



The 'KSL' School Culture Slot Machine

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Special Edition of the JEA (Overview)

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'Maya' where do I start? She's a lovely girl, caring and hard-working.

She has a positive attitude to everything that she does. She is hungry to learn.

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Winners spill out into the corridor clutching their awards – tokens for the new vending machine. But no ordinary a vending machine here. No fizzy drinks or crisps. These much-prized tokens are for books: the classics, 'The Three Musketeers'; mysteries of the past, 'The Totally Dead Dinosaurs'; the chocolate fix, 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'.

Redvil is in the middle of a 1950s post-war Council Estate of social housing, in an area of high unemployment and deprivation. When newly appointed headteacher 'Dave

Phillips' held his first parents' meeting, no one came. The empty School Hall told its own story: a school where 'learning' was an alien and joyless experience – as much for parents, as for their children. Today, families who have long been reluctant to cross the school's threshold flock in. Children and staff tell us that they can be themselves at Redvil: that they belong. I learn about how compassionate and intentional whole-school practices have helped build connections with communities, and grow trust (Riley, 2022).

This special edition of the JEA is your prize token. Take your pick of the five tantalising listings (and eight articles) in *The KSL School Culture Slot Machine* (Figure 1). Dip into the many ways that Karen Seashore Louis has shaped discussion, challenged pre-conceptions, and influenced policy and practice. You won't go away hungry, as you choose from her intellectual smorgasbord.

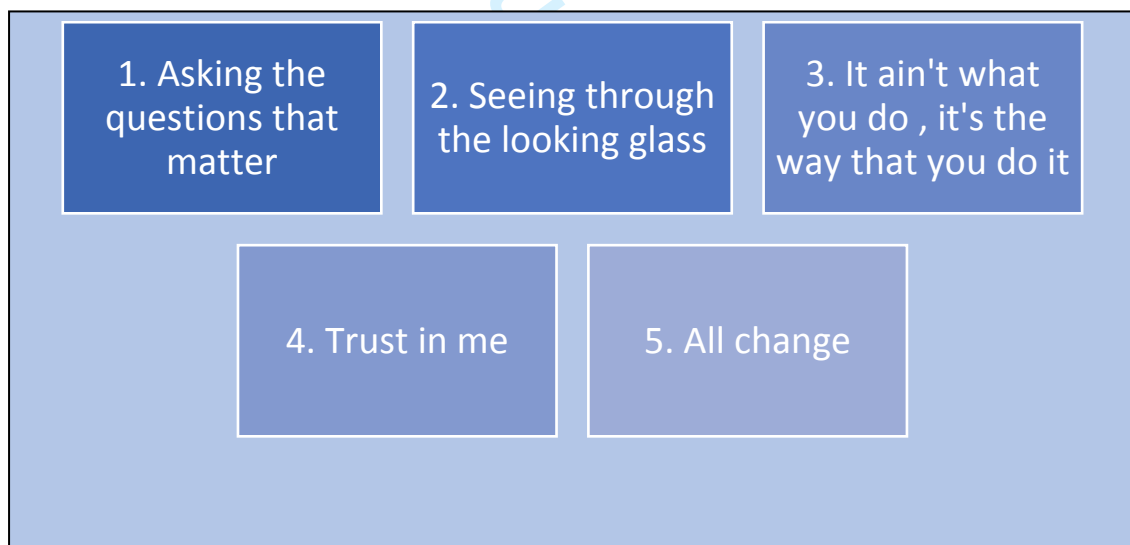


Figure 1. The KSL School Culture Slot Machine

1. Asking the questions that matter

Asking the questions that matter is an art form which *Karen Seashore Louis* has perfected over many years. Go to her overview piece to read more about her journey as a scholar. In it she identifies the 'knots' the real-world experiences that seemed

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The 'all change' theme touches on what has changed, as well as what still needs to change. In providing an historical overview, *Andy Hargreaves* offers further testimony to the significance of Karen Seashore Louis' contribution to our understanding of how schools function as organisations and how leaders enact their role. He maps the various attempts made over a number of years, to crack that organisational tough nut, 'the America High School', and goes on to identify the features of a range of successful networks, collaborations and social movements that have brought about significant improvement and transformation.

This final 'all change' strapline also leads to the kinds of question which many educators are struggling with today. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and an uncertain and unstable world:

- how can we accelerate the process of change in schools?
- how can we create schools which are safe and secure environments for young people, places where they feel they belong?
- And what do we know about the kinds of leaders that are needed to enable this to happen?

Leadership has always been an uncertain and messy business, and no more so than today. The reality of the future is unknown and unknowable. Attempts to find certainty when there is none, adds to the stress. It is hard for leaders to feel safe and secure when they do not 'know' what is to come. Their leadership challenge becomes how to lead others into, and through, the unknown and this includes the unsafe places and times.

