

Book Review

Accelerated Leadership Development
Fast tracking school leaders
Peter Earley and Jeff Jones



Accelerated Leadership Development: Fast Tracking School Leaders

by Peter Earley and Jeff Jones

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Review by **Gemma Hannan**

This book has been written in the climate of a growing interest in the issue of accelerated leadership development that is partly due to the large number of headteachers and other senior school leaders who are to retire or leave teaching prematurely over the next decade. The problems facing schools lie in the identification of suitably experienced candidates, the negative perception that some middle and senior leaders have about headship that prevents them from applying for headship and the time it takes to become a teacher.

The authors have been funded in their research by the (then) National College for School Leadership. They have investigated leadership development practices in private and public sector organisations in the UK and other parts of the world to explore whether fast tracking school leaders works and, if it does, how? The aim of the book is “to help schools address the leadership succession planning and take issues they currently face” (p x) by contrasting the traditional model of career progression in teaching with other approaches to leadership development that may be of value to schools and policy makers.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 explores approaches to accelerated leadership development: Its theory and concepts, different approaches and methods and examples of high potential programmes from the private and public sectors. One of the strengths of this book is the way in which it uses extensive research into the theory and practice of accelerated leadership development to build a picture of what it looks like from which the reader can see the value of this method for the development of future leaders. A lot of information is condensed into table form for ease of reference, which also allows the reader at a later stage to quickly identify and return to the aspects that are of most interest. Chapter four, which outlines some of the accelerated leadership development programmes in sectors beyond education, is useful as it gathers in one place examples that school leaders and policy makers may not otherwise have ready access to or knowledge of. For example, leadership development models of some banks in the UK are outlined, as is the approach used by the New Zealand State Services Commission and the Police Service in Scotland. There is no critique of the methods employed by these companies and, although it could be argued that this is not the purpose of providing the examples, this first part of the book does occasionally read as if accelerated leadership is to be accepted by school leaders and policy makers without reservation. At times, the case for a link to be made between other sectors and education could be enhanced so that busy readers do not skim too quickly over these early chapters as they do contain a wealth of rich evidence from which to develop an accelerated leadership programme in their own school or consortium of schools.

These links between accelerated leadership development and how this can be implemented in schools are more clearly developed in Part 2 of the book. Chapter five, which outlines some of the development methods and approaches that have been taken in schools as well as a discussion of how leaders learn and develop, provides ready examples and ideas that can be adopted by those seeking to nurture future leaders. Chapters six and seven discuss some of the successes of the now defunct Fast Track scheme and how these principles are being carried on through the more recent Future Leaders programme. However, chapter 8 is perhaps most interesting and relevant in a changing economic climate where funding can suddenly become unavailable for teachers from certain types of schools or from the independent sector as it discusses some of the ways in which schools can develop leadership potential without the use of nationally provided programmes.

Although chapter nine is dedicated to the issues involved in accelerated leadership development, more could be made of the challenges of this fast tracking. For example, how to deal with the responses of other members of staff who may feel less valued by their schools if they are not included in a programme of accelerated leadership development, as well as how to help individuals being fast tracked to cope with the emotional stresses that may be linked to a quick progression up the management ladder in teaching and the responsibility that comes with leading a school. Having been attracted to the book by my own interest and experience of fast tracking outside of any national programme such as Fast Track, I would have liked to see a chapter aimed at those who are experiencing the process of accelerated leadership development or who are interested in progressing to headship within the next ten years. However, perhaps this is not necessary - or even the point of this book - as those with this interest should also have the ability to read between the lines and chapters that are written with current school leaders and policy makers in mind to extract the qualities they need to develop if they are to be the successful leaders of the future. Indeed, they could use the plethora of examples within this book for ideas of the professional development opportunities that they should be seeking if they are to be the successful and lasting school leaders who take the future of schools further into the 21st century.