Contesting PLD services: the case of CORE Education

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ABSTRACT
The article is derived from a larger study of charities, philanthropists, policy entrepreneurs and international businesses in state schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand. The article considers the formation of a private professional services provider, CORE Education, and its recent corporate trajectory following the government’s decision in 2009 to make all School Support Services provision contestable by private providers. CORE Education is an interesting case of schooling privatization because the organizational structure comprises both a not-for-profit charitable educational trust and a wholly owned, for-profit business. CORE’s activities also illustrate the new network governance modality in schooling. In this modality, both bureaucratic and market forms of schooling services delivery are being displaced by fluid networks of domestic and offshore policy actors who seek strategic and tactical alliances in order to advance their voice and agency in schooling services policy development, delivery and evaluation. The article adopts a critical policy scholarship approach drawing on theories of social network analysis and network policy governance. The article claims that network alliances serve to blur the distinctions between for-profit and not-for-profit activity, between state, NGO and philanthropic actors and, ultimately, between what counts as private and what counts as public in state schooling.

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Introduction
Across the Anglosphere, the provision of formerly publicly funded and publicly provided education services is increasingly being made contestable by the private sector. This article offers a case narrative of one such recent instance in Aotearoa New Zealand. The article is derived from a larger study of charities, philanthropists, policy entrepreneurs and international businesses in state schooling. The study was jointly commissioned by three New Zealand education sector professional associations as part of an attempt to uncover, map and explain recent schooling privatizations.

In September 2015 the New Zealand Minister of Education released a media statement announcing changes, to be phased in from 2016, in the way Professional Learning and
Development (PLD) would be delivered to teachers and schools (Parata, 2015). The policy changes were based on the principles and recommendations in the Report of a cross-sector Professional Development Advisory Group (Professional Development Advisory Group, 2014) established in 2013 by the Minister of Education, and the subsequent three-year work programme for its operationalisation developed by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2015). The proposed changes (i) reinforced the National-led government’s focus on a limited number of national priority areas for PLD; and (ii) prioritised access to PLD funding for those schools that were self-organized as Communities of Learning.

The changes will be phased in over the next three years. They will focus professional development on a small number of national priorities in the areas of mathematics, science, reading and writing, digital fluency, and a pilot in health and PE. These priorities are based on student data providing evidence of where the biggest challenges are. Priority will be given to schools as they grow into communities of learning, working together to raise achievement for all their students and to schools with a high number of students achieving below expected levels. (Parata, 2015, n.p.)

The proposed PLD innovations built on earlier changes to the regionally based School Support Services (SSS) contracts that had been initiated under both Labour-led and National-led governments between 2004 and 2010 (Sankar & Chauvel, 2011, pp. 13–14). Under Labour, these changes reoriented government funded PLD to a required focus on student achievement data, while by 2012 SSS contracts under National had been made fully contestable nationally. In practice, contestability and increased privatisation of PLD services delivery had been building throughout the late 1990s and 2000s alongside the growth of two private sector providers in particular: Cognition Education (formerly Multi-Serve Educational Trust) and CORE Education, both of which operate for-profit businesses as wholly owned subsidiaries of registered not-for-profit educational charities.

