

Chapter 14

Paola Del Zotto Ferrari: Building Change Makers in Underserved Settings

Paola Del Zotto Ferrari
Accademia di Gagliato Globale, Italy

ABSTRACT

Talent is universal; opportunity is not. Millions of children, especially girls, born in peripheral, disadvantaged settings lack the opportunities to develop their potential. Access to quality education, role models, mentoring, and economic support are necessary resources to aspire to knowledge-based careers and to social mobility. Unfortunately, such resources are out of reach for too many, both in the least developed countries and in underserved communities in the so-called developed world. Though part of the group of the seven richest countries in the world, Italy too counts many small rural and urban communities challenged by poverty of economic and education resources. Calabria is one of the poorest regions. Here, from 2008, a highly successful experiment of dissemination of frontier science to young children and the lay public has led to the creation of the Accademia di Gagliato Globale Model. Participatory activities between outside scientists and the local population have activated a movement of regeneration of the community and in support of the children's future.

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Paola Del Zotto Ferrari

Figure 1. Paola Del Zotto Ferrari, digital sketch based off a public image



NARRATIVE

We want to: Build. Forward (Not Back). Better.

How do we create a new generation of Better Builders?

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men and women to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea. (Saint-Exupéry, 1959).

Giving the imagination wings to fly is the first step toward yearning, and acting, for a better future. Flights of the imagination are an unaffordable luxury for too many children around the world, especially among the most socially and economic deprived or vulnerable ones, and especially of the “Covid-19 Generation.” If talent is universal, opportunity is not. The dreams of millions of children born in disadvantaged settings all over the world are systematically crushed by their inability to access education and mentoring opportunities. This is true for children born in the so-called “least developed countries,” but also for many born in the peripheries of developed ones. Italy is part of the G7 (i.e., the group of the seven world’s leading industrial nations), and still many villages and small communities in its poorest region, Calabria, are bypassed by quality education and access to resources that can promote social and economic mobility. This situation is penalizing not only the multitude of children whose aspirations are cut short, but also the world at large, deprived of the talent, creativity, and innovation quotient of young, brilliant minds (Alexander M. Bel, 2018). In 2005, Paola joined her husband Mauro Ferrari, a prominent nano-scientist (Cucuzza, 2012), on a few visits from the United States, where they live, to Calabria, Italy, where Mauro had been asked to assist a local university to set up their biomedical engineering department. Inspired by the raw beauty of the place and the generous hospitality of the people of this region, among the poorest in Europe, they decided to find a summer residence in the little village of Gagliato.

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