally relevant leadership learning are predicated on the development of individual and group efficacy for leadership.

Each of these examples suggest that leadership scholars and educators be more specific about which capacities are essential for developing leadership both within and across cultures and contexts. Examining the contexts in which leadership is learned, as well as the discourse surrounding leadership capacity, is essential for advancing inter- and transnational leadership development. This inquiry requires both practitioners and students to critically ask: "What is the purpose of leadership?" Is it merely a means of self-promotion to secure employment and operate within the existing world order, or does it serve as a catalyst for transforming society into a more just, equitable, and inclusive place?

Implications for Scholarship and Practice

Our hope is for this article to surface the degree to which ideas about leadership learning and development are shaped by western ideals of individualism, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. As authors from varying cultural contexts across Japan and the United States, we examined aspects of the LLF for inter- and transnational applicability. Themes addressed include leadership identity, efficacy, and capacity development in international contexts; integrative approaches to cross-cultural leadership scholarship and practice; and developing deep and sustained partnerships to cultivate leadership for a thriving future. In this final section, we suggest implications for scholarship and practice, including how the use of narratives and counter-narratives, collaborative partnerships, and cultivating curiosity work to build a shared understanding of leadership learning and development across cultures.

Centering Narratives in Leadership Development

Centering narratives through counter-storytelling is a powerful tool for leadership development among marginalized individuals in transnational contexts. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter-storytelling as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 32). Counter-stories create space for individuals from marginalized backgrounds to share leadership experiences often overlooked in traditional leadership discourse, assert themselves outside dominant leadership ideologies, and disrupt these ideologies. Through this process, leadership is redefined beyond hegemonic perspectives (Chunoo & Torres, 2023; Hassell-Goodman et al., 2024; Mahoney, 2017). This approach

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

fosters a deeper understanding of how personal histories intersect with leadership practices (Hassell-Goodman et al., 2024).

However, a key challenge lies in how marginalized individuals navigate dominant assumptions about leadership and find ways to advocate for themselves and others within oppressive structures. Many are still in the process of reconciling their leadership identities with broader societal expectations that often fail to acknowledge their unique perspectives and contributions. Each individual's environment presents distinct constraints, making it difficult to reimagine leadership in ways that fully reflect their lived experiences (Hassell-Goodman et al., 2024). In this context, critical reflection becomes an essential tool for deconstructing and reshaping leadership narratives. Critical reflection involves deep self-examination beyond superficial evaluations of personal experiences and interactions across various contexts (Chunoo & Torres, 2023). This process is shaped by thoughtful recollection of life events through social and political lenses, allowing individuals to critically assess their positionality within leadership structures (Owen, 2016). When applied to leadership development, critical reflection encourages individuals to engage in social change, adopt new perspectives on learning, and distort their assumptions and beliefs about leadership within historical, political, and social contexts (Volpe White et al., 2019).

The ongoing struggle to assert leadership identities and challenge dominant narratives underscores the need for liberatory and transformational approaches to leadership (Hassell-Goodman et al, 2024). These approaches actively dismantle exclusionary norms and promote leadership identity development that recognize the value of diverse lived experiences. By centering marginalized voices, liberatory leadership encourages individuals to reclaim their agency, challenge systemic barriers, and redefine leadership in ways that are inclusive, equitable, and justice-oriented. Ultimately, counter-storytelling through critical reflection and liberatory leadership transform leadership identity development into a more inclusive and empowering practice in transitional contexts and create spaces for healing and solidarity, and inspire others to see leadership as an evolving, collective process rather than a static, hierarchical structure (Chunoo & Torres, 2023; Hassell-Goodman et al., 2024). By centering marginalized voices and recognizing leadership as a dynamic and participatory act, these practices help create a more just and equitable vision for leadership identity development in inter- and transnational contexts.

Developing Deep and Sustained Partnerships

Another way to cultivate leadership learning across cultures and contexts is to intentionally develop inter- and transnational partnerships. Since 2022, this article's author team has cultivated a Japan-U.S. partnership aimed at fostering more liberatory approaches to leadership development in higher education. This collaboration did not emerge from institutional agreements but rather from informal outreach and a shared commitment to being in community. The initial catalyst was Momo Waguri's participation in the International Leadership Association's Leadership Education Academy in 2022 where she learned of the text, *We Are the Leaders We've Been Waiting For: Women and Leadership Development in College* (Owen, 2020). The book's approach to student leadership development stood in stark contrast to prevailing narratives in Japanese universities, highlighting critical gaps in leadership education.