This article focuses on the case of CORE Education. Specifically the article discusses CORE’s growing influence in national PLD professional services delivery since the government’s decision in 2009–2010 to make them fully contestable from 2012. Such private sector influence in PLD policy and services delivery, and contiguous increase in CORE’s size, geographical reach and financial equity, has occurred as part of a global shift from education policy settings based on bureaucratic and classic market modalities, to what is referred to in the critical policy scholarship literature as the new network governance in education (Ball & Junemann, 2012). Network governance of state education is premised on an ideological blurring of formerly hard distinctions between public and private sector actors and institutions, and the encouragement of tactical alliances across both sectors that are formed through, and dependent on, highly mobile personal relations and information conduits. These alliances may be domestic, regional or global. Commonly, these alliances develop outside the public sphere although their consequences may be reported and scrutinised publicly as positions and contracts are awarded to them. The individuals and groups who broker such alliances and collaborations are known as policy entrepreneurs (Mintrom, 2000) or edu-preneurs (Rönnberg, 2017) because they adopt social and commercial enterprise approaches that enable them to take advantage of shifting state education policy settings, and provide apparently nimble, outcomes-focused solutions to the policy challenges identified by the state.
Network governance and edu-preneurial positioning by private sector policy actors have been facilitated through increased contestability, contracting out and privatisation of state education policy development, services delivery, and evaluation (Lingard, Sellar, Hogan, & Thompson, 2017; O’Neill, Duffy, & Fernando, 2016). The main sources of data for this case narrative are extracts from CORE’s website (reported ‘in single quotation marks’) and CORE’s annual financial reports and summary returns to Charities Services, Ngā Rātonga Kaupapa Atawhai. A key aim of this case narrative is to document the many relationships that CORE enjoys with other policy actors, not only through its own commercial and philanthropic activities that involve rival organisations, but also indirectly through the numerous personal and professional contacts to which CORE gains access by virtue of the individuals it appoints to its executive and governance groups (see O’Neill et al., 2016 for graphic representations of these social networks).

The first part of the article provides a brief conceptual overview of the emergence of the school modernisation discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand and how this has materially shaped the policy settings in which the commission and delivery of professional services delivery in state schooling occur. The majority of the article is a descriptive or narrative account of CORE’s positioning within this new entrepreneurial modernisation discourse. A descriptive account is argued to be necessary because: (i) modernisation policies and practices are being enacted very rapidly under the contemporary administrations and need to be understood by other policy actors in real-time as it were; (ii) Internet-based organisational information, documentation and records are relatively ephemeral. They appear and disappear rapidly, often not leaving archival versions for subsequent scholarly analysis; and (iii) network analysis of the kind reported here brings into the public sphere and gaze organisational and interpersonal networks and relationships that are commonly developed and maintained in the private sphere, beyond public gaze. Methodologically, a detailed descriptive account of local events and names is ‘fit for purpose’ precisely because the phenomenon under investigation is the private-isation of public schooling in a particular local educational policy setting.

The conclusion briefly considers how the strategies and tactics of private sector edu-prenuers such as CORE may need to change as new PLD policy settings, activities and relationships unfold from 2016 to 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2015).

‘Modernising’ state schooling

From the mid-1930s, for at least four decades there was a broad political consensus around state education in Aotearoa New Zealand. This conceptualised state education as: (i) a public or social good; (ii) socially governed and publicly delivered; and (iii) universally accessible, fully funded through general taxation and open to public scrutiny. Since the late 1970s, this ‘progressive sentiment’ has declined. The decline has been fuelled through a claimed ‘crisis’ by the control agencies of the state (Treasury, State Services Commission, Education Review Office) and politicians about the ‘cost’ and ‘effectiveness’ of state education in delivering government objectives. In order to make state education policy and practice more ‘efficient’, the 1989 Education Act separated education policy, services delivery, and accountability functions. Principal-agent contracts replaced collegial or representative governance relations, and a vastly increased array of planning,
monitoring and reporting requirements was introduced for public accountability and fiscal responsibility purposes (Court & O’Neill, 2011).

Between 1989 and the mid-1990s, most such public education services continued to be delivered within the state sector. Since then, however, as in overseas jurisdictions, the state has begun to export or contract-out this work of policy development and policy delivery to the private sector (O’Neill, 2011). Despite this, until 2008, the purpose and functions of School Support Services as a near monopoly, bulk-funded public sector provider of PLD opportunities to schoolteachers remained largely unquestioned. With the election of a National-led government in 2008, the pace of private-sector participation in public services delivery has grown to the point where the conventional distinctions between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ in state education now appear irredeemably blurred. Public and private sector policy actors both work alongside and compete against each other in developing and delivering education on behalf of the state. In the scholarly literature this process of structural adjustment is sometimes now referred to the ‘modernisation’ of public or state education.

