Women's Leadership in Macau Education

澳门教育领域的女性领导力

Dennis P. McCann 丹宁思 interviews Ana Maria Correia 高安雅

The MRI Journal plans to feature interviews with academics, business leaders, and other professionals who are developing positive responses to the changes underway in Macau, Hong Kong, China, and SE Asia. The first of these interview is with Dr. Prof. Ana Correia, the Dean of the Faculty of Psychology and Education, at the University of St. Joseph. At the 2016 Symposium on "The Challenge of Moral Leadership," co-sponsored by the Macau Ricci Institute (MRI), November 3-4, Dr. Correia presented a paper on "Breaking the Glass Ceiling for Women in Macau." In our interview we discussed not only the problem of the "glass ceiling" as it is encountered in Macau, but also the challenge of making progress in the reform of Macau's educational institutions.

— Dennis P. McCann, Co-Editor, MRI Journal

Dennis P. McCann (DPM): Dr. Correia, tell us what drew you into this area of research?

Ana Maria Correia (AC): My research interests have always been related to social inequalities within education. Gender-linked inequalities formed a prominent part of it, either as related to women's access to leadership positions in schools or to the gender gap evident in outcomes reported for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) areas. Recently I have focused on inclusive education as I believe this is perhaps the most significant area where, as a researcher, I may be able to contribute to the effort toward making Macau society more compassionate and open to equal opportunities for all its people.

As a researcher I aim to contribute to social change. Research findings, if they do not impact peoples' lives, if they do not contribute to improving human relationships and wellbeing, are just intellectual exercises without sound social meaning. Knowledge should serve virtue, as the great thinkers from West and East taught us more than two thousand years ago. Hence, I always look at how I can help meliorate the lives of those who are excluded, if not given equal opportunities to succeed.

and Education at the University of St. Joseph in 2014, after earning my Ph.D. there in 2008, when it was still called the Inter-University Institute of Macau.

My dissertation was in Portuguese, with the title, "*Género, construção cultural do ensino e liderança feminina nas organizações escolares*" or in English, "*Gender, cultural construction of teaching and female leadership in school organizations*." As the title may suggest, my hope was to develop an overview of women's leadership

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As I have spent the last 30 years in a culture other than my own—I am Portuguese—cultural awareness and responsiveness emerged as another area of research interest. Macao is a rich society in terms of cultural encounters, and culture as a category of analysis must be present in whatever area of social research one pursues. There are two factors that impact research in Macau: one is culture, the other one is size. Though the opportunities for cultural exchange are great, Macau is only a small city with only 28 sq km in its jurisdiction which poses great challenges to researchers.

DPM: I think your statement about the nature of research and its practical impact is very important. While research clearly aims to be as objective as possible, and indispensable for understanding reality without wishful thinking, it should also be transformative. I've always thought about my research projects this way, and clearly that is consistent with the mission of the MRI, but how did you come to this understanding of research?

AC: My first degree was in philosophy and I taught philosophy for many years. I graduated from the Universidade Clássica de Lisboa (Classic University of Lisbon) in 1984, and taught philosophy with a concentration on ethics, which I continued to do after coming to Macau in 1987. I became the Dean of the Faculty of Psychology

in Macau's schools, and to identify the obstacles to women's advancement in them.

I learned a lot from doing that dissertation not just in terms of the research topic but also on the difficulties in gaining access to school principals. Firstly, almost all school principals were men, although they made only approximately one third of the school teaching staff; secondly, I found that very few female principals would engage in a conversation about gender issues. I had to change the focus of the research from women principals to women teachers holding middle management positions at schools, if I was to do the field work.

Several interviewees in the study did not recognise the relevance of gender issues in Macau society. Although Macau schools tend to have male principals, with the exception of the schools for girls only, the principals usually appoint their vice-principals from among female teachers. This practice gives an impression of shared authority with regard to gender, which is not true. The token female vice-principals are there to implement the decisions of the principals. Do they make a difference to the school while holding these functions? Yes, to some extent, but they do not have decision-making authority.

