

SECTION II:

**Engaging Students and the Community
through Study Abroad, Service-Learning,
and Civic Engagement**

CHAPTER 7

“To Share With All:”

VIDA SCUDDER’S EDUCATIONAL WORK IN THE SETTLEMENTS

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Abstract: Vida Scudder, a progressive-era professor and activist, created community programs to share her intellectual inheritance. The first, College Extension, teaching “high” culture to immigrants, was ultimately unsuccessful and undoubtedly condescending. However, in the long-lasting, successful *Circolo Italo-Americano*, Italian immigrants and Americans met for debates, concerts, parties, and lectures. Italian newcomers and long-time Bostonians governed the group together. The *Circolo* fostered cross-cultural friendship and mutual learning.

In a speech during Smith College’s 25th anniversary celebration, alumna Vida Dutton Scudder championed the idea that college-level education or “intellectual privilege” should be available to everyone, uniting society instead of dividing it:

We can tolerate no fixed class of the intellectually privileged; we demand that our colleges and universities be in the truest sense centers of democracy, and that from them proceed ceaselessly influences seeking to share with all, the gifts which they impart.... Learning itself, alas, acts too often as a dividing rather than a uniting force, adding to all other distinctions that final, most inexorable distinction between the literate and illiterate. (as cited in McManus, 1999, p. 118)

When she made the speech, Scudder had spent two decades trying to make colleges “centers of democracy” and creating programs to “share with all” the gifts her Smith experience had given her. In this article I introduce Vida Dutton Scudder, describe and critique the educational programs she started at her settlement house, and use her experiences to suggest principles that may apply today. I rely on archival materials such as daily records from Denison House and letters Scudder wrote, as well as Scudder’s memoirs, novel, and articles. I have also consulted secondary materials from fields such as history and rhetoric.

Radical educator, tireless activist, and accomplished orator, Scudder (1861–1954) was a triple threat to the turn-of-the-century’s complacent elite. Scudder wrote of her life, “I was perpetually drawn in three directions at once, and racked in consequence” (Scudder, 1937, p.175). “The calm college world,” her first direction, provided her salary (Scudder, 1937, p. 175). Both in her Wellesley classroom and across the college campus, she emphasized social justice themes and taught women to be effective, committed citizens, agents of social change. In articles and speeches, she urged college-educated women to use their academic skills for the good of their communities. Her work linking academic study with settlement work created an historical antecedent for one innovative, currently popular way of connecting academia and community work: service learning.

Scudder’s second direction, “the tumultuous world of social reform,” claimed her attentions as much as teaching (Scudder, 1937, p. 175). In the first half of her life, she concentrated her energies on settlement houses—comprehensive neighborhood centers in urban ghettos, mostly staffed by college-educated, upper-middle-class women. She and her friends, calling themselves the College Settlement Association, founded some of the country’s first settlements. Scudder’s home settlement, Denison House, was in Boston’s South End. Although Scudder never lived there, remaining with her widowed mother, she helped run the settlement and many of its programs. Scudder’s experience working among the poor inspired her to become “ardently and definitely a socialist” (Scudder, 1937, p. 161). This radicalism eventually alienated her from her settlement colleagues. After leaving settlement work, she spent 42 years concentrating her activism within the Episcopal church, forming social justice organizations and arguing that socialism and Christianity were complementary. Finally, “in time jealously snatched from other matters” (1937, p. 180) Scudder produced a staggering number of books and magazine articles exhorting educated readers to work for an equitable society.

A well-known whirlwind of activity in her lifetime, Scudder now is usually relegated to footnotes. The only settlement worker to whom scholars devote detailed attention is Jane Addams. As for scholarship in education, Gerald Graff (1987) calls Scudder “one of the great neglected figures of English studies” (p. 335), yet only two articles about her in this context has appeared. In the theological

arena, being a socialist Anglican woman ensured Scudder's obscurity outside of the Episcopal Church during her life. For instance, the arguments in Scudder's (1912) *Socialism and character* parallel—but extend—those of her still-famous friend Walter Rauschenbusch. Scudder's unique theology, fortunately may now garner some attention because of Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty's 2006 book *Beyond the social maze: The theology of Vida Dutton Scudder* and Gary Dorrien's discussion in his ambitious series *The making of American liberal theology: Idealism, realism, and modernity 1900–1950*.

Each of Scudder's three paths merit study. Scudder and her colleagues created the most radical settlements in the country, publicly aligning themselves with labor and striving to combat public scorn or paternalism about poor immigrants. Her educational innovations include developing the first course about socialist themes in literature; linking classroom work with community work; soliciting student suggestions for topics; and the community ventures I discuss here. Both her theology itself and her strong influence within her denomination during her lifetime warrant the attention they are finally receiving.

Furthermore, Scudder's lifelong struggle to connect academia and activism offer inspiration for college instructors today who want to responsibly combine community work and scholarship. As historian Peter Frederick (1976) writes, "Her story reveals the often painful process of the professor who seeks to balance a professional obligation to the pursuit of learning with a personal commitment to social and political activism" (p. 115). Indeed, Scudder's troubles merging academics and activism parallel the perils facing contemporary academics committed to social change work. Scudder grappled with the challenging issues of the extent and basis of the elite's responsibility to improve society, of colleges' responsibilities to their communities and of relations between server and served. In a 1999 *College English* article, Ellen Cushman pointed out that many conceptualizations of the public intellectual envision a public composed of middle- to upper-middle-class policymakers, administrators, and professionals, not the local community. Citing a growing pressure for intellectuals to contribute to a more just social order, Cushman advocated a different kind of public intellectual: one who combines her research, teaching, and service efforts in order to address social issues important to community members and under-served neighborhoods. One hundred years before Cushman wrote her article, Scudder strove to exemplify Cushman's public intellectual.