Central to this modernisation … is a process of substitution and the creation of modes of entry for new providers – a process that replaces traditional public sector actors with others (businesses, charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises) and at that same time replaces traditional public sector values and sensibilities (service) with others (enterprise and entrepreneurship). (Ball & Junemann, 2012, p. 31)

Cognition Education and CORE Education both exemplify the new edu-preneurial policy actors in New Zealand state schooling. In order to understand what is occurring, and why, we need to appreciate that the way our state schooling system now functions organisationally has radically changed. It used to be the case that with the decline of the progressive sentiment, polity debates about educational effectiveness and efficiency in the state sector focused on the respective merits of ‘bureaucratic’ and ‘classic market’ system forms to deliver public education (See Thompson, 1991, p. 244). In practice, these two ideologies coalesced in the form of: (i) explicit New Public Management funding controls and performance accountabilities between the state and individual institutions; and (ii) the appearance of free, fully informed educational choices made available to families and students within a managed marketplace of early childhood, school and tertiary education providers for which the rules were set by government (Court & O’Neill, 2011).

Even so, until 2008 politicians and officials invariably referred to state education as a set of interconnected public good provisions for which government was morally responsible: the ideal of a state funded and provided education system. Today, politicians and officials now commonly speak only in terms of government ‘subsidies’, ‘investments’, ‘targeting’, and ‘social investment’, all four interventions limited by what is affordable to the taxpayer citizen.

To get better long-term results for people with needs that aren’t being met, we need to look at where existing services could be improved, and where we need to innovate to get bigger breakthroughs. To help with this, the government is looking at greater involvement from not-for-profit and private sector providers alongside its agencies. (http://www.treasury.govt.nz/statesector/socialinvestment/howitworks

This is not simply a rhetorical device. Shifting the responsibility from universal state funding and state provision to partial state subsidy and state investment also legitimates the growth of private subsidy and private investment in public education activities that government says it can no longer afford (O’Neill, 2017).
Logically, private subsidy and private investment imply both moral and property rights to greater private participation in framing, deciding and delivering public education policy. This is where we are at today in Aotearoa New Zealand: businesses, charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises are all essential to the maintenance of state schooling as a result of the withdrawal of government. Consequently, the case of CORE is illustrative of how private policy actors are framing, deciding and delivering state schooling policy solutions on the ground; and how relationships across the public and private sectors are morphing as a result.

Intuitively, it makes sense that the organisational forms of our education system as a whole would need to change to reflect the influence of these new public-private relationships. We might reasonably anticipate that public-private forms in New Zealand, to a greater or lesser extent, mirror education system public-private forms that are reportedly evolving overseas, just as they did with the ‘Before Five’ (early childhood education), ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ (compulsory schooling) and ‘Learning For Life’ (post-compulsory tertiary education) structural adjustments of the late 1980s. In Thompson’s (1991) terms, one would expect to see tangible evidence of co-operative networks and clans (e.g. venture capital consortia, iwi [indigenous tribe], rūnanga [indigenous tribal authority], school clusters or ‘Communities of Learning’) at work alongside competitive classic market and bureaucratic forms. CORE’s astute corporate positioning to take advantage of current schooling policy settings reflects its active negotiation of these network and clan relationships as former bureaucratic and, later, market forms of PLD services development and delivery decline in policy influence. The key point to be made here is that in the emerging schooling policy milieu the growth and influence of organisations such as CORE depends largely on the social, reputational and entrepreneurial networks they are able to create and leverage in order to compete successfully for contestable PLD contracts. The case description that follows also serves to differentiate CORE’s current organisational form and strategic trajectory with those typically seen in the former University-based SSS until 2011.

CORE Education

In recent years, CORE Education has been remarkably successful in growing its social, reputational and entrepreneurial networks. These networks and alliances are formed with other individuals and organisations externally in the form of consortia or collaborative contract PLD services delivery but, just as importantly they derive from the people (and their social networks) that CORE has been able to appoint to executive and governance roles within CORE itself, and gain considerable educational capital in the process. Hence the need to document these in fine detail. The case narrative that follows goes to some lengths to elaborate the logic of CORE’s positioning, the breadth of educational services it provides, and the internal and external networks that expand its reputation and influence in an era of state schooling modernisation.