The experience during the years of my PhD research prompted me to shift the focus of my research interests away from leadership and gender to issues where educational reform might be achieved in a shorter period of time. I do not

think that exploring gender inequalities in the field of educational leadership is irrelevant. The glass ceiling in Macau's schools is real, and should be removed. However, there are other pertinent issues that need to be tackled without delay, issues that have a direct impact on students' learning and wellbeing. I found that if I wanted to help change Macau's schools, I should concentrate on other critical problems, such as the female students' avoidance of pursuing studies in scientific areas, cultural responsiveness, or inclusiveness.

reported by the literature are associated with the negative effects of stereotyping, limited access to professional networks and support, lack of mentors and role-models, attitudinal biases, and role conflicts related to work and family life. The latter are responsible for the lack of career ambition that is often attributed to women. During the 1980s research on the glass ceiling mainly investigated the underrepresentation of women in work organisations. As time passed and improvements have been achieved it has moved

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DPM: Tell me more about what you mean by the glass ceiling, and why you thought that breaking the glass ceiling might be the key to educational reform in Macau.

AC: "Glass ceiling" is by now a familiar metaphor initially used to describe the subtle barriers preventing women and minorities from climbing up to leadership positions in work organisations. As far as I know, in an article published in the Wall Street Journal in 1986, Hymowitz and Schellhardt, coined the term. It has since been adopted in various fields, educational leadership being one of them. There are associated metaphors, such as glass walls, sticky floors, glass escalators, and others, all of them referring to discriminatory practices related to gender segregation or other kinds of segregation within work organisations. If a certain position is reserved for just males or just females without sound justification, we may be in the presence of glass walls, as when a school only accepts males to the position of head of student affairs.

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into other kinds of gender imbalance beyond the share of leadership positions between males and females. In the present decade research has been focusing on more subtle and complex factors that have an impact on women's organisational roles, performance, commitment and expectations.

Understanding and challenging the glass ceiling in Macau is not the same as in other countries, especially in Western countries. In Macau we must reckon with the fact that more than 90% of the people here have been shaped by the Confucian cultural inheritance. In these cultures the self is built on family relationships. Individual identity is determined by gendered duties within the family. As a result, fulfilling the roles of daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers comes first. Although the prospect of developing a career might seem attractive, women will not risk neglecting responsibilities towards their family by accepting the high demands attached to a professional career. In my research several teachers reported their fear of not being able to accommodate both family expectations and the challenges attached to a career.

In sum, to understand the phenomenon of glass ceiling in Macau we need to understand that Chinese women do not value independence the same way as Western women value it. In Europe, if I have to be financially dependent on

my husband I will feel insecure and be unhappy and my self-esteem will go down. Chinese women have a different understanding. All members of the family share in the accomplishments of the male head of household. In a consumerist society such as Macau, middle and high class women enjoy the security and high status afforded by marrying well and are very proud of the bourgeois life provided by their husbands. Having a career is higher on the agenda for divorced or single women, or women who are not happy with their lot in life. Only rarely do we find women driven by a strong desire to pursue career goals.

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DPM: If I understand you correctly, you are saying that the glass ceiling in Macau is a reflection of the pervasive influence of Confucian tradition on both men and women here, 90 per cent of whom are of Chinese descent. But you have also identified the factor of the "Portuguese patriarchal society" whose influence has persisted even beyond the handover of Macau to China in 1999. How does the colonial legacy of Portugal continue to support the glass ceiling?

AC: Over a very long period of almost fifty years of right-wing dictatorship, Portugal lagged behind Europe and the rest of the developed world in economic and social development. Conservative laws and customs, with scarce respect for human rights, kept the country isolated from the outside world. Women were encouraged to confine themselves to the private sphere, and to restrict their duties and responsibilities to motherhood and household chores. This was made possible through the reinforcement of patriarchy. Of course patriarchy is not specific to Portugal, it is present in almost all societies. However, countries which have gone through right-wing dictatorships for long periods, such as Spain, Italy, and Brazil, have this ideology of male superiority deeply rooted in the culture and its social structure. Since Macao was administrated by Portugal until 1999, it is natural that Portuguese preconceptions about male superiority have become entrenched in Macau as well.

DPM: So the culture of machismo perpetuated by Portuguese colonialism blended well with the Confucian traditions that have shaped gender roles in Macau. But as soon as you mention the Portuguese colonial legacy, I can't help thinking—for better or for worse—of the influence of the Catholic church and its institutions in Macau. How do you see that playing out?