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

Moved by this perspective, Momo reached out to Julie with a request for permission to translate and publish the book in Japan. What began as an email exchange quickly evolved into a dynamic partnership, including colleagues from several universities in both Japan and the U.S., and especially supported by individuals like Aoi who have a multilingual, multinational perspective.

Our team delivered several online sessions tailored to Japanese audiences, including university faculty, staff, students, and professionals from business and nonprofit sectors. These sessions explored the "missing pieces" in dominant leadership education narratives. The partnership expanded to include organizing panel discussions for leadership educators in spaces such as the International Leadership Association's annual conferences. After two years of dedicated effort, the Japanese translation of We Are the Leaders We've Been Waiting For was published in 2024 (Waguri et al., 2024). The collaboration continues to evolve, with plans underway for a faculty and staff leadership education training program in Japan, along with an international leadership development initiative bringing together American and Japanese students.

What makes this partnership both deep and enduring is the deliberate cultivation of meaningful interpersonal relationships—an intentional practice of leadership driven by a shared commitment to making leadership education more just, equitable, and inclusive in both countries. Without formal institutional agreements or external funding, the partnership has been sustained by the process of actively engaging with one another for a positive change (Komives et al., 2013). The approach aligns with the "personal relationships" in the 10 cruxes of university-community partnerships outlined by Stewart and Alrutz (2012) and resonates with the guidance on cultural competence and collaborative engagement offered in the SOFAR community partnerships model (Bringle, et al., 2009). A truly deep and sustained partnership is nurtured through individuals' willingness and ability to foster an equitable and inclusive process. However, commitment and interpersonal skills alone are not sufficient for long-term sustainability. For partnerships to thrive over time, adequate resources and institutional support are also essential.

Cultivating Curiosity

In her essay "willing to be disturbed," Margaret Wheatley (2002) invites leaders to reflect on their willingness to have their ideas and beliefs challenged by others. She suggests that leaders cannot be effective changemakers unless they are willing to give up their certainties in life— such as their positions, beliefs, and explanations. This can be especially challenging in today's world where our positions and our personal identities are often inextricably intertwined. One strategy that both honors identity and cultivates openness is curiosity. As Wheatley (2002) notes, "We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes." (p. 2). Being curious and listening deeply to another person, especially with the goal of seeking connections, moves us closer while also deepening relationships. Wheatley (2002) suggests that "It's not differences that divide us. It's our judgments about each other that do. Curiosity and good listening bring us back together." (p. 3)

The idea that curiosity may be essential to cultivating inter- and transnational leadership development is echoed in Edgar and Peter Schein's books *Humble Inquiry* (2021) and *Humble Leadership* (2023). The authors define humble inquiry as "the fine art of drawing

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

someone out, of asking questions, to which you do not already know the answers, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person" (Shein & Schein, 2021, p. 2). This process may function especially well in international contexts in that it can circumvent cultural imperialism and stereotyping. Rather than evaluating all cultural differences from a lens of comparison (better or worse than one's own experiences), curiosity and humble inquiry invite a more expansive and relational connection,

The Scheins (2021; 2023) specify the skills and mindsets necessary to evolve from humble inquiry to humble leadership. They suggest leaders engage in deeper listening – to one's self (reflection), to others (empathy), and to better read the room (perceptiveness). Humble leaders need interpersonal skills such as active listening and mutual respect, seeking to elevate and help others, and valuing the whole person. They also need group-level skills such as better management of relationships and trust-building, design skills, and helping groups to become effective teams, and to develop shared commitments. Finally, humble leaders should cultivate specific mindsets that value: context over content; cultural heterogeneity; distributed power and shared responsibility; group sensemaking; reflection and learning; as well as adapting to complexity and perpetual change.

Adopting these mindsets is essential for inter- and transnational leadership development work. Valuing narratives and counter-narratives allows for deeper leadership identity development (Owen, 2023), the development of collaborative and sustained partnerships across cultures enhances efficacy for inter- and transnational leadership work, and cultivating curiosity allows for the expansion of leadership capacity beyond an essentialist individual checklist approach to allow for collective capacity building.