Her learning curve was painful, though. As Cushman (1999) notes, public intellectuals "need to first understand that what they count as art and political choices does not necessarily match what community members count as art and political choices" (p. 334). Scudder's first venture, "College Extension," imposed her taste in art upon community members who eventually refused to accept it.

After a painful year of reflection about settlements' purposes and efficacy, Scudder changed course. She then formed the Circolo Italo-Americano (Circolo) with an Italian friend.

“ERADICATING A DISTINCTION”?

Settlements had come into being not primarily as sites for food distribution, day care, or emergency services but because of educated people's desires to share their intellectual riches with the poor. Early settlers truly believed that by “eradicating the distinction between the literate and the illiterate,” as Scudder put it in her Smith College speech, they could best set immigrants on the path to becoming the kinds of citizens settlers privileged. Stanton Coit patterned his Neighborhood Guild, the first American settlement, partly on Frederick Denison Maurice's Working Men's College in London (Davis, 1967). (Scudder and her mother both revered Maurice, a Christian Socialist clergyman in the 1850s.) Jane Addams and Ellen Starr began teaching and lecturing at Hull House as soon as it opened. Starr organized a group that read George Eliot, Dante, Browning, and Shakespeare; another settler started a Sunday Afternoon Plato Club to discuss philosophical questions (Davis, 1967). The University of Chicago offered college credit for the courses.

One program seen as successful at the time took place a mile away from Denison, in Boston's North End. Mrs. Quincy Agassiz Shaw established the Civic Service House in 1901 to promote civic and educational work among immigrants. Several of the staff had been involved in settlement activities as children, such as Meyer Bloomfield, who had attended classes at New York's University Settlement, and Philip Davis, a Russian immigrant whose love of learning started at Hull House. The men organized clubs and classes, helped immigrants learn English, and encouraged them to join trade unions.

In 1905 Frank Parsons, a Boston University law professor, started the Breadwinner's College at Civic Service House. It offered adult men courses in history, civics, economics, philosophy and psychology in which the works of James, Santayana, and Royce were discussed, taught by their own Harvard students. In addition to Parsons, Bloomfield, and Davis, instructors included Ralph Albertson, an itinerant reformer who had organized a failed Christian Commonwealth in Georgia, and Harvard and Boston University students, including Walter Lippman. Apparently the teachers liked to mix “a little radical social thought” with their explications of Longfellow and Emerson (Davis, 1967, p. 41). Breadwinner's College offered a diploma at the end of two years. Some graduates became government workers: a judge, a Department of Labor official, and an assistant attorney general. Parsons soon realized, however, that Breadwinner's students, no matter how enthusiastic and talented, graduated to face uncertain job prospects with no expert

guidance. Therefore, he developed a new field, vocational counseling, and wrote the first book on the topic (Davis, 1967).

“A Rare Opportunity”?

For the first ten years of Denison House’s existence, Scudder tried to impart “the joy and freedom of higher learning” through her College Extension program (College Settlements Association, 1896, p. 5) for immigrant “neighbors,” as settlement workers (“settlers”) called the ghetto residents living near their settlement houses. A woman could attend “to improve herself,” to experience “the pleasure of interesting studies,” and to find joy in poetry. Scudder offered seemingly practical courses as well (Scudder, 1895, n.p.). Students could take writing to learn to “write letters easily and correctly” and spelling because “bad spelling is a great disadvantage in practical life” (Scudder, 1895, n.p.). Because “American women ought to know something of the story of their land,” Scudder offered American history (Scudder, 1895, n.p.). Finally, she showed her political leanings, offering a course in trade unions: “What they have done, what they mean, what they want to do” (Scudder, 1895, n.p.). No homework for the courses was necessary.

Many of Scudder’s ambitions matched her goals for her Wellesley students as well as for Denison settlers, for whom she created reading lists and tried to start discussion groups. Scudder sought to expand students’ horizons by introducing them (in person or through literature) to members of other classes and races; to foster appreciation for certain authors; and, ultimately and most importantly, to transform everyone inwardly, producing a classless Christian society. During College Extension’s existence, she also had goals specific to poor, uneducated neighbors, often Irish: “to share our intellectual inheritance” (Scudder, 1902, p. 817). The word “our” encompassed settlers and other established Anglo-Saxon Americans, and “intellectual inheritance” meant the newly developing literary canon and other European works then seen as masterpieces.

In addition, she saw College Extension programs as a means to “interpret” different classes and nationalities to each other—to create an idealized version of what English professor Mary Louise Pratt (1991) calls “the contact zone,” “a social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (pp. 34–40). Immigrant students could interact with settlers and “meet” literary texts. Scudder herself tried to be the interpreter; she wrote articles in newspapers and the *Atlantic Monthly* detailing her experiences with immigrants.

In her autobiography and her settlement house novel, Scudder referred to immigrant women by their nationalities: a Russian Jewish woman, an Irish laundry worker (Scudder, 1937, p. 225). In her announcements for the programs, she assimilated them instantly by calling them American women. The difference

suggests that although she wanted the women to see themselves as Americans, she actually thought of them as representatives of their respective countries (Scudder, 1937).