Over recent years, Karen Seashore Louis has turned her attention to the fundamental elements of school leadership. Working in collaboration with Mark Smylie and Joe Murphy, this journey has led to the notion of caring leadership. Caring leadership, these three scholars argue, is a moral endeavour - a dynamic ministry – and a highly relational and place-based activity, driven by deep wells of compassion (Smylie *et al.*, 2020; 2021).

Compassion is the super-glue that can bring school leaders, staff, families and communities together. It is the ingredient which has the potential to redress some of the imbalances and inequities revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Compassion brings joy to the lives of young people, creating bonds and friendships in a shared community of learners (Riley, 2022).

My own work has taught me much about the practice of compassionate leadership, as well as the features of compassionate schools and school systems. I have come to conclude that system approaches which rely on mechanisms of order and control, over-rigid testing regimes and hard line, sanction-driven behaviour management approaches are long past their sell-by date. Young people tend to be happier, more confident and perform better academically in schools where they have a sense of belonging. Their teachers feel more professionally fulfilled and valued and families more connected (Riley, 2022).

In my final session with the fledgling school leaders, I show them the drawing in Figure 2, suggesting that whether a school becomes a place of belonging (the left-hand side of the drawing), or a closed place where young people are ostracised by a clique, and staff feel unappreciated (the right-hand side), is shaped by school leaders (Riley *et al.*, 2020). I ask this next generation of school leaders who come from many parts of the globe, 'What kind of school do you want to lead?' Their insightful responses about connectivity and belonging, personal and social responsibility, creative endeavour, equity and social justice and global citizenship leave me with a deep well of optimism about the future.

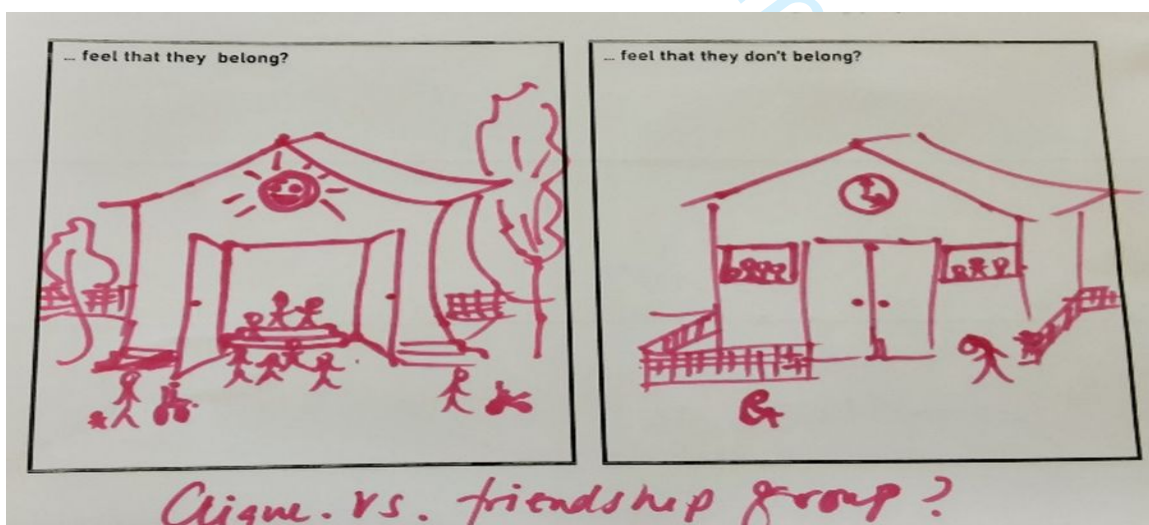


Figure 2: What Kind of School Do I Want to Lead?

Schools can and should be places of welcome, possibility and connectedness. Karen Seashore Louis' powerful professional contribution is to show how, organizationally, this is possible and to signal the actions, behaviours and values of leaders that can help move school cultures in that direction. I hope that the 'goodies' in *The KSL School Culture Slot Machine* have given you a flavour of her legacy, and how it can be applied.

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Professor Kathryn Riley kathryn.riley@ucl.ac.uk

