



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

On the History of the Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry (CCFI)

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Dear Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration,

I am following up on the Dean's invitation to formally participate in the Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration's review process. I appreciate the opportunity to have formal input, conversation, and a response. Many of us continue to ask: for what problem is the "Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration" a solution?

One initial observation is that the use of "cross-border collaboration" as a new concept, instead of the problematic "cross-faculty inquiry," in the Faculty of Education signals an avoidance of confusing the Working Group on CBC with the Working Group for CCFI. Thankfully, an analysis and serious discussion of CCFI are *squarely* within the Dean's purpose for the Working Group and its members: "The Working Group is asked to undertake an analysis of what is happening already here and elsewhere so as to imagine infrastructure and governance models that might enable cross-border cooperation and collaboration." Indeed, "what is happening" with units in place that failed to deliver on "cross-faculty inquiry" and by implication "cross-border collaboration"?— is *the* question to ask. Hence, my input here focuses on CCFI as a failed innovation (a unit that did not meet its mandate and a plan that simply won't work for historical and current reasons).

I offer a few relevant facts on the history of the CSCI and CCFI followed by an analysis of current problems and scenarios:

The Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction (CSCI) was established as a product of a report submitted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in June 1975. The NWREL report, headed up by Arliss L. Roadin & James R. Sanders in Portland along with Blaine R. Worthen in Tennessee, was commissioned by UBC's Faculty of Education in 1974 to provide direction in curriculum and instruction. Within "A Design for Program Development in Curriculum and Instruction" are specific recommendations for CSCI and its concomitant graduate program. Ted Aoki was appointed the first Coordinator of CSCI, beginning 1 July 1976. Extremely influential in curriculum theory to this day, Ted directed the Centre until 30 June 1978, when he left to Chair the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta.

Through the 1980s, CSCI's "General Curriculum and Instruction" Ed.D. included fifteen specializations, and was the de facto unit for doctoral degrees in curriculum (including language education). By 1993, at the height of the Ed.D. era in the Faculty, a student could choose among 11 Ed.D. programs with 21 different specializations. The Curriculum and Instruction Ph.D. was introduced in 1992. The Ph.D. became more restrictive for

specialization, but was preferable. CSCI was immediately called into question as redundant once the Department of Curriculum Studies (CUST) was formed as the aggregate of a number of units in 1994. On the surface, intellectual differences between CSCI and CUST appeared minimal. As co-Directors John Willinsky and Hillel Goelman acknowledged in 1994, “the emphasis in C&I [and CSCI] has been on what might be better termed Curriculum Studies” (p. 3). And once the Ph.D.s in Language Education and Curriculum Studies were approved in 1994 and 1995, the CSCI Ph.D. became redundant as well. Note that both unit and degree became redundant in the mid 1990s.

Distinction from CUST dissolved through the final days of CSCI, and under the leadership of Karen Meyer the Centre was pressed to establish a unique identity. She described the mandate as follows: “the Centre is committed to inquiry into pedagogy as it is lived with the purpose of deepening understandings and re-imagining curriculum and pedagogical practices” (Meyer, 2003, p. 21). But if CUST's mandate reiterated the Department of Curriculum's (Dept. in the 1960s, predating CSCI) mandate of teacher education *and* graduate work in curriculum studies, then in effect, CSCI was redundant.

An observation made by Dean Tierney in 2002 was that the perception of CSCI among the Faculty was that it was “an enclave that competes with departments for resources” and “a unit that overlaps in ways that might be viewed as duplication rather than intermeshed, complementary or supplemental.” These observations made by the Dean were reflective of trends that developed throughout the mid to late 1990s. For example, in 1997, the Department of Educational Studies communicated to Dean Sheehan that plans at the time for CSCI reinforced it as “a well-resourced Faculty superstructure with all of the autonomy of a Department and none of the accountability.” Following this nonetheless came a high point of reform, an exciting process in which I was an active participant. Karen was outstanding as Director, but with momentum CSCI rivaled or exceeded two of the Department's and a School's graduate course FTE and students. For certain, there will always be something unworkable when a centre or service unit, which technically has only one faculty member, rivals or exceeds some Departments or Schools in FTE or graduate students (at this moment, the CCFI's graduate FTE is nearly that of the Department of Language and Literacy Education, but it operates with 1 Faculty member).