Throughout the 1890s, College Extension offered similar courses yearly. Scudder taught some courses, introducing immigrant women to her beloved poets; settlers taught other classes, and undergraduates taught a few. Men could take courses, too, although Scudder's students seem to have been women only. Scudder reminisced in her autobiography that the future president of Smith College, William Allen Neilson, taught a Shakespeare course for men while a Harvard graduate student (Scudder, 1937). Another course, among whose students was labor leader Jack O'Sullivan (Carrell, 1981), was made up of, in Scudder's words, "labor men who wanted to understand what poetry had done for the labor movements and who hope to find in Burns and Shelley some refreshment from their hard practical work" (Scudder, 1895, n.p.). O'Sullivan's wife, labor activist Mary Kenney O'Sullivan, took a course on Dante (Scudder, 1895, n.p.). Another settler taught the proto-feminist "Women Worth Knowing" course, featuring, among others, Deborah, Cleopatra, Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (College Settlements Association, 1906, p. 35). Teachers and students met occasionally for evenings of talk, music, and readings (College Settlements Association, 1896, n.p.).

Theatre at Denison provided another way for settlers to teach immigrants about English masterworks. Men's dramatics clubs at Denison put on abridged versions of Shakespeare plays, with men playing the female parts. "Portia, by Jack Cronan, was a beautiful piece of work. The disguise was complete, and the lines were rendered with much expression and good judgment," one newspaper article reported (Converse, n.d. [b], n.p.). Hull House had similar programs. The Henry Street Settlement in New York, too, offered courses in art, music, and theatrical performance, often slated to promote social change. Its Neighborhood Playhouse Theatre put on innovative performances including an anti-lynching drama by the grandniece of the abolitionist Grimke sisters (Sharer, 2001).

Unfortunately, the only glimpse of what went on in classes comes from Scudder, not from students or even other teachers. The way Scudder and the other College Extension teachers described their students makes one wonder whether students found them respectful, patronizing, or an odd mix of the two. In her autobiography, Scudder never *overtly* condescended. "I grew to care in a special way for some of the working girls in my little classes. I shared my beloved poets with them in a manner quite different from those possible in college classes" she wrote, leaving one wondering what was different about her presentation and the students' responses at Denison (1937, p. 146). She also discussed immigrant students in different terms than she used for college women. The word "little" pops up often; the working girls in her "little classes" (Scudder, 1937, p. 146) read "a little Shelley,

and a little Wordsworth, and a little Tennyson, and a little Browning” and copied poems into a “little book” (College Settlements Association, 1896, p. 19).

When Scudder reported her adult students’ accomplishments she almost gloated, as if displaying diamonds in the rough that she and the other College Extension teachers had discovered:

The class in Poetry “couldn’t see why people think Browning hard.” The teacher of the class, having surreptitiously noted all the questions asked by a grave professor in a college graduate seminary [sic], put them to her working-girls, and triumphantly reported that they answered much better than the graduates. Indeed, the instinctive sense for poetry of these girls is remarkable (College Settlement Association, 1896, p. 19).

Here Scudder spoke in terms of her working students’ instincts, whereas when she discussed Wellesley students, she emphasized the students’ hard work, and her own. The distinction evokes a Romantic idea of the child as *tabula rasa*, keenly and intuitively perceptive. Interestingly, although here she focuses on the immigrant students and not her own pedagogy, when she discusses college teaching in her autobiography she made “avaunt” [boasted] of her own effectiveness and popularity (1937, p. 114). In the draft manuscript of the autobiography in the Smith College Archives, someone—perhaps Scudder herself, perhaps her companion, Florence Converse—has written on the margin of the teaching chapter, “Insert some humility—Balance—don’t purr!”

Scudder also used words like “unspoiled” when she spoke of immigrants, as if she thought them purer and closer to God because of their lack of education, like the Romantic concept of children: “The lack of training is compensated for to a certain degree by unspoiled intuitions, and a poetic sensitiveness in artistic and literary lines rare in more highly trained students. If you cannot turn out scholars, you can make happier women” (College Settlements Association, 1897, p. 20). Scudder loathed paternalism and condescension, but she never escaped it herself.

Yet Scudder’s own “[u]nconscious snobbism,” as Mina Carson put it, pales next to the lack of respect and the stereotyping of other settlers (1990, p. 104). A Wellesley alumna living at the settlement, Caroline Williamson (1895), wrote, “It was interesting to find that they had intelligent ideas on theme-writing and Shakespeare” (p. 237). Williamson expressed surprise that some of her students “showed a keenness of insight in literary interpretation and criticism which many a college student might envy” (p. 238). Williamson also felt guilty: “A bachelor of arts felt that she had not improved her opportunities, when she saw the avidity with which the girls who worked ten hours a day could seize a chance to study Ruskin, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, or Homer” (p. 238). Master stereotyper Florence Converse, running a dramatics club

for young men, reported that although she did not know whether “the Russian Jew, or the Italian, or the German, or the Syrian,” would thrive on dramatics, for “the Irish boy” Shakespeare was “the best text book,” teaching “English, and History, and Patriotism, and Courtesy” (Converse, n.d. [a], n.p.).

Whether College Extension was successful depends on how one defines success. Scudder barely mentioned the program in her memoirs, and never discussed why she stopped participating in it after 1901. The number of students taking classes, however, increased throughout the 1890s. In October 1894, College Extension offered a Shakespeare reading class on Wednesday evenings, two literature classes on Fridays, and lectures by Scudder on Saturday nights; by 1901, there were 10 classes and 109 students. In the 1895–1896 CSA Annual Report, Scudder wrote that the classes “were a great pleasure alike to teachers and scholars” (College Settlements Association, 1896, p. 15).

