**Case Study 1: Time for a Change?**



You have recently been appointed as Deputy Head in a new school. Your responsibility is for Curriculum and Raising Standards. To get to know the school, you arrange to speak to a variety of members of staff. You hope to get a feel for the culture of the school.

Your first meeting is with one of your senior colleagues, Maria, who has responsibility for improving teaching and learning. Maria is quite frustrated when you meet. She has completed a series of lesson visits in which she has been looking at the impact of the recent training she led on questioning techniques for teachers. Maria had researched extensively into the research evidence and ‘best practice’ around how teachers use questions to check pupils’ understanding of the curriculum before planning and delivering the training. Teachers had responded well and the feedback from the session was positive. However, her lesson visits revealed very little evidence that teachers had changed their practice.

The next day, you have a catch-up meeting with the headteacher, Michael. You ask him to describe how he sees the staff culture at the school. Michael has been headteacher at the school for five years. He tells you that he has found it difficult to make changes at the school due to what he describes as a ‘resistance to change’ among longstanding members of staff in particular. You ask Michael what he has done to overcome this and he describes a range of strategies, including increasing opportunities for training, introducing regular observations of teaching to monitor standards, and in more extreme cases, using the capability procedure where standards are poor.

That afternoon, you come across one of the history teachers, Prisha, in the staffroom. You introduce yourself and ask how she is getting on at the school. Prisha joined the school last year as a newly qualified teacher. She is upbeat and enthusiastic and speaks positively about the recent training. You ask Prisha whether she has put any of the knowledge she learnt into practice. “I have tried,” she says, “but it hasn’t gone very well.” She goes on to explain that she had tried out some of the questioning techniques with one class but giving them too many opportunities to contribute meant that pupils started calling out and she didn’t cover all the content she had planned. Prisha looks a little embarrassed telling you this and explains that she understands she is inexperienced and needs to get better at managing her classes. You ask her if she has had any support with this and she tells you that she has spoken to her Head of Faculty who offered to come and speak to the class about their behaviour. Prisha excuses herself as she has a large pile of marking she needs to get through before tomorrow morning.

If you are to raise standards at the school, you want to be sure that you fully understand what the barriers to this might be. The three people you have spoken to have offered quite different perspectives on the challenge of improving teaching and learning. How might we begin to reconcile these perspectives and define the problem?

**Questions**

Explore the different perspectives offered by Maria, Michael and Prisha. These questions may help structure your thinking:

1. Maria has described a problem which is frustrating her. Michael has offered a reason which may explain Maria’s problem. What impression might you form of the problem if you had only spoken to Maria and Michael?
2. Prisha offers a different perspective to Michael. Is one right and the other wrong?
3. To what extent are Maria, Michael and Prisha describing the same problem? Why do they see things in different ways?

Begin to formulate a definition of the problem. These questions may help structure your thinking:

1. How would *you* define the problem the school must address if it is to improve?
2. How might your background, position, and experience affect how you see the problem?
3. To what extent is the problem you describe ‘wicked’?