Public-private tactical alliances

Te Toi Tupu Leading Learning Network was formed as a joint venture consortium between Cognition Education, CORE Education, The New Zealand Council for Educational Research, The University of Waikato, and Waikato-Tainui College for Research and Development. It
was created in response to the government decision to make the formerly bulk-funded, university-hosted SSS contestable in 2009–2010. Te Toi Tupu comprises a public university, an independent statutory body, two not-for-profit educational and consultancy services providers, and a tribally endowed indigenous education provider. In November 2015, in anticipation of a Ministry of Education and Education Council requirement for accreditation of Professional Learning and Development (PLD) providers, representatives of Cognition Education, CORE Education, the Universities of Auckland, Canterbury, Otago and Waikato, and Te Tapu ae o Rehua consortium (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, Lincoln University, Otago Polytechnic, the University of Canterbury and the University of Otago) registered a new incorporated society, Professional Learning Association New Zealand Te Māngai Whakangungu Kaikako o Aotearoa to set ethical and quality standards for consultancies and professional development facilitators.

A reasonable policy scholarship question to consider is how CORE managed to position itself within two potentially very influential schooling policy networks that straddle the public and private sectors in schooling and which might in many ways be regarded as natural competitors rather than collaborators. CORE’s position in this regard is considerably enhanced by being able to represent its activities as charitable and not-for-profit.

**Narrating CORE’s work as a charitable social good**

CORE’s website states that its ‘gestation’ lay in discussions during 1998 between current CORE Directors Derek Wenmouth and Nick Billowes, and Professor Stephen Heppell of Ultralab UK, later joined by Dr Vince Ham. ‘A business plan was developed with Canterbury Development Corporation (CDC), a heads of agreement with Christchurch City Council (CCC), and an MOU with Ultralab UK’. CORE was constituted under the company name of Ultralab South Limited in 2004 as a ‘Company carried on exclusively for charitable purposes’. In the establishment document, its stated purposes were:

a. To advance education by researching, applying and disseminating the benefits of new learning technologies;
b. To advance education by developing innovative, creative and effective learning environments;
c. To advance education by promoting the importance of research;
d. To advance education by assisting educational institutions and teachers to obtain better classroom resources; and
e. To advance education by assisting educational institutions and teachers to understand technology.

The rules permitted the company to make ‘donations of capital and/or income to any shareholder of the Company where that shareholder is a trustee of a charitable trust which has obtained an exemption from income tax’. The company changed its name to CORE Education in 2005, when the first General Manager was appointed. CORE Education Charitable Trust was registered in 2012, when Canterbury Development Corporation gifted its shareholding in CORE Education Limited to the Trust (the transfer of equity from CDC is shown as income in the 2013 financial return for CORE Education Trust, below). The earliest Ultralab South/CORE Directors were Christopher Pickerill (2003), Cameron Moore (2003), Carol Moffatt (2005), Anthony Hall (2005) and Cheryl Doig (2005).
In positioning itself within the New Zealand context, CORE’s self-description elaborates at some length its underpinning concepts of ‘Tātai Aho Rau’ and ‘Lalaga Tivaevae Niu’ (traditional weaving metaphors); its status as a not-for-profit entity that is both a limited liability company and a registered charitable organisation; that CORE Education is owned by CORE Education Charitable Trust; and that any profits made are used for charitable purposes. The website references the 1601 Statute of Elizabeth and later New Zealand law:

Under these regulations, the advancement of education is considered a charitable activity. To be charitable under this category, your organisation’s purpose must:

• Provide some form of education
• Ensure learning is passed on to others.

The modern concept of “education” covers formal education, training and research in specific areas of study and expertise. It also includes less formal education in the development of individual capabilities, competencies and understanding.