The next year, though, her report sounded disappointed. She even, atypically, disparaged her students: “You cannot make scholars out of people whose chief nerve force is given to manual work all day long. You must take them as they are, ignorant and immature” (College Settlements Association, 1897, p. 20). By the late 1890s, in fact, the College Extension program incurred criticism from within and without. Some other settlers thought it unrealistic to teach literature and art to people with such difficult lives, and neighbors themselves began requesting more skill-oriented classes (McManus, 1999). In Scudder’s 1903 novel *A Listener in Babel*, a caustic settler expressed Scudder’s own doubts about College Extension’s value to exploited workers:

The topics will be chosen with a view to the popular mind...I think the most valuable course will be on the History of Art. The class will be exposed alternately to photographs from the most dislocated of the old masters and to glaring chromos. Differences will be explained and tests of appreciation applied. Any expression of wandering thoughts will be severely reprimanded. Most of the class will be in a state of uncertainty concerning their food or shelter for tomorrow; some of them will have left hungry families at home. It will be a rare opportunity for them to practice concentration of mind and detachment from material things (Scudder, 1903, pp. 127–128).

In early 1901, Scudder collapsed from exhaustion and spent a year recuperating in Italy. While there, she wrote a series of articles for the *Atlantic Monthly* recounting her experiences fostering cross-class fellowship. They are a record of thoughts as she mulled over the failures and successes of her settlement work in light of her goals, exhorted her upper-class readers to value immigrants, and

tried half-heartedly to justify her former approach while searching for new ideas and approaches. In “Democracy and Education” (1902) she reflected on College Extension. It is disappointing, she wrote, that popular movements to bring “what education may be” to busy workers have not been totally successful. It is hard to get through to exhausted laborers, she continued. Lecturing is difficult because working people are tired out, and “all arts of delivery” are needed to “carry across the invisible leagues that separate the speaker and the hearers” (p. 818). Such talks, then, should only last an hour and be clear-cut, well-put, and interesting; the speaker must steer between “the Scylla of obscurity” and “the Charybdis of childishness” (p. 818). She should be vivid, pictorial, and emotional. “Be brief; be clear; be coherent. Be dignified; be pictorial; be impassioned,” Scudder exhorted. Even an excellent lecturer, though, will “reach two or three listeners” only (p. 819).

The lack of common ground posed one problem. “On what grounds shall we try to meet? It is painfully evident that uneducated people do not naturally like the same things as the children of privilege” (1902, p. 820). But while Scudder realized that people’s tastes depend on their class and education level, she still believed there were “wholesome, universal and enduring” works of art that all classes could enjoy (p. 820). For example, she reported that boys enjoyed Homer’s *Odyssey* and everyone liked Shakespeare. Of course, her own privileged class was the one making these determinations of universality—a point Scudder never acknowledged. She insisted that the uneducated, without guidance, liked “nothing good,” favoring “cheap music, vulgar chromos, and so on” (pp. 820–821).

Informal contact in settlements offered better chances for intellectual fellowship than lectures, Scudder concluded. When people spend time together, she wrote, there develops a “natural unity of consciousness” so that “intellectual fellowship between people of different traditions will probably crystallize” (1902, p. 820). Real change occurs not through improved educational systems or formal personal contact, but through “a genuine living of the common life” (p. 822). Then, “small groups, rarely numbering more than a dozen, will gather around some lover of art, history, literature, to share his delights” (p. 820). The “probably” and “will gather” hint that these hoped-for outcomes had not materialized at Denison by 1902; in fact, Scudder confessed, “we see as yet only faint beginnings of what we desire” (p. 820). Of course, that Scudder was writing to a distinctly non-radical audience, *Atlantic Monthly* readers. Rhetorically astute, she chose not to reveal her conviction that only through socialism would everyone would live the common life; she simply implied that under current conditions, truly educating immigrants was impossible.

When Scudder returned to the United States in 1902, longtime Denison resident Bertha Scripture had taken over College Extension. The Irish who lived near the settlement in its early years had moved to the suburbs, replaced by

Italians, Syrians, and Chinese (Corcoran, 1973). In 1903 an Educational Center had opened in South Boston that offered industrial classes. Consequently, College Extension attendance declined, though Scudder continued to offer literature courses (McManus, 1999). In 1904, she turned her attention to Boston's Italians.

Scudder's goals for College Extension sound unrealistically rosy. Yet community colleges, which educate 44 percent of the nation's postsecondary school adults, were originally founded in part on the principles that inspired Scudder to offer her program. The first community college opened in 1901—the same year that Scudder stepped down as head of Denison House's College Extension. The men who presided over the early community college movement saw their task as bringing "the blessings of expanded occupational opportunity to the people" (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 10). Humanities instruction, they felt, was vital. Before 1970, most community college students agreed. They shunned vocational education, preferring liberal arts courses that might earn them admission to four-year colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Community colleges, however, began to offer vocational training as well as liberal arts education soon after their founding. The leaders of the movement baldly stated a rationale that would have horrified Scudder though not surprised her. Despite its language to the contrary, these founders said the United States was actually class-stratified, a situation these leaders saw no reason to challenge. Offering community college students hope of a four-year degree when many would not make the grade would give students falsely high hopes, perhaps causing mass discontent. Vocational training, on the other hand, would not only give them marketable skills but also placate them. As James Russell, Dean of Teachers College, Columbia University, put it in 1908, "If the chief purpose of schooling be to promote social order and civic responsibility, how can we justify our practice of schooling the masses in precisely the same manner as we do those who are to be our leaders?" (as cited in Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 11). The conflict between the different tasks of the community college continues: on the one hand to provide students with a common cultural heritage and educate them to be thoughtful citizens, as Scudder hoped College Extension would do; on the other, to promote economic efficiency, keep the masses in their place, and respond to the demands of employers.