Conclusion

Despite the existence of many approaches and agendas for leadership learning and development, few aim to critique and decolonize these theories in order to promote more liberatory and transnational leadership learning and development in higher education. This article considered possibilities for centering the future of leadership development in equity, inclusion, and social justice. We also troubled the use of the terms global, international, and transnational in how they apply to partnerships and leadership learning. We end in a call for more liberatory leadership development. Table 1 offers questions to reflect on inter- and transnational dimensions of leadership development.

Table 1.
Reflective Questions for Inter- and Transnational Leadership Development

• If leadership identity is a form of identity, how have (or haven't) leadership educators from inter- and transnational contexts addressed issues of equity, power, and identity in leadership learning?
• If social identities are the product of environments which are undergirded by systems of power and oppression (Abes, Jones & Stewart, 2019) in what ways do eastern and western approaches to intersectionality, identity, and leadership vary?
• How might critical reflexivity practices, whether formal or informal, enable both students and leadership educators to deeply understand the ways their identities and values show up in the creation, facilitation, and assessment of leadership?
• How have recent advancements in the theorizing and practice of leadership identity development, such as the LLF and CRLL, placed concepts of power and identity at the center of leadership learning?

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

- What are key contributors to sustaining inter- and transnational partnerships?
- What enables and constrains socio-cultural conversations across differences in different contexts, especially cross-cultural contexts? What enables and constrains critical reflection? What enables and constrains humble inquiry and humble leadership (Schein & Schein, 2021; 2023).

[Adapted from Owen, J., Waguri, M., Izumitani, M., Kawai, T. & Yamanaka, A. (October, 2023). *Transnational Approaches to Women and Leadership Identity Development: A Japanese-US Partnership.* Presentation at the International Leadership Association Annual Meeting. Vancouver, Canada.]

As we work to develop more liberatory and decolonized approaches to leadership development, we recognize that it is not enough to merely deconstruct everything that came before; we must also find paths forward. For our author team, this involves positioning justice, equity, and inclusion as essential to inter- and transnational leadership development; seeking transnational approaches to leadership that de-center western views; and naming how leadership knowledge can be tied to liberation.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The authors claimed no conflict of interest to be cited here.

Funding
There is no funding to support this research.

Human Participants
The research involves no human participants; but the experiences/ narrations of the authors. All other necessary guidelines are observed.

Originality Note
This paper is the authors' original work and proper citations are used if others' works are included.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement
The authors claimed that there is "No Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies" in preparing this research.

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

References

Beatty, C. C., & Guthrie, K. L. (2021). *Operationalizing culturally relevant leadership learning.* Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Beatty, C. C., Irwin, L., Owen, J., Tapia-Fuselier, N., Guthrie, K., Cohen-Derr, E., Hassell-Goodman, S., Rocco, M., & Yamanaka, A. (2020). A call for centering social identities: Priority 1 of the national leadership education research agenda 2020-2025. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 14*(3), 39-44. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21719

Bertrand Jones, T., Guthrie, K. L., & Osteen, L. (2016). Critical domains of culturally relevant leadership learning: A call to trans-form leadership programs. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2016*(152), 9-21. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20205

Bringle, R. G., Clayton, P. H., & Price, M. (2009). Partnerships in service learning and civic engagement. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning & Civic Engagement, 1*(1), 1-20. https://libjournal.uncg.edu/prt/article/view/415

Chunoo, V. S., & Torres, M. (2023). Critical perspectives on leadership identity development. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2023*(178), 55-64. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20554

Davis, T., & Harrison, L. M. (2013). *Advancing social justice: Tools, pedagogies, and strategies to transform your campus*. Jossey-Bass.

Day, D. V., Harrison, M. M., & Halpin, S. M. (2009). *An integrative approach to leader development: Connecting adult development, identity, and expertise*. Routledge.