Such a conception of education, it must be said, is potentially inclusive of most or all human activity. The website states that ‘CORE was founded on the belief that education is a public good’. The website also states that ‘CORE’s day to day work is considered charitable by its nature’. That is correct in as much as New Zealand law is liberal in its interpretation of charitable activity by comparison with some other jurisdictions, and public reporting requirements are comparatively minimal. Thus, even though CORE does allocate funds to ‘external charitable activities that advance CORE’s education and charitable objectives’ it states that it is not obligated to do so in order to maintain its charitable status. Indeed CORE argues that building up a reserve (equity) enables the company both to negotiate ‘fluctuating financial times’ and ‘undertake a range of developmental and philanthropic opportunities’, such as the Modern Learning Expo held in Christchurch in 2013. One reading of these arguments is that according to CORE, any activity it undertakes to advance its own corporate educational objectives is inherently charitable and is therefore also in the public good. Consequently, it is claimed that CORE’s charitable activities ‘return investment to the wider education sector and stimulate and support best practice and new educational development’, as well as traditional grants, scholarships and awards to educators. In the for-profit sector these same charitable activities could arguably be regarded as a mixture of altruistic social responsibility, and self-interested sponsorship and brand marketing to achieve competitive commercial advantage.

Competing for public funding to grow the private PLD business

CORE currently operates offices in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland together with a ‘sister organisation’, CORE Education UK, based near London. A significant proportion of CORE’s trading income comes from Ministry of Education contracts, many of these in ICT professional learning and development, and evaluation studies. Current projects include: ACCELL an online ESOL programme (funded by MoE); Auckland Intermediate Schools research (MoE); Centre for Veterinary Education Moodle courses (University of Sydney); Connected Learning Advisory Te Ara Whitiaki (MoE); National Curriculum resources (MoE); e-Learning Planning Frameworks Project (MoE, with Te Toi Tupu); Early Childhood NZ Pou Manawa Akoranga (Early Childhood NZ); EdTalks (CORE Education); Enabling e-
Learning (MoE, with Te Toi Tupu); EPS Educational positioning System (CORE Education); Future Focused Inquiries (MoE, with Te Toi Tupu); Grow Waitaha – Learners at the Centre of Change (MoE with Evaluation Associates, Leadership Lab and Massey University); Inclusive Education Website (MoE); Incredible Years Teacher (MoE); Learning with Digital technologies (MoE, with Te Toi Tupu); Māori Medium Publishing (MoE); National Aspiring Principals Programme (MoE, with Te Toi Tupu); Moodle content development (New Zealand Breastfeeding Authority); multiple projects (New Zealand School Trustee Association); Poipoia te Mokopuna: A whānau-centered evaluation (MoE); Strengthening Early Learning Opportunities (SELO) Programme (MoE); financial capability school clusters (The Commission for Financial Capability); Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) channel support (MoE); Nurturing and encouraging young children’s identity, language and culture in the early years (Teaching and Learning Research Initiative); Virtual Learning Network (VLN) technical maintenance (MoE); Virtual Professional Learning and Development Network (MoE with Te Toi Tupu); Vocational Pathways (MoE); WW1 website (Canterbury 100 Committee); and Young Enterprise Scheme (Young Enterprise Trust).

CORE lists a number of conference and project partners, affiliates and associates. Allied Telesis, HP, Microsoft, Sitech Systems NZ and Toshiba are Conference Partners; Te Toi Tupu Leading Learning Network, University of Canterbury, South Pacific Press, Torque IP, Weta Workshops and Young Enterprise Scheme are listed as Project Partners. Dr Cheryl Doig, Tony Ryan (Australia) and Gillian Heald are listed as CORE Affiliates; and Te Toi Tupu Leading Learning Network, Canterbury Development Corporation, Galileo Education Network (Canada), CORE UK, the International Council on Education for Teaching, Telecommunication Users Association of New Zealand, NZ Book Council and Principals Academy Inc. Singapore are listed as CORE Associates.

CORE Education offers various ‘ICT innovation’ services to ECE centres, schools and tertiary organisations: Educational ICT audits; Online facilitation; Web development; Instructional design; and Digital video production through CORE Digital. Professional Learning ‘options’ include half-day workshops (Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland) online programmes and custom designed ‘Transform’ workshops that are facilitated both online and face-to-face.