The Clemente Course, a present-day college-level course in the humanities for people living in poverty, is an even more direct analogue to College Extension, though much less prominent than community colleges. Earl Shorris, Clemente's founder, based it on Robert Maynard Hutchins' Great Books courses, which Shorris took at the University of Chicago. The Course teaches moral philosophy, literature, history, art, and writing—which the founders added when they realized that Clemente students panicked about writing. Clemente's Western cultural

canon-oriented curriculum makes it vulnerable to charges of cultural imperialism. Yet, Shorris developed and taught a Clemente course in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula using Mayan cultural works, and one in Alaska has been given using Eskimo texts and in an Eskimo language. In its first eight years Clemente enrolled 1,480 students. Approximately 900 completed the full course of study, 780 earned college credit, and 670 went to four-year colleges and universities (Bard College, 2004).

Shorris's argument for humanities' value to the poor focuses on systemic change as well as individual transformation. Substandard schooling cheats the poor because it gives the humanities short shrift, he argued. Students who study high culture intensively develop reflective thinking capacities; "the humanities teach us to think reflectively, to begin, to deal with the new as it occurs to us, to dare" (cited in O'Connell, 2000, p. 2). He acknowledged that reflective thinking and appreciation for high culture will not automatically transform a poor person's material circumstances: "How can a museum push poverty away? Who can dress in statues or eat the past? The answer was politics, not 'the moral life of downtown.' Only politics could overcome the tutelage of force. But to enter the public world, to practice the political life, the poor had first to learn to reflect" (Shorris, 1997, p. 336).

Shorris hopes that Clemente graduates will go on to challenge societal priorities that relegate poor people to substandard schooling and limited opportunities. However, I have found no information on what Clemente graduates have done post-course or post-college. Are they practicing the political life? We do not have that information—though we could get it, unlike our situation with Scudder's students.

CRITIQUES OF HUMANITIES TEACHING TO THE POOR

Sinclair Lewis parodied the educational fare in a fictional settlement as "lectures delivered gratis by earnest advocates of the single tax, trout fishing, exploring Tibet, pacifism, sea shell collecting, the eating of bran, and the geography of Charlemagne's Empire" (cited in Davis, 1967, p. 41). His parody exemplifies the most common argument against College Extension type courses: that they were impractical. Historian Allen Davis (1967) noted "an element of the unreal and esoteric about the early settlement workers' attempts to dispense the culture of the universities to workingmen" (p. 41). He concluded that most neighbors were uninterested in extension classes, instead wanting to learn "something useful, concrete, and related to their daily lives, such as manual training, homemaking, the English language, or basic American government and history" (p. 43). Jane Addams herself eventually declared, "[t]he number of those who like to read has been greatly over-estimated" (as cited in Davis, 1967, p. 49).

Even at the Breadwinner's College, with eager students who became successful, "the founders realized that many of their students had problems, such as unemployment or bad jobs, that no course in philosophy or ancient history could solve" (Davis, 1967, p. 53). Davis (1967) implied that Frank Parson's vocational counseling was more useful than his Breadwinner's College teaching. In an award-winning dissertation, Wendy Sharer (2001) repeated the non-practicality critique, writing that the early Hull House classes initially captured the interest of the local neighbors but could not sustain interest because they lacked direct connection to the lives of the immigrant workers.

Some College Extension courses, such as the one where Scudder dictated poetry to the students so they could work on their manual writing skills as they learned about literature, taught practical skills alongside mainstream cultural appreciation. Furthermore, Scudder's (1903) *Babel* parody shows she was aware of the critique. Still, she continued to believe, first, that if she picked the right authors, neighbors would derive the same aesthetic and spiritual benefits from literature that she did; and second, that high aesthetic pleasures were more important than material comforts. Both beliefs are hard to justify, especially since neighbors enjoyed entertainments of their own without the guidance of College Extension. As Ellen Cushman (1999) writes:

If public intellectuals hope to find and generate overlaps between aesthetics and politics, they need to first understand that what they count as art and political choices does not necessarily match what community members count as art and political choices. Because community members tend to esteem their own brand of knowledge more than popular forms of knowledge, they deepen the schism between universities and communities (p. 334).

Another argument against College Extension is that immigrants did not learn enough, or the right way, by just listening to lectures: "The need for beautiful things could be better satisfied by letting the people themselves create things rather than having them merely look and listen," Allen Davis argues (1967, pp. 48–49). When Scudder headed Denison's Italian Department, however, she created chances for immigrants to make and sell traditional Italian crafts. While Shorris' Clemente students do not create artwork, they do more than look and listen; they are required to study outside of class, write papers, and invest much time and energy on projects.

This commitment of energy, however, brings up another major difficulty of teaching humanities to poor adults. Scudder emphasized the exhaustion her students suffered, even concluding that their harsh living conditions made it impossible for her students to become "scholars" (College Settlements Association,

1896, p. 20). Articles about scholars in the Clemente Course highlight the many different pressures they face: long work hours, sick family members, lack of facility in English, AIDS. Some community college students face such pressures, some do not. It is interesting that other settlement education programs, such as those at Hull House, the University Settlement in New York City, and the Breadwinner's College, did produce some scholars, such as Philip Davis and Meyer Bloomfield (Davis, 1967).

A similar critique is that College Extension required, and Clemente requires, a level of sophistication even at the outset that many would-be participants do not have. As Davis (1967) wrote with stunning condescension, College Extension courses provided "intellectual stimulation for the 'transfigured few' in the neighborhood capable of abstract thought" (p. 43). Community colleges, on the other hand, seem to meet students at the students' own levels, offering basic humanities courses as well as more advanced ones.