For historical reasons and those echoed by Dean Tierney, on 12 June 2002 the CSCI Futures Committee led by Jean Barman recommended restructuring the Centre by curtailing enrollments, effectively a recommendation to close the Centre as it stood (recall that this committee actually included Karen as a member). Dean Tierney briefly closed admissions but then for some reason reversed the decision. Associate Dean Deborah Butler was appointed to implement an administrative plan for “cross-faculty inquiry” qua CCFI within the Faculty. In 2003, a partially scaled down CSCI was converted into a “Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry in Education” (CCFI). But the new plan for “cross-faculty inquiry” never materialized, and nor will it materialize. Since the reversal of the decision, students were nonetheless admitted, and continue to be admitted, into the CCFI's M.Ed., M.A., and Ph.D. (albeit with a cap) programs, new courses are designed and offered, and new “cross-faculty” or “cross-border” programs may be planned as if nothing had ever happened or as if the Centre actually succeeded. Now, back to the future, Departments may have to justify

programs in context of another administrative plan for CCFI, “cross-faculty inquiry” or “cross-border collaboration.”

Since 2002, the Faculty has not entertained a single open discussion of the CCFI. First, questions of its redundancy were off limits when Associate Dean Deborah Butler revived the unit as CCFI in 2003 and 2004. Very few liked the name (what in the world of scholarship and careers is “cross faculty inquiry”?) or the administrative plan for reviving a Centre of centres. Who could argue with the Associate Dean and Dean? Second, questions of CCFI’s maintenance were off limits when senior faculty member Graeme Chalmers was appointed Director in 2005 and remained through the summer of 2007. Who wanted to argue with Graeme at the end of his career? Third, given the history and revival, many of us were surprised when we were not given pause to discuss the unit’s purpose and utility in the Faculty prior to the search for a new Director initiated in the spring of 2007. Prior to searching and upon Graeme’s announcement that he was retiring, this would have been the perfect time for again taking into account the voices and mandate of the majority of FT faculty members. So here we are again. The Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration offers prospects to call into question, once again, the seemingly automatic maintenance of a unit that, on its own administrative mandate, has failed. One conclusion to be made is that neither the innovation of the unit nor the administrative plan that underwrote it was a good idea.

That is the short history of how the CSCI became redundant and subsequent repurposing of the unit as the CCFI. What follows is an analysis of current problems and scenarios: Again, for what problem is the “Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration” a solution?

Obviously, administrative plans and units designated for “cross-border collaboration” or “cross-faculty inquiry” are failing. Otherwise, there would be no need for a Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration— especially given that the DAC (and the DAC-S) maintain their charge to address, in an integrated way, everything else in the Working Group’s Terms of Reference: “undergraduate programs, graduate programs, and research, and with special reference to the creation of robust decision-making bodies, governance issues, oversight structures, process issues, and leadership.” So this Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration really needs to be, among other accountabilities and responsibilities to faculty members, a Working Group *on* (not for) CCFI.

One is tempted toward a second conclusion that there are five very basic things wrong with the Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry in Education— the word “Centre,” the word “Cross,” the word “Faculty,” the word “Inquiry” and the hyphen in the middle (to paraphrase Latour). Somehow, post 2002 there has been established a fiction or myth that a/cross-faculty inquiry, programs, collaboration, etc. are undoable or inoperative without a large mediating structure called CCFI. There is something wrong where on one hand manifests a failed “Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry” within the Faculty, and on the other hand are many examples of robust models of interdisciplinary graduate and research programs within the Departments that do perfectly well without the mediation of CCFI. And, with its plan and mandate of “cross-faculty *inquiry*,” etc., CCFI is no more a “centre for inquiry” or “research centre” (see Faculty list of research centres) than is any Department or School within the Faculty a “research centre.”