CORE offers a New Zealand version of the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning™ (NPDL) with Michael Fullan as the main drawcard. CORE also offers consultants, 14 Apple Consultants Network facilitators, several Google tools facilitators, and multi-module, online PLD courses in Modern Learning Environments, Modern Learning Practice, Modern Learning Technology, Modern Learning Curriculum and Modern learning Assessment. CORE additionally offers a ‘tailored learning journey’ in a 3, 6 or 12-month online learning community in Educational Positioning Systems, Kaupapa Māori, or Pasifika Education. Finally, CORE offers EdTours to Australia to experience modern learning environments in Melbourne.

CORE as PLD ‘thought leader’

CORE publishes its ten trends: ‘Each year CORE Education’s experienced staff of researchers, teachers, educators and digital technology experts pool their expertise and combine their understanding and evidence of the ways that digital technologies are influencing all aspects of education’. CORE describes itself as a ‘research and development centre’. It has
formal research associations with NZCER, University of Canterbury and CORE Education
UK. It publishes its research reports and summaries on the CORE website. It publishes:
books, white papers and articles written by CORE staff; EDTalks video podcasts of inter-
views with ‘leading educators, thinkers and classroom practitioners’ and at conferences
with ‘some of the world’s leading thinkers and teacher practitioners’; and New Zealand
versions of ‘Connected Educator’ free webinars in collaboration with organisations in
the USA and Victoria, Australia. It also publishes easily consumable audio podcast discus-
sions among CORE’s ‘education experts’. CORE offers a range of scholarships and awards
annually. It organises and/or event manages various conferences including Ulearn (3 days,
4 venues), breakfast seminars, and the New Zealand Emerging Leaders Summit. It operates
the CORE Education Blog.

Networks of personal and institutional influence

As indicated above, an entrepreneurial approach to PLD services design and provision in
the 2010–2015 policy environment has required the ability to bring together disparate
areas of expertise using personal and institutional networks of contacts and expertise.
CORE has been very successful in attracting executive and governance personnel to its
for-profit and not-for-profit entities, whose professional expertise and business and philan-
thropic contacts include but are by no means limited to schooling or education. Indeed,
they extend widely into the public, NGO, for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. CORE thus
gains significant reputational and competitive advantage by association, which further
enhances the financial advantages it enjoys by virtue of its charitable status.

At the time the case analysis was undertaken (2015–2016), the CORE Education Charia-
table Trust Trustees were Martin Hadlee, member Institute of Directors, chartered accoun-
tant, principal consultant Hadlee Kippenberger and Partners, former partner Morris
Patrick and Co (subsequently KPMG) and managing partner Hadlee Kippenberger and
Partners Limited; Gillian Heald, former principal of Rangi Ruru Girls’ School, co-director
of Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti, guardian of the Secondary Futures Project and part of the
OECD Schooling for Tomorrow Project. Heald has education governance experience at
Boards of Rutherford Den, Independent Schools Council, University of Canterbury
Council, Aurora College Establishment Board, University of Canterbury Foundation and
NZ Mathematical Olympiad Executive, and Research and Education Advanced Network.
She is currently on the boards of Te Aho o Te Kura The Correspondence School and
NZQA; Frank Owen, adjunct senior fellow at the University of Canterbury Colleges of
Business and Law, and Engineering, former director of Canterbury Development Corpor-
ation, former CEO and managing director of Tait Communications, Philips Electronics
research scientist and marketing professional, manager of Tyco Power Components Div-
ision, founder electronics manufacturing and supply chain company GPC Electronics;
and, from 2013, Ronnie Davey, University of Canterbury College of Education and formerly
seconded to CORE Education as National Facilitator on the Ministry of Education’s INSTEP
(In-Service Teacher Education Project). Vince Ham a founding director of CORE in 2003,
was a past officer of the Trust until 2013.