AC: When observing Catholic schools in Macao it is possible to trace their distinctiveness, which forms the foundation of their identity. The students experience belonging and attachment; the leaders and the teachers are committed and caring; the rituals and ceremonies are carried out ensuring that students are united as a community and guided into Catholic values and deeds, and are receiving an education that goes beyond mere training and instruction. Knowing that the majority of students, families and even teachers are non-Christians, the leaders must dialogue with the community and keep an open attitude to external influences. Without this effort to adjust to the social environment, Catholic schools would not survive in Macao, as they are basically immersed in a non-Catholic community.

This makes for a sharp contrast with Catholic schools in countries with large and solid Catholic communities, where they can rely on the clarity of faith parameters, practices and boundaries. The school is a bonding structure, providing a culture that serves to unite and protect the Catholic community from outside threats.

In Macau that was never the case. The strength of the Catholic schools must not rely solely on faith, because it is not faith that attracts families to the school. Families are instead attracted by the reputation of the school in terms of academic excellence and moral values. Therefore, schools must prove their academic excellence to survive. However, in so doing, they may become elitist and exclusionary. In Macao there are several Catholic schools that won't admit students with learning difficulties and students with disabilities, which is a paradox, because Catholic schools should be inherently inclusive. Schools must find a balance between the demands of the community and the requirements, for example, of Catholic social teaching (CST). This target is quite difficult to reach in some cases.

DPM: I'm beginning to understand why you've shifted your research focus from gender issues to their consequences for practical policy questions facing all the schools in Macau, like inclusive education. Perhaps we should now follow your development in that area, and learn how breaking the glass ceiling might create change there.

AC: There are schools (Catholic and non-Catholic) in Macau that are proactive in implementing inclusive education and others that are not. Research findings developed in countries such as UK and USA have concluded that women are more people oriented, more empathetic, and less competitive and ambitious than men. Therefore it might be possible that, if more women were in leadership positions in schools, these would become more inclusive.

What I mean by inclusive education is that schools would provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their social, religious, and ethnic differences as well as their individual differences in respect of physical, emotional and cognitive abilities. Schools in Macau need to improve their capacity to attend to the needs of diverse students and their families. There are many students with mild disabilities attending special education schools because they are not given an opportunity to be educated in regular schools. This problem needs to be addressed because it is causing suffering for many families and children.

The main obstacles preventing Macau schools from moving faster into true inclusion are related to management decisions. Elite schools are interested in attracting middle and upper class families whose goal is to prepare their sons and daughters for university studies overseas. The schools are afraid of not being able to live up to parents' expectations, if they choose to embrace students with special needs. They are afraid of becoming less appealing to the parents who have high academic expectations for their offspring. But instead of catering to these fears, they should try persuading parents of the educational benefits of inclusion to the high achieving students.

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Segregation, whether gender-related, ability-related, or ethnicity-related, among other kinds, implies discrimination and exclusion. Schools should not function as a laboratory where students are labelled and separated according to their ability or other arbitrary criteria, because students eventually must be integrated into a society where they should interact and respect all other human beings regardless of who they are or what they look like.

DPM: Of course, the challenge is how to transform the culture in Macau so that educational reform, specifically, measures to promote inclusiveness in

the schools can become a reality.

AC: I deeply believe in education. Educating entails a noble purpose, and is seldom seen as such nowadays. Not in public discourses, where we continue to pay lip service to it, but in practice. Nevertheless, teachers can contribute to social change like no one else. If governments truly recognise the value of education and provide adequate levels of support, teachers can work to establish less discriminatory and exclusionary practices. If we wish to tackle derogatory stereotypes, to fight erroneous preconceptions and superstitions, to make people aware of cultural practices that are disrespectful to women, children, minorities, or animals and are not acceptable in the 21st century, we need to rely on educators. I believe teacher education is the key to achieving equal access to opportunities for leadership, which in turn may be our best chance to establish a truly inclusive education for our students.

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Considering Macau at present, it would be very important to increase the number of women in decision-making positions. I am not saying that there are not women holding positions of authority in the field of education, but instead I am saying that they are isolated. Isolated women who gain entrance in professional environments dominated by men tend to imitate the prevalent male leadership styles, and they avoid everything that may highlight their gender to male colleagues. These female leaders tend to become "cogs in a machine" as a strategy for survival, and they will not likely implement relevant changes.