One of the reasons underwriting a lack of support is that many FT faculty members learned and continue to learn that the work we do for the CCFI as Supervisors, Instructors, and etc. will always be used as a defense of the CCFI. Hence, I, and many of our colleagues, have opted out of the unit for various reasons. To my knowledge, no one in the School of HKIN participates in CCFI, perhaps for similar reasons. When I co-designed and taught a CCFI course (EDCI 601) in Winter 1, 2004, ironically there were no students from the unit enrolled. It was unclear how this constituted “cross-faculty inquiry,” but it was still tallied up as such. Eventually, many of us realize/d how backwards things were— the Departments were and continue to be in the service of CCFI rather than the other way around.

Given basic evaluative criteria, or its mandate, CCFI is a failed innovation. With five+ years to fulfill the administrative plan for “cross-faculty inquiry” (programs, research, space, etc.), there is little that is “cross-faculty” or “cross-border” in CCFI to speak of, except for a small group of faculty members from the Departments who teach a CCFI course or two (*this last criterion is equally met by faculty members teaching cross-departmentally).

The reason that “cross-faculty inquiry” never materialized and failed in the CCFI is in the redundancy of the unit, and not because *we* failed to put the right person in the Director’s position or the right Plan, Budget, or Network in place, or because the Dean capped Ph.D. admissions once the admissions decision was reversed. Nor is it the operating budget, revenue, space, staff lines, and students, etc. that could be going to the Departments at this point at issue. Given redundancy and a caveat that faculty members’ confidence in the unit eroded, plans for “cross-faculty inquiry” and “cross-border collaboration” simply won’t materialize in the near future. Since it did not happen in 5+ years as planned, evidently one option to now pursue is to administrate by imposing “cross-faculty inquiry” or “cross-border collaboration” through CCFI or a similar unit, but this will only result in more “duplication” and problems (see e.g., Barmen report, Flashpoint 16 “Centre anxiety”).

Despite a troubling possibility of administrative decree or fiat, the new mantra for faculty members has for good reasons become: ‘we can do interdisciplinary, (a/cross-this or that) collaboration, research, and programs without a Centre of centres— without CCFI.’ To do interdisciplinary research, and joint programs, we do not need a mediating Centre (infrastructure is necessary, the infrastructure for joint programs and interdepartmental collaboration is in place, but it is in the Departments and HKIN).

It is indicative that CCFI does not have a research focus yet shadows the other eight (soon to be nine) centres in the Faculty *and* there is not another Faculty on campus that has anything even remotely like the CCFI as a quasi-Departmental “Centre.” None of the other *research centres* in the faculty has plans or visions of mediating programs a/cross the Faculty. It is increasingly unnecessary that this Faculty needs what Dean Tierney envisioned in 2003 during the CCFI revival as an “in-between space” and “a site that creates synergies around research and theory across the departments and units within the Faculty.” It has to be acknowledged that this “in-between space” called CCFI did not “create synergies around research and theory” and nor was there a need for a Centre to mediate graduate programs and research. CCFI was mistakenly shaped by a plan that included course FTE, students, specialized programs, and etc., and effectively rivals the size of Departments and HKIN.

Comparatively, for obvious reasons, including budgetary implications, there are no Faculties on campus that tolerate a “research Centre” with academic programs and numbers of FTE and students that match or exceed the size of some of the Departments in the Faculty.

The verdict is still out on Dean Tierney’s decision to create the Network of Centres and Institutes in Education (NCIE) in 2002, and the related decision to make the CCFI the Centre of the NCIE, and by default the Centre of centres. This is *not* to say that what the loosely coupled network we refer to as the NCIE does not need a Director. The point is that the NCIE does not need the CCFI.