CORE Education’s Board comprises Chris Mene (Chair), elected director Canterbury Dis-
trict Health Board, trustee of Sport Canterbury, and director of Mene Solutions Ltd. Former
project facilitator for Secondary Futures; Kaila Colbin, co-founder and trustee of the
non-profit Ministry of Awesome, founder and director of New Zealand social media consultancy Missing Link. Kaila is a PMP® certified Project Manager and is chair of the board of the New York-based Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Culinary Arts; Dr Bruce Bryant, senior lecturer Manukau Institute of Technology with governance experience ‘of a major Māori tertiary educational initiative’, adviser to SMEs; Hannah Buchanan (Taranaki, Te Atiawa, Ngāti Ruanui), public sector management consultant, trustee of the Wellington Tenths Trust – a Ture Whenua Māori land Trust and former teacher; Deb Gilbertson, Director of the Global Enterprise Experience, an action learning education programme developing global leadership skills in 82 countries, former board member of the commercial arm of Victoria University and current teaching fellow’, runs her own consultancy Kaihau Ltd, and a trustee of Kaihau Education Trust, which focuses on special needs education; and, Dr Sheelagh Matear, who has ‘extensive experience in tertiary education in New Zealand’. She is currently AVC Academic Programmes and Student Experience, Lincoln University and is an academic auditor with the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, director of Telford Farm Board of Management, the Biological Husbandry Unit and Lincoln Hospitality Ltd.

Collectively, what these professional, entrepreneurial, community and philanthropic experiences and expertise illustrate is an extraordinarily diffuse and rich aggregate of influence and association on which CORE may draw to advance its strategic position in the PLD professional services marketplace.

**Income, distributions and equity**

A key question to be asked of all educational charities is the extent to which the benefits they provide are public or private. This is complicated in situations such as CORE’s where the Group operates both a not-for-profit charitable trust (Table 1) and a for-profit business (Table 2). Equally, the distinction between relative public and organisational benefits may be difficult to make (e.g. corporately named scholarships), as are judgments about whether fees and salaries (i.e. administrative costs) that are paid to governance and executive staff in a charitable organisation are appropriate relative to their public and private sector equivalents, and to its paramount charitable purpose.

CORE’s Education’s annual reports show that since 2013, the majority of the Charitable Trust’s income since its establishment has come via donations from CORE Education. In 2014 ($148,668) and 2015 ($295,814) the Trustees approved charitable donations to: CORE Education e-Fellowship Programme, pro-bono research activities, Dr Vince Ham Excellence in Postgraduate Scholarship awards, CORE Foundation Programme, grants for Māori education initiatives, Excellence in Pasifika Education, Award for International Conference Attendance, and a new pedagogies initiative. The great majority of CORE trading income is from the Ministry of Education. CORE Education’s contract revenue in
The table below provides an overview of CORE Education Limited’s financial statements for the years 2010 to 2015.

| CORE Education | 2010    | 2011    | 2012    | 2013    | 2014    | 2015    |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Income         | $7,765,916 | $9,268,853 | $12,225,989 | $22,730,457 | $21,225,939 | $22,748,538 |
| Surplus        | $356,423 | $456,228 | $281,885 | $620,555 | $844,990 | $402,116 |
| Directors’ fees| $44,000 | $44,777 | $46,452 | $59,736 | $86,033 | $82,408 |
| Employees      | 55       | 75       | 108     | 119     | 147     | 180     |
| SLT remuneration|         |         |         | 1,065,248 | 1,126,991 | 1,465,799 |
| Grants         | $200,000 | (211,442) | $337,848 | $240,438 | $148,668 | $295,814 |
| Donation to Trust|       |         |         | $52,775 | $600,000 | $50,000 |
| Equity         | $2,992,408 | $3,448,636 | $3,730,482 | $4,352,183 | $5,196,998 | $5,553,658 |

In 2014 ($18,504,845) and 2015 ($19,545,993) was over 85% of total income. In contrast to Cognition Education, CORE Education’s income has grown consistently since 2010, with a marked increase in 2013 and subsequent years, to the point where annual income is of comparable magnitude to Cognition Education in 2015.