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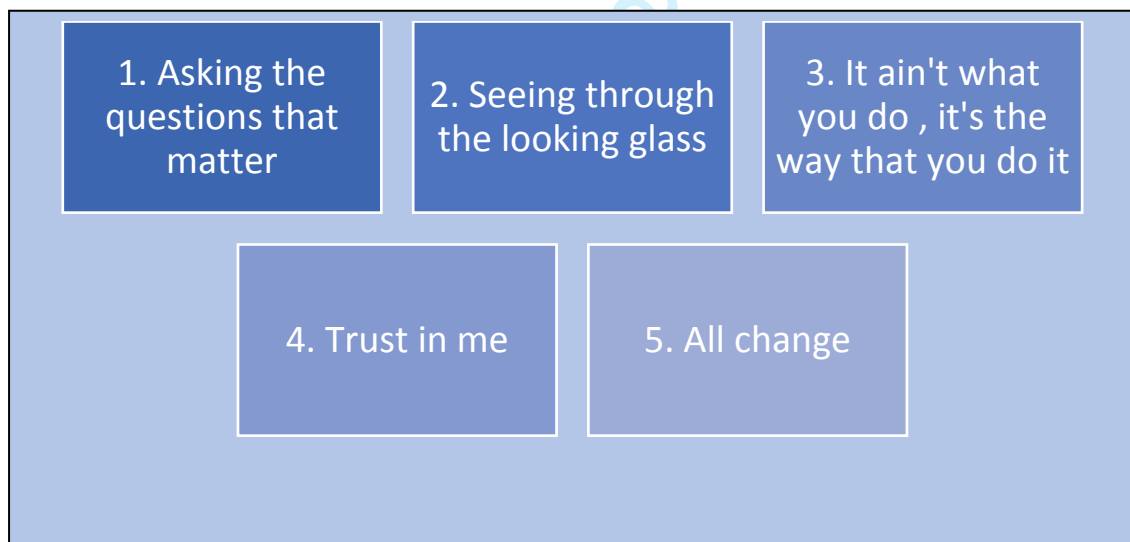


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Compassion is the super-glue that can bring school leaders, staff, families and communities together. It is the ingredient which has the potential to redress some of the imbalances and inequities revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Compassion brings joy to the lives of young people, creating bonds and friendships in a shared community of learners (Riley, 2022).

My own work has taught me much about the practice of compassionate leadership, as well as the features of compassionate schools and school systems. I have come to conclude that system approaches which rely on mechanisms of order and control, over-rigid testing regimes and hard line, sanction-driven behaviour management approaches are long past their sell-by date. Young people tend to be happier, more confident and perform better academically in schools where they have a sense of belonging. Their teachers feel more professionally fulfilled and valued and families more connected (Riley, 2022).

In my final session with the fledgling school leaders, I show them the drawing in Figure 2, suggesting that whether a school becomes a place of belonging (the left-hand side of the drawing), or a closed place where young people are ostracised by a clique, and staff feel unappreciated (the right-hand side), is shaped by school leaders (Riley *et al.*, 2020). I ask this next generation of school leaders who come from many parts of the globe, 'What kind of school do you want to lead?' Their insightful responses about connectivity and belonging, personal and social responsibility, creative endeavour, equity and social justice and global citizenship leave me with a deep well of optimism about the future.

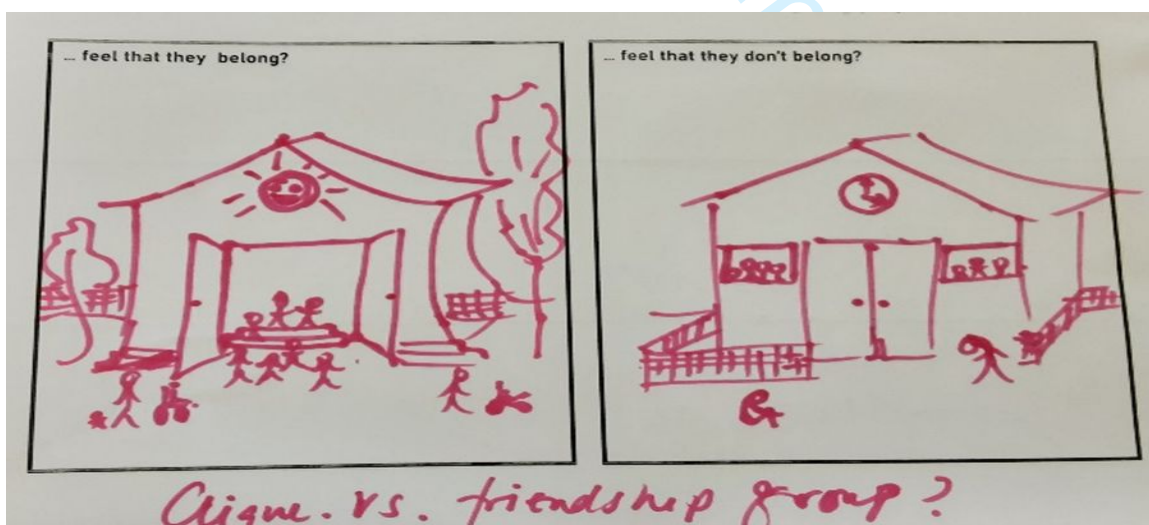


Figure 2: What Kind of School Do I Want to Lead?

Schools can and should be places of welcome, possibility and connectedness. Karen Seashore Louis' powerful professional contribution is to show how, organizationally, this is possible and to signal the actions, behaviours and values of leaders that can help move school cultures in that direction. I hope that the 'goodies' in *The KSL School Culture Slot Machine* have given you a flavour of her legacy, and how it can be applied.

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