DPM: But how will preparing women for leadership roles in the school system actually lead to educational reform?

AC: There is a connection, of course, but it's not likely to become clear until we actually facilitate women's leadership development. One condition for facilitating the access of qualified women to leadership positions is family support. Having a supportive partner plays a difference in women's aspirations to develop a career. Young women graduating from universities are more than ever eager to find a meaningful work, not just temporary or part-time occupations as happened in their mothers' generation. The conflict they experience coping with competing obligations in work and family could be solved if boys from early on were educated to accept their share in household and caretaking responsibilities. Research findings repeatedly report an association between successful female leaders and family support.

The bottom line is that the perpetuation of glass ceilings does have harmful effects on organisations and societies. An organisation that prevents talented members from reaching top positions just because they are female is actually making poor decisions. If you can choose the best out of 100, why put aside half and choose only out of the remaining 50? Such thinking is not very clever. Evidence-based findings from the PEW Research Center in 2015 showed that women actually do better than men in several areas of politics and business. In politics they were shown to be better at working out compromises, being honest and ethical, working to improve the quality of life, and standing up for their beliefs. In business they were rated much higher than men in being honest and ethical, providing fair pay and benefits, and mentoring employees. They were considered less successful than men in negotiating profitable deals and being willing to take risks. However these two aspects are contingent to training and experience. The aspects

in which women proved weaker than men can be overcome with experience. Experience will help in gaining knowledge and confidence about negotiating and taking risks.

Organisations need both males and females because they complement each other. There are some kinds of organisations that may benefit from having a leadership more focused on so-called male characteristics, and others where females may be more suitable. However these are exceptional cases. In general, organisations benefit from having leaders who are flexible and able to adjust to the changing environment.

DPM: I think you make a very convincing case for breaking the glass ceiling and the sooner the better. But could you say a bit more about the struggle for educational reform, with inclusiveness as a major goal, in Macau? How are we to move forward? What is the solution?

AC: The solution? Well, it's not likely to come from families, so much idealised in CST's view of education. For the majority of people in Macau, the reality of family life is this: Women have outside jobs, they rely on helpers, and so the education of children is actually in the hands of helpers or in the schools. Here, as elsewhere, we have nuclear families with both parents working, or single parent families which means that children are not spending much time with their parents. Therefore, if any change is to occur it will have to occur in the schools, beginning with the training of teachers. Of course it is important to involve parents in the schools and their programs. But we know how difficult it is even now to get parents to go to school for meetings; it was difficult even in the old days when mothers could do it since they didn't have jobs. But parent-teacher organizations could be a resource for change, along with educational programs supported by the government.

So we need to educate teachers, invest in their training (which is where the government must provide support), and give them, among other things a proper and enlightened understanding of gender roles and children's development.

We must move into a less patriarchal system by starting with teachers and their education. Think for a moment what usually happens when school day ends. Girls are asked to water the plants, while the boys are left free to play. We need change precisely at that level. We must organise workshops where we can dialogue with teachers, in order to create courses and workshops on gender. We simply cannot leave the question of human development up to the families, who inevitably either pass on the gender identities that they learned from their parents and their cultural traditions, or leave it up to the helpers and the social media to form their children.

Besides, we must admit that parents don't usually see themselves as an educational resource. They know they are not educational professionals. They feel disempowered, as lacking skills in what their children need. They have values and convictions, but even these may be more part of the problem than part of the solution. Macau is a very materialistic society governed by consumerist values. The parents tend to have mistaken goals. What they think is best for their children may not actually be the best. For example, when it comes time to guide their adolescents into a university field, they will look only at what they think will be the most profitable career. They aim toward jobs that will bring more material advantages, driven by economic values.

DPM: But if the challenge is that deep and pervasive, why do you think teachers and administrators can make a difference?

AC: My reasons for being hopeful may seem strange. But here is one example. In Macau all students must wear uniforms, which do tend to offset the materialist culture from home. School uniforms are a great equalizer. Schools can play a role contributing to the transmission and formation of good values, more compassionate and more personable. At the core of the challenge of fostering good values is the problem of helping students to form wholesome attitudes toward their own gender identities and the acceptance of others who are different in various ways. Schools, and the quality of their moral leadership, can and

do play a positive role. I've seen it before. It can happen again. But we do have our work cut out for us.

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