In the second decade of Scudder's settlement involvement, she developed another program that she found more rewarding. The Italian-American Circle or the *Circolo Italo-Americano*, as she preferred calling it, was limited to a hundred chosen Italian and American members with intellectual interests. It held lectures, concerts, debates, and parties. Scudder and the group's Italian co-founder, Francesco Malgeri, aimed to educate Italians and Americans about the gifts the other nationality offered as well as to teach Italian immigrants their civic responsibilities in their new country. Scudder emphasized that she especially wanted Americans to appreciate the new immigrants' contributions. Scudder and Malgeri wrote newspaper articles about *Circolo* events for those who could not share in the experience.

In 1903 Scudder took Italian lessons from Francesco Malgeri, a recent immigrant. Pointing to her fascination to "a dead Italian," St. Catherine of Siena, Malgeri asked Scudder to turn her attention to live Italians in Boston, "neglected and sadly in need of fellowship" (Scudder, 1937, p. 253). Scudder agreed. She went on to spend ten years working with Boston's Italian immigrants, both as "La Bossa" (her term) of a group of hand-picked, educated Italian and Americans, the *Circolo Italo-Americano*, and as head of the Denison House Italian Department.

The Italian Department worked with poorer immigrants, providing sewing classes, women's and boys' clubs, relief assistance and visiting, and a circulating library. It ran both English classes for adults and Italian classes for children, so that they would not "lose the tongue of their own country as they acquire that of the new" (College Settlement Association, 1904, p. 33). As a newspaper article of the time noted, "Settlement workers have tried to repossess the young Americanized Italians of their Italian language, and to wake in them a pride in the literature and history of Italy" (Bouve, 1912, n.p.). Like the Labor Museum at Hull-House, the

Italian Department also encouraged immigrants' art and artisan work, organizing a Folk Handicraft Association. The settlement held a large exhibition of Italian painting and sculpture and helped skilled silversmiths and lace makers sell their work (Scudder, 1937).

In her autobiography, though, Scudder focused on the Circolo rather than the Italian Department, calling her Circolo experience "the most exciting, quickening, and fruitful social adventuring I have known" (1937, p. 254). She wrote, "I feel [the Circolo] enriched lives more than any other social activity in which I was ever engaged" (1937, p. 268). In a 1911 *Boston Transcript* (1911) article, she described one major benefit of Circolo activities: increased appreciation for diversity. "Americans scattered through the audience enjoy a unique opportunity to learn what new citizens are really thinking about our bewildering civilization" (1911, n.p.).

Run by both Scudder and Malgeri, the Circolo consisted of about a hundred members, mostly Italians, all either professionals or persons who would have had professional careers in Italy but had been "forced here into the industrial world" (Scudder, 1937, p. 257). The group planned "equal interchange of ideas and gifts" between the two cultures, although Scudder wanted to emphasize those of the Italians (Scudder, 1937, p. 257). The club language was Italian; Scudder (1937) poked fun at her own attempts to lead meetings despite an Italian friend's observation that she spoke Latin instead of Italian. In her memoirs she always referred to the group as the Circolo Italo-Americano, not "the Italian-American Circle." The "circle" image evokes unity and equality, and having the club's name in Italian and placing "Italian" before "American" in the name shows the group's emphasis on the immigrants' culture.

The Circolo held lectures, receptions uptown in American homes, spring and summer fests in the suburbs, "musicales," and many Columbus Day celebrations (Scudder, 1937, pp. 259–260). Scudder and the Circolo, at the request of the Italian Consul, even entertained the sailors on an Italian naval ship stationed in Boston Harbor (Denison House Daybook, n.d., n.p.). Sunday afternoon lecture concerts, open to the public, were particularly popular. Scudder (1937) explained, "[T]he hall was usually jammed. We planned for about half an hour of speaking, followed by music. Usually our speakers were Italian; we had no trouble in securing competent persons, who could talk on anything from hygiene to art" (pp. 260–261). Subjects included cultural highlights of Italy—the Coliseum and "Arte Immortale: Pompei"; late Victorian American icons such as Emerson, Lincoln, and Longfellow; criminal anthropology; and standard settlement house assimilationist topics such as "The American Concept of Home" and "Infectious Diseases" (Scudder, 1937, pp. 261–262).

According to Malgeri, inducing immigrants to assimilate required attention to their particular ethnic characteristics. For example, Malgeri stated that Italians

like lectures—although Scudder had found them unsuccessful when she tried them during College Extension:

Until you shall study your immigrants and adopt methods adapted to their status, their mentality, their ethical characteristics, do not ever hope to realize your dream of assimilation. The Italian for instance must be influenced through lectures, music, diversions. Our lecture-concerts have done more good than a thousand set scholastic classes and ten thousand missionary sermons (cited in Scudder, 1937, p. 262).

Another Circolo member, Dr. Luigi Verde, explained his view of the Circolo's *raison d'être*. An Italian immigrant, he wrote, arrives in the country ignorant of American languages, habits, and customs, without knowing anyone, and either falls in with "bad people" or remains isolated. But when he meets Americans through the Circolo, he begins to understand that he needs to know English, begins to feel affection for America, and becomes more inclined to obey the law—"and so prepares himself to become a worthy citizen" (as cited in Scudder, 1911, n.p.).

Scudder's own version of becoming a worthy citizen differed from others' versions. To some Italian immigrants, she noted, becoming Americanized was undesirable; it meant becoming "impertinent, and headstrong—and vulgar" (Scudder, 1937, p. 254). Meanwhile, as a scholar noted about New York City schools, industrial schools in tenement areas required immigrant students to recite a pledge evoking scary images of plant-like assimilated children: "We turn to our flags as a sunflower turns to the sun. Then we give our heads! And our hearts! To our country! One country, one language, one flag!" (Hendrickson, 2001, p. 102).