One recommendation means thinking clearly about what a “research centre” actually involves, basically by definition (e.g., no course or program FTE, research mandate, niche focus, external funding base, etc.). It would have been advantageous to redirect the latest Director’s (Mary Bryson) expertise toward mobilizing collective interests for what she identified as a possible “Centre for Transdisciplinary Studies in Education.” The mandate among FT faculty members is for *research* centres, not for a Centre with “cross-faculty”, “cross-border, or “cross-programmatic” plans, resources, and visions. Let’s just finally agree here that a vast majority of FT faculty members want research centres among research centres, and not quasi-Departments among Departments. There is a difference.

Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are administrative appointment and resource allocation problems. For example, a second recommendation is to make more joint or cross-appointments to the Departments and HKIN (where there is currently only one or two faculty members with joint appointments). A third recommendation is to allocate resources to create more interdepartmental joint programs (where there is currently one).

Once again, the CCFI’s current doctoral and MA students can easily be moved back to their respective departments (i.e., Department of their Supervisor), the Urban Learner M.Ed. program could be shared (joint program) by EDCP & EDST, and the Early Childhood program shared (joint program) by ECPS and LLED. The academic oversight and FT faculty of these programs have been primarily located in the Departments. A vast majority of FT faculty members, if provided with the issues and asked, would vote to close the CCFI as it stands and move its programs and students back to Departments, which is already their principle support network (e.g., supervision, committees, resources for GRAs & GTAs).

CSCI had a rich, very rewarding purpose and history in the Faculty, but it became redundant. The subsequent reviving or repurposing of the CSCI into a unit for “cross-faculty inquiry” failed. Understandably, CCFI Directors want to expand and build (e.g., Graeme for arts education, Mary for digital technologies, etc.), increase enrollments, and attract more resources, but it’s draining and counter-productive for the Faculty. It makes little sense to generate yet more ideas, develop more plans, take more courses of action, and allocate more resources to revive “cross-faculty inquiry” while in the wake reinforce yet more problems, etc. More candidly, a sound argument can be made that it is academically and fiscally irresponsible to further invest in CCFI with programs, resources, students, etc. to do what it has failed to do in five+ years (viz., cross-faculty inquiry, collaboration, programs, etc.). The Working Group and the end of the CCFI Director’s two-year appointment this year provide a convenient time to abandon this unworkable administrative

plan for a “cross-faculty” or “cross-border” unit, Centre of centres, or quasi-Department, to broker or mediate the Faculty’s programs and research. There was not much support for it to begin with. Why not replace administratively mandated or decreed “cross-faculty inquiry” and “cross-border collaboration,” which have no traction in the world of scholarship, with faculty-led interdisciplinary (or transdisciplinary) research and interdepartmental, joint appointments and programs? It’s time to make the hard decision on the administrative unit for “cross-faculty inquiry” that should have been made in 2002 or again in 2007.

To cover the budget crisis over the past three years, collectively the Staff absorbed hard cuts, the Departments’ operating and capital budgets were reduced, and we are meeting the deficit only by expending hard earned revenue from external programs. Departments are going through painful reviews and internal restructuring. It should be crystal clear that for “cross-faculty” or “cross-border”, or what most of us prefer to call just plain working together, coordination, joint appointments and programs, etc. on one hand and interdisciplinary research on the other, we do *not* need a mediating Centre. Those days are over, given the reduction of FT faculty lines, budget crisis, and a new era of interdepartmental coordination initiated by the Heads.

Thank you very much for responsively attending to this input. I am willing to help facilitate conversations and hard decisions on the units in the Faculty designated for “cross-faculty inquiry” and “cross-border collaboration” that are not working and won’t work. Please make this report available as one of the public documents forwarded. I look forward to a response and an invitation to talk with the Working Group.¹

¹ **Note:** This input is not a criticism of personnel (Directors, staff, students, etc.) associated with CCFI. Also, this is far from the first letter I’ve written on problems with CCFI. Since 2002, I am on record with formal correspondence on these types of problems. Please also note that these types of analyses have been directed at my own Department.