Dugan, J. P. (2018). Critical perspectives on capacity-building for international leadership. *New Directions for Student Leadership Series, 2018*(160), 31-39. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20308

Dugan, J. P. (2024). *Leadership theory: Cultivating critical perspectives* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Dugan, J. P., Kodama, C., Correia, B., & Associates. (2013). *Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership insight report: Leadership program delivery*. National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs. https://expandingleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/MSL-Insight-Report-Leadership-Program-Delivery-2013-1.pdf

Festinger, L. (1962). Cognitive dissonance. *Scientific American, 207*(4), 93-106. https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1062-93

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Fukuoka Women's University [FWU] Women's Leadership Center. (2021-2024). *Watashiwa ri-da-ni muitenai (I'm not cut out to be a leader)*. 私はリーダーに向いてない http://www.fwu.ac.jp/faculty/strength/cocurricular.html

Guthrie, K. L., & Devies, B. (2024). *Foundations of leadership: Principles, practice, and progress*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Guthrie, K. L., & Jenkins, D. M. (2018). *The role of leadership educators: Transforming learning*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Guthrie, K. L., & Jenkins, D. M. (2024). Shifting from education to learning: Leadership learning framework. *New Directions for Student Leadership Series, 2024*(183), 13-22. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20619

Guthrie, K. L., Beatty, C. C., & Wiborg, E. R. (2021). *Engaging in the leadership process: Identity, capacity, and efficacy for college students.* Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Hassell-Goodman, S., Yamanaka, A., Pender, K., & Kikhia, N. (2023). "Me! I am leadership!" Evolutions and disruptions by Black, Indigenous, and women of color. In T. Teig, B. Devies, & R. Shetty (Eds.), *Rooted and radiant: Women's narratives of leadership* (pp. 59-78). Information Age Publishing, Inc.

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

Hino, K. (2019). Are leadership theories Western-centric? Transcending cognitive differences between the East and the West. In R. E. Riggio (Ed.) *What's wrong with leadership?: Improving leadership research and practice* (pp. 138-149). Routledge.

Irwin, L. N., Reynolds, D. J., Bitton, A., Hassell-Goodman, S., Teig, T., & Fuselier, N. (2023). Insights from a critical qualitative inquiry in leadership scholarship. In S. R. Komives, & J. E. Owen (Eds.), *A research agenda for leadership learning and development through higher education* (pp. 255-272). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800887787.00025

Jacobsen, T. (2010). Riding a buffalo to cross a muddy field: Heuristic approaches to feminism in Cambodia. In M. Roces, & L. Edwards (Eds.), *Women's movements in Asia: Feminisms and transnational activism* (pp. 207-223). Routledge.

Johnson, M. R., & Soria, K. M. (2020). Deepening, broadening, and charting: Extending the reach and impact of evidence-based practices for leadership development. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2020*(168), 109-115. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20413

Komikawa, K. (2021). Where does career support and education in Japanese universities stand? Erosion by business, or a new form of university education? *Japan Labor Issues, 5*(28), 37-51. https://www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2021/028-05.pdf

Komives, S. R., Longerbeam, S. D., Owen, J. E., Mainella, F. C., & Osteen, L. (2006). A leadership identity development model: Applications from a grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(4), 401-418. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0048

Komives, S. R., Lucas, N., & McMahon, T. R. (2013). *Exploring leadership: For college students who want to make a difference* (3rd ed). Jossey-Bass.

Komives, S. R., Owen, J. E., Longerbeam, S. D., Mainella, F. C., & Osteen, L. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(6), 593-611. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0061

Leis, M., & Wormington, S. (March 03, 2025). 12 essential qualities of effective leadership. *Center for Creative Leadership*. https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/characteristics-good-leader

Liu, H. (2020). *Redeeming leadership: An anti-racist feminist intervention.* Bristol University Press.

Lyons, L. (2010). Transnational networks and localized campaigns: The women's movement in Singapore. In M. Roces, & L. Edwards (Eds.), *Women's movements in Asia: Feminisms and transnational activism* (pp. 75-89). Routledge.

Mahoney, A. D. (2017). Being at the heart of the matter: Culturally relevant leadership learning, emotions, and storytelling. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 11*(3), 55-60. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21546

National Association of Colleges & Employers [NACE]. (2024). Competencies for a career-ready workforce. https://www.naceweb.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2024/resources/nace-career-readiness-competencies-revised-apr-2024.pdf

Ospina, S., Foldy, E., El Hadidy, W., Dodge, J., Hofmann-Pinilla, A., & Su, C. (2012). Social change leadership as relational leadership. In M. Uhl-Bien, & S. Ospina (Eds.), *Advancing relational leadership research: A dialogue among perspectives* (pp. 255-302). Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Owen, J. E. (2016). Fostering critical reflection: Moving from a service to a social justice paradigm. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2016*(150), 37-48. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20169

Owen, J. E. (2020). *We are the leaders we've been waiting for: Women and leadership development in college*. Stylus Publishing, LLC. /Routledge.

