

J.R. KIDD: AN INTERNATIONAL LEGACY OF LEARNING

Nancy Joan Cochrane and Associates

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In Canada, as elsewhere, we like--indeed, some feel compelled--to celebrate, venerate, and even worship our national heroes. Of course there are many reasons for this, foremost among which we might include pride and purpose. We feel honoured that there are such individuals among us--and somewhat like us--who can triumph in their fields of endeavour. They also serve as symbols of that to which we might also aspire and emulate. And finally, they serve to dramatize many of those values so dearly held by us--notably "decency," "compassion," "generosity," and "dogged determination." Witness in recent years Terry Fox, Steve Fonyo, and most recently, Rick Hansen. And witness the continuing interest in Dr. Norman Bethune, a hero to the Chinese, and increasingly to Canadians, and whose cinematic biography will soon hit the silver screen.

Nancy Cochrane (author and editor), in *J.R. Kidd*, tries to make her contribution to Canadian myth-making. She offers us a "scholarly" glimpse into the life and triumphs of a genuinely and undeniably heroic Canadian--and adult educator to boot--Dr. James Robbins (Roby) Kidd (1915-1982). Truly, as Cochrane and her sixteen Associate authors point out, Roby Kidd passionately and tirelessly worked and re-worked the field of adult education, at home and abroad. His impact was significant; his accomplishments legion. He was a missionary for adult education. The route to world-wide peace, and to social, economic, political, and cultural justice and development, he believed, lay through a commitment to continuous, lifelong learning. To his credit, Kidd was perhaps the prime mover in establishing adult education as a professional practice and as a university discipline, in India and the Caribbean, as well as in Canada. He also organized, in 1973, the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE). Cochrane, then, can be congratulated for her attempt to review Roby's life and career.

J.R. Kidd, sadly, is only half baked and undigested. Cochrane's admirable thirteen chapter collection of anecdotes, tributes, and recollections--commissioned from Kidd's sisters, close friends, colleagues, and students--display their obvious love, respect, and admiration, and lend insight and significance to the impact of his contributions. Nevertheless, they are uneven (alright considering the sources). Worse, they are repetitious and are used uncritically and without expansion or explanation by Cochrane as evidence for her "assessment of Roby's impact upon the field of adult education."

Cochrane describes her work as an "oral history." There are two parts. First is the thirteen chapter collection. Second is her summary and analysis of data from questionnaires and personal interviews of 82 friends and former associates. Her objective was "to obtain a historical, biographical, and analytical review of Roby's work that pertained to the following themes: organization development, scope of contribution, adult learning theory, adult education practice, major aims and goals, cross-cultural approach, personal qualities/character, personal influence/impact, and overall contribution."

Unfortunately, she falls far short of her objectives. She inappropriately and dubiously mixes historical and social scientific research methods and writing styles. For one thing, she claims to have based her research methodology and analysis on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach. There is no grounded theory building here. She admittedly pre-determined her major themes--in direct contravention of grounded theory's major purpose. Further, she neither analyzes nor synthesizes her evidence in any comprehensive fashion. She focuses solely on opinion, without corroborating evidence or without reference to relevant social, economic, or political contexts in Canada and India. Readers are left to make their own inferences about the hows and whys of Roby's work, drawing together what facts and opinion they can from the thirteen independent accounts. Cochrane's collection of opinions adds little. At best, she offers comparisons of opinions (that border on gushing praise) by his Canadian and Indian associates. Such opinions serve to support her contention of Roby's impact on the field and his esteemed status. Finally a quibble about citation style. It is quite irritating to read quote after quote, each followed in APA style by last name, "personal communication," and year--especially when there is no reference list, and thus no first names that could be traced in future research.

Surely, Roby and his life's work deserve better. This significant piece of Canadian and educational history is surely more worthy than the golly-gee-wiz--he was so great! (and so maybe are we)--approach as commissioned by Cochrane. Let's more dispassionately discover and explain Roby, his life, his approach, and his accomplishments. And let's tie it in closely to the rest of his and our world.

Finally, should you buy this book? Perhaps, but remember, caveat emptor. It is not all that it promises, but, as they say, it's all there is.

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