An unusual feature of CORE Education’s annual statements is that the SLT or ‘key management personnel’ aggregate remuneration is reported together with the FTE staff numbers. The data show that the mean remuneration package per person for this management tier was $222,091 in 2015 (180 FTE staff), $208,702 in 2014 (147 FTE staff), and $197,268 in 2013 (119 FTE staff). By way of crude comparison, according to the Secondary Principals’ Collective Agreement 2016–2019, for the equivalent period (prior to May 2016) the U16 Principal basic salary package for the largest school grade with a roll of more than 2,401 students was $185,541.

Aggregate fees paid to CORE Education directors were less than one third of the equivalent total amount paid to Cognition Education directors (their closest organisational equivalent) in both 2015 and 2014, and one sixth in 2013 (the years when both organisations had income in excess of $20 million). Across the six-year period 2010–2015 CORE Education’s aggregate director fees were on average one fifth of the amount paid to directors by Cognition Education. For the period 2013–2015, it is also possible to compare aggregate trustee fees. For CORE Education Charitable Trust, the average aggregate trustee fees were $13,159 each year, for Cognition Education Trust they were $77,333.

In 2015, aggregate income for both CORE Education and CORE Education Charitable Trust was $22,775,473. Grants totalled $295,814. This equates to a direct granting proportion of 1.3% of total CORE Education Group income in 2015, but 384% of CORE Education Charitable Trust income. (In 2014, CORE Education made an unusually high donation of $600,000 to the Trust, which was not distributed in 2014 by the Trust). Director and Trustee fees for the same year were 0.4% of CORE Education Group income, but 107% of CORE Education Charitable Trust income, respectively.

To summarise, CORE Education appears to have been following three policy entrepreneurship strategies within current schooling policy modernisation settings. First, to position itself, alone or as part of Te Toi Tupu consortium, to win Ministry of Education PLD contracts since these were made fully contestable from 2011; second, to enhance its reputational capital by association with high profile international educational initiatives, thought leaders and organisations, both for-profit and not-for-profit; and third, to anticipate trends in education policy development and be the lead national provider of conferences, short courses and consultancy services in those emergent technology-enhanced spaces. These strategies have proven spectacularly successful in terms of the growth in
its staff, income and equity in a relatively short six-year period. A question that now arises is whether the PLD corporate strategies such as those pursued by CORE over the period 2010–2015 will prove as successful in the new PLD environment from 2016 onwards.

**Future directions**

The three-year work programme to implement the new PLD national infrastructure fore-shadows a significantly increased role for the Education Council New Zealand Matatū Aotearoa (ECNZ), the new professional body for teachers. This is consistent with ECNZ’s mandate to lead the profession, increase the status of teaching and assure teachers’ continuing professional development as a requirement of eligibility and fitness to practice. It is also premised on accreditation of each and every professional development facilitator and expert in the country in order to create a database from which communities of learning would choose the individuals most closely matched to their development needs (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Anecdotally referred to as the ‘Uber model’, such an approach presents a possible threat to the future trajectories of organisations like CORE which have made a virtue of exploiting contestable public funding to grow in size, scope, scale and national reach to rival the formerly publicly funded, publicly provided regional School Support Services. As its financial returns, its network of relationships, and the experience biographies of its executive and governance staff show, over a period of six years CORE has benefited greatly from the creation of a managed marketplace in PLD services delivery. With the transition to an Uber model of PLD provision and the enablement of Communities of Learning and the Education Council as new, officially preferred policy actors in this space, it remains to be seen whether CORE’s energetic investment in and exploitation of social network governance modalities will enhance or diminish its capacity to respond to the new PLD policy settings.

In this regard, the case of CORE Education is instructive. It has both local and global resonance in the field of critical education policy scholarship and, in some ways, underscores the importance of using ‘fast scholarship’ as part of the toolkit to appreciate and understand the project to ‘modernise’ public schooling systems and the private professional services providers with which they increasingly interact.

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