Owen, J. E. (2023). Deepening leadership identity development. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2023*(178), 11-20. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20550

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

Owen, J. E., Hassell-Goodman, S., & Yamanaka, A. (2017). Culturally relevant leadership learning: Identity, capacity, and efficacy. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 11*(3), 48-54. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21545

Owen, J., Waguri, M., Izumitani, M., Kawai, T. & Yamanaka, A. (October 12-15, 2023). *Transnational approaches to women and leadership identity development: A Japanese-US partnership.* Panel Discussion at the 25th ILA Global Conference [Cultivating Leadership for a Thriving Future]. Vancouver, Canada. https://ilaglobalnetwork.org/events/25th-anniversary-global-conference-vancouver-2023/

Prakash, M. S., & Esteva Figueroa, G. (2008). *Escaping education: Living as learning within grassroots cultures* (2nd ed.). Peter Lang Publishing.

Roberts, D., & Yamanaka, A. (2023). International perspectives in leadership learning. In S. R. Komives, & J. E. Owen (Eds.), *A Research agenda for leadership learning and development through higher education* (pp. 59-181). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800887787.00013

Rocco, M. L., & Priest, K. L. (2023). Extending the scope of leadership identity development. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2023*(178), 107-117. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20559

Roces, M. (2010). Asian feminisms. Women's movements from the Asian perspective. In M. Roces, & L. Edwards (Eds.), *Women's movements in Asia: Feminisms and transnational activism* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.

Rouse, R. (2019). International, transnational, multinational, global. https://teaching.pitt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DIFD-2019-GlobalStudies-InternationalTransnationalMultinationalGlobal-May2019.pdf

Schein, E. H., & Schein, P. A. (2021). *Humble inquiry: The gentle art of asking instead of telling* (2nd ed.). Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Schein, E. H., & Schein, P. A. (2023). *Humble leadership: The power of relationships, openness, and trust* (2nd ed.). Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 23-44. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103

Stewart, T., & Alrutz. (2012). Meaningful relationships: Cruxes of university-community partnerships for sustainable and happy engagement. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship, 5*(1), 44-55. https://doi.org/10.54656/NYHZ8317

Taylor, K. B., & Reynolds, D. J. (2019). Dissonance. In E. S. Abes, S. R. Jones, & D-L, Stewart (Eds.), *Rethinking college student development theory using critical frameworks* (pp. 94-109). Routledge.

Teshigahara, M., & Isono, M. (2022). *Noryokuno ikidurasawo hogusu* (Untangling the meritocracy anxiety). Dokusha.

Volpe White, J. M., Guthrie, K. L., & Torres, M. (2019). *Thinking to transform: Reflection in leadership learning*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Waguri, M., Izumitani, M., & Kawai, T. (Translators). (2024). 女性とリーダーシップ とリダーシップ: 待ち望んでいたリーダーはわたしたち (*We are the Leaders We've Been Waiting For: Women and Leadership Development in College*) (2024). Nakanishiya Shuppan Publishing.

Wheatley, M. J. (2002). Willing to be disturbed. In M. J. Wheatly (Ed.), *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future* (pp. 34-39). Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Yamanaka, A., Hassell-Goodman, S., Athanasiou, J., & Arminio, J. (2024). The important role of distortion recognition in student advocacy leadership development. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2024*(182), 187-197. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20613

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

Dr. Julie E. Owen (she/her), is an Associate Professor of Leadership Studies in the School of Integrative Studies, George Mason University. Her research explores the intersections of leadership identity and women's adult development, as well as the scholarship of liberatory leadership teaching and learning.

Dr. Aoi Yamanaka (she/her), is an Associate Professor and Interim Associate Director of Undergraduate Programs in the School of Integrative Studies, George Mason University. Her current scholarship focuses on social justice issues in higher education, cultural leadership, socially just and inclusive learning and pedagogy, administrators' acculturation strategies to meet the needs of special populations in higher education, advocate archetypes, and campus community activism.

Dr. Momo Waguri (she/her), is an Associate Professor at the International College of Arts and Sciences at Fukuoka Women's University. She holds a Master's degree in International Comparative Education from Stanford University School of Education. Her current research focuses on liberatory leadership development approaches especially for women students living and learning away from the metropolis, where they are living in a more "conservative" culture.

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-08]

[DOI: 10.61882/johepal.6.2.6]

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) which allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.