Scudder, in contrast, tried to Americanize immigrants according to her own vision of an ideal America, "an Apocalyptic vision" of "what the emergent people might become, when the glory and honor of many diverse nations should have entered through its gates and created its citizenship" (Scudder, 1937, p. 254). Although she used patriotic language when addressing certain audiences, America's actual condition saddened her. In 1904 she wrote a friend, "I...believe our society to be...permeated with injustice and selfishness. Our claim to offer equal opportunity to all is a lie. Our claim to be a Christian civilization is a lie. Our claim to be a land of liberty is a lie. The sooner we know it the better" (cited in Carrell, 1981, p. 333).

Scudder's ideal society transcended nationality; it combined "the best" of the values immigrants brought to the country with Scudder's own progressive, socialist values. She conceptualized assimilation as a two-way process, with "giving and taking on both sides" and a moral tinge: America should encompass a "right and wholesome fusion of the races" (Bouve, 1912, n.p.).

Free speech was an important component of her ideal America. Scudder and Malgeri tried to model democracy through Circolo discussions. She solicited questions for group discussion, as she did in her Wellesley classrooms. Scudder (1937) sought “genuine democratic contacts” (p. 256). To accomplish that, she explained, “I wanted our lecture platform...to welcome speakers of opposing views” (p. 262). In 1937, however, twenty-five years after she nearly had been dismissed from Wellesley because of her speech at the incendiary Lawrence Textile Strike, she wrote dryly that she no longer had illusions about “the free intellectual atmosphere which, as those days I fondly believed, existed in the U.S.A.” (p. 262).

Scudder (1937), without success, “tried to press on those people my own synthesis of a socialist and a Christian creed” (p. 264), and encouraged “a free field and no favor” (p. 265) during discussions. In fact, the Circolo Italo-Americano *was* a “contact zone,” in Pratt’s (1991) words, complete with clashing and grappling. When Italian immigrants arrived in Boston, they often identified most strongly with their own regions or towns, not as simply as “Italians.” They also held strong and divided political viewpoints about the Catholic Church and its clerics, socialism, anarchism. Circolo members came from different parts of Italy and different neighborhoods in Boston. As for politics, one particularly heated debate between socialists and anarchists ended when the police arrived with teargas.

Finally, during a Circolo debate between socialist and anarchist groups on “The Social Ideal of the Future,” angered anarchists stormed the speakers’ platform and plainclothes police resorted to tear gas. After that, Scudder (1937) recalled, the group avoided controversial topics (p. 266). Writing in 1937, scanning her experiences as she tried to understand Mussolini’s appeal, Scudder stereotyped Italians as fundamentally unable to handle unfettered expression: “We Americans... tried to encourage free speech. And it couldn’t be done—any more than it can be done in Italy today” (p. 265).

Besides lecture-concerts and debates, Scudder and Malgeri sought to educate through printing. Their monthly *Bollettino*, much of which Scudder wrote, included uplifting quotations, reports of meetings, plans for dramatic events, quotations from Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*, extracts from Mazzini, instructions to Italians about their civic duties, a “Decalogo” summarizing them, a translation of the “Declaration of Independence,” and a convenient digest of laws affecting immigrants (Scudder, 1937, p. 260).

Such Circolo pamphlets as “My Rights in the City of Boston” and “What America Can Give to the Italians” (McManus, 1999, p. 125) emphasized immigrants’ entitlements as well as their responsibilities. The leaflets led to the preparation of *a Civic Reader or Handbook for New Americans* used for night courses in Boston. Scudder wrote a chapter called “Our Country” (Corcoran, 1973, p. 149).

One year, Scudder and Malgeri asked Circolo members what they wanted to discuss. She reported many, though perhaps not all, of the responses, ranging from “Deportation: How to Handle It” to “Why in America are Fearfully Multiplied Drunken Men and Women, Churches, and Prisons?” The questions she enjoyed most, in keeping with her own socialist orientation, included “Are American Trusts Preparing the Way for Collectivism?” and “Dogma the Enemy of Freedom” (Scudder, 1937, pp. 263–264). This attempt to involve all group members seems less autocratic than other group activities run by Scudder and Malgeri.

As with her College Extension students, Scudder essentialized her “good Italian friends” in print. She seems to have realized this; at the beginning of the autobiography chapter about the Circolo, she observes, “You could neither idealize the Italians, nor generalize about them” (Scudder, 1937, p. 255). Yet the rest of the chapter continues typecasting them: they had indefinable qualities, perhaps such as can be possessed only by an ancient race,” including courtesy and loyalty (p. 256). To be charitable, perhaps one reasons she stereotyped Italians was to convince xenophobic Yankees that they were good to have around. In newspaper and magazine articles, Scudder explained that Italians can be worthy new citizens, with “great gift[s]” to bring ‘to our race’: their background gives them imagination and enthusiasm, they have natural social gifts, and they are natural orators and artists” (Bouve, 1912, n.p.). The most egregious example of stereotyping boosterism is an anonymous call for settlement volunteers the *Smith College Settlement News* in 1910: “Seeking volunteer worker/resident at Denison to work with Italians—the eager, impetuous, intelligent, responsive Latins from the Sunny South.”

Partially aware of her typecasting by 1937, Scudder strove to portray the Circolo as nonhierarchical, involving “equal interchange of ideas and gifts” between Italians and Americans” (p. 259). Yet even in this autobiography she listed a set of unique characteristics she thought Italians possessed—mostly good ones. She also makes it clear she relished her own role as “Presidentessa,” or her “pet name, ‘La Bossa,’” of the Circolo and proudly cited—in untranslated Italian—a poem written for her (p. 253).

CRITIQUES OF THE CIRCOLO ITALO-AMERICANO

Scholars have interpreted Scudder’s experiences with both College Extension and the Circolo according to the scholars’ own historical circumstances and historiographical frameworks. For example, in 1967, Allen Davis charged that Scudder “quickly gave up the idea of reaching the Italian peasant” when she organized the Circolo (p. 89). But Davis’ book was focused on settlers’ efforts to curb urban poverty; he showed less interest in other aspects of settlement work,

such as settlers and “neighbors” engagement in mutually beneficial activities such as parties. Writing from a postcolonialist perspective in 1989, Rivka Shpak-Lissak argued that Jane Addams sought to “disarm workers of their class-consciousness and hostility through personal contact, social services, and cultural indoctrination” (pp. 22–23). Pacification accomplished, Addams could “inculcate them with the proper ideas, sentiments, and norms of behavior that the settlement workers considered indispensable for the unification of the social organism and the restoration of social harmony” (p. 37).

Some scholars, such as Shpak-Lissak, see settlements less as beneficent ventures than as attempts to control a huge influx of immigrants through rapid acculturation with upper-middle-class norms at the expense of immigrants’ own culture, ethnic identity, and language. None of these “social control” scholars have examined the Circolo—or, indeed, any Denison House programs. If they did, they might view the Circolo as a more mutually beneficial, less paternalistic venture than College Extension. Yet Scudder and Malgeri’s emphases on influence and assimilation would surely perturb them. In addition, although some Circolo activities, such as debates, involved audience participation, some did not. Instead of a group of people of different nationalities creating knowledge together, “experts”—whether Italian or American—dispensed knowledge to listeners. Also, as mentioned above, despite her self-confessed poor command of Italian at the beginning of the enterprise, Scudder ran the show; she even proudly recalled that her Circolo title was “Presidentessa,” or her “pet name, ‘La Bossa’” (1937, p. 253).

Why was the Circolo a success when College Extension was ultimately, not? I suggest several reasons. First, paradoxically, it is easier for people to learn when they already have some education. Circolo participants were professionals in the United States or had been in Italy. Community colleges offer many developmental courses to prepare students for “college-level” work, and many educationally prepared students attend two-year colleges to save money, then transfer to four-year schools. College Extension students, on the other hand, had no educational base from which to work.

Scudder discovered that poor immigrant students’ extreme poverty posed a formidable barrier to their learning. As a character in Scudder’s (1903) settlement novel reflects, “[i]t isn’t easy to care much about beauty and all, when you’re hungry” (p. 231). Most community college students are probably not living in extreme poverty, though many work full-time while they attend school. Although Clemente students are impoverished, the program differs from College Extension in several important ways: the students make an intensive, multi-year commitment, and they have an incentive: the opportunity to obtain a free degree from a prestigious college when they finish Clemente.

Incentives are important. Scudder's experiences with both programs highlight the fact that people need tangible reasons to expend the time and effort to learn difficult new things. For Scudder's College Extension students, studying the humanities had little point. Scudder claimed that classes in spelling and writing did yield practical advantages, but she never offered examples of such advantages, either in her announcements to prospective students or in her memoirs.

The Circolo, on the other hand, *did* aid its members tangibly. The companionship made members feel more at home in their new country; practicing English and making new friends among American professionals helped this handpicked group of the Italian intelligentsia; lectures and pamphlets educated them in concrete subjects, such as the benefits and responsibilities of being new citizens, that directly affected their lives.

The disparities between Scudder's relative failure with College Extension and success with Circolo shows that the best learning and most enjoyable experiences come when everyone learns from each other, not when one side does the teaching and the other the learning. In College Extension, Scudder taught and the students learned. In her discussion of the Circolo, in contrast, the language of "teacher" and "student" never appears—yet everyone learned.

During the United States' current obsessive conversations about immigration, few have mentioned benefits that immigrants can offer besides cheap labor. Are the culture and customs of citizens of Mexico and Central America, for example, worthless? Scudder would insist that these new immigrants have much to give and that together citizens and newcomers can create new knowledge.

One basic tenet of current-day service-learning is that such reciprocity makes for the best service-learning experiences. In fact, the term "service" in "service-learning" has drawn criticism for the inequality it implies between server and served—a criticism Scudder (1937) anticipated when she wrote, "Sharing' is a noble and democratic word, when it does not degenerate into cant. Between that and 'serving' there was a line...for the term 'Service' carries a possibly implied condescension" (p. 138). In its mutuality, the Circolo approached Scudder's ideal of a post-revolution world when classes would disappear and ethnicity, and gender no longer divide.

A NECESSARY WRECK?

Scudder's own conclusion based on her settlement work was that settlements' effectiveness was minimal; the country needed (her) new paradigm, not earnest social workers:

the inadequacy of settlements was becoming clearer and clearer... social services...were, as they are yet, a magnificent and paradoxical spectacle of compunction, compassion, wisdom, trying valiantly to

retrieve the wrecks of civilization, while often not pausing to demand whether such wreck had been necessary (Scudder, 1937, p. 164).

In other words, Scudder realized that the entire settlement enterprise, including its various educational programs, could “amount to precious little” in a country dependent on social stratification, (p. 160). Nor has much changed in one hundred years. We value immigrants for their cheap labor and show little interest in welcoming them, much less learning from them. Immigrants and other members of the “masses” often attend execrable schools and then are ridiculed for failing to learn. Whether or not we come to Scudder’s conclusion that socialism is the answer, Scudder’s experiences suggest that scattered programs such as the Circolo or Clemente, however enriching they may be for their participants, can do little to lessen the overwhelming inequities in American education.

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