British Council

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A Very Short Introduction to

Action Research for **Teachers of English** to **Speakers of Other Languages**

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One kind of beginning
What is '*action research'* ? It's like this:

I teach.

I observe my teaching, my students and my teaching context.

I notice something that I want to change. It may be a problem that I become aware of, or an opportunity that I see, or a resource that I realise I can exploit. Whatever I notice, it offers a chance to improve what is going on.

I think about what I want to change and I explore the possibilities. I ask my colleagues about it. I read about it.

I make a plan. I may discuss the plan with colleagues and/or with my students.

I put my plan into action.

I observe the results of my action. (I may discuss the results with colleagues and/or with my students.)

I ask myself, '*What have I learned from this experience?*'

I find a way to tell people what I did and what I have learned. Perhaps I give a workshop. Perhaps I write an article.

I continue teaching, observing, thinking, planning, putting new plans into action, observing, reflecting, telling people what I have learnt, listening to what they tell me.

Action research is *not* research separate from teaching, it is an exploration of teaching by teacher-research.

Action research is a way of being a teacher. The details are different for each person. To borrow a metaphor from Antonio Machado (1912):

> Traveller, there is no path, the path is made by walking. Walking makes the path, and when you glance behind you, you see a track that will never be trod again.

> Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar. Al andar se hace camino, y al volver la vista atrás se ve la senda que nunca se ha de volver a pisar.

Sharing details of the paths we have walked into being can help us all. Action research also builds communities. First, there is the community of teachers, students and others working together to improve things in their situation. Then there is the community of action researchers learning with and from each other across their different situations.

What is 'action research'?   A longer answer:

Action research is a form of inquiry carried out by professionals into their own work. Teacher-researchers explore their own teaching, or their curriculums, or some other aspect of their professional context.

Action research sets out to change the world by acting on it. The aim is to make things better. So, a teacher might notice that his/her students do not seem very motivated in their writing class. S/he asks colleagues about their writing classes, s/he reads articles about teaching writing and about motivation. S/he plans something new and tries it out. Then s/he asks, '*What did I learn from that*?'

Action research is done by insiders. It sets out to create practices from which we can also develop our own theories. A theory, in this sense, means a statement of our best understanding of what is happening and why. This theory arises from practice.

Because practice is always located somewhere, at a certain time, among certain people, we can expect that action research in different places will produce theories that have some overlap and some differences. By sharing our practices and our theories, we can learn from both the overlaps and the differences.

Action research can be an individual effort, but it is even stronger when it involves cooperation among colleagues and also, where appropriate, cooperation with students. Action research carries the message that we can learn and improve things through our own efforts, without waiting to be told what to do by so-called experts who may not properly understand our situation. Action research, in this view, is in the tradition of cooperative, problem-posing education, of which Paulo Freire (1998:65) writes:

> … it affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future.

... se identifique com eles como seres mais além de si mesmos - como "projetos"-, como seres que caminham para frente, que olham para frente; como seres a quem o imobilismo ameaça de morte; para quem o olhar para trás não deve ser uma forma nostálgica de querer voltar, mas um modo de melhor conhecer o que está sendo, para melhor construir o futuro.

How do you do action research?

As in the brief descriptions above, action research can be seen as a continuing cycle, or spiral, of action, observation, reflection and planning, which leads to more action, observation, reflection, etc.

Figure 1 The action research cycle (after Kemmis & McTaggart 1988)
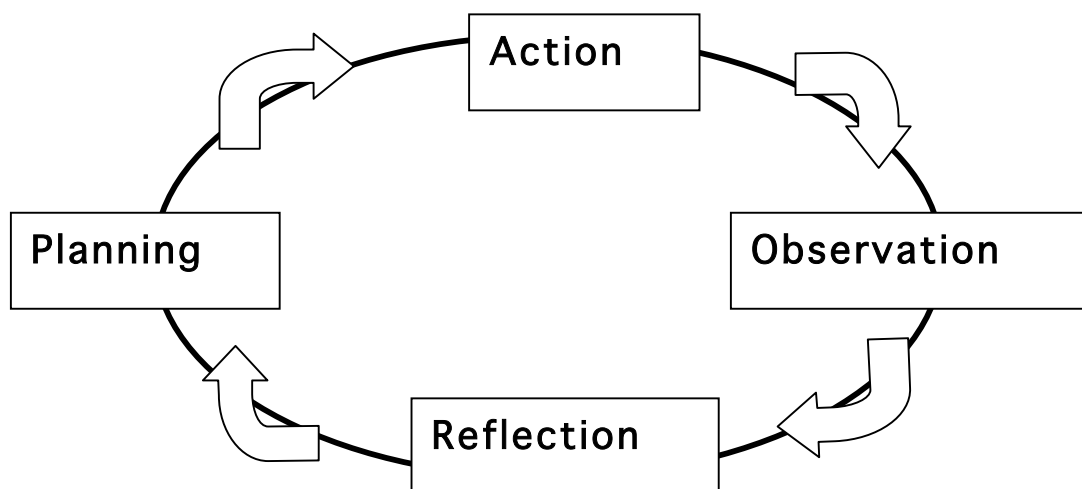
These four elements are not completely separate stages, but I hope you can see a meaningful progression through them. It goes something like this:

- We begin in a context of *action*. The importance of action research arises from the fact that it begins in the working situation of our on-going professional lives.
- In this action, we try to be open to our work environment. We want to learn from it, and to respond to it, with an overall purpose of making things better for all concerned. We take care to be *observant* of what is going on and to be on the

look-out for something worthy of further investigation. Sometimes, this might be a problem and we ask ourselves, '*How can I improve things there?*' On the other hand, we might notice a significant success and we ask ourselves, '*Why did that work so well, can I do something like that in another part of my teaching?*' Or it might be that we see a possibility to do something new and we ask ourselves, '*How could I make that happen?*' The fundamental issue is that the individual observes a possibility in that person's working context. To put this another way, the context offers the person a particular opportunity, one that it might not have afforded another person, because that other person might see things differently.

- The person concerned *reflects* on this issue and informs themself about it, drawing on personal experience, reading, conversations with colleagues and also their own ability to analyse the issue concerned and to express their ideas. Talking about ideas helps them to grow.

- Then comes a *planning* stage, personal but informed by others, by local knowledge and by reading. Once again, planning is helped by talking about plans as they are being made.

- We then put the *plan* into **action**, we *observe* carefully what has changed and check whether things have improved or not. On *reflection*, we ask the key question, '*What have I learned from this?'* The key meaning of reflection here is '*the kind of thinking that helps us turn experience into knowledge*.'

- As we carefully spell out our new understanding, we are developing our theory of teaching and learning. As we do this, we change ourselves a little. As we change ourselves, we change our teaching context, because we see it differently. It can offer us more opportunities.

- In this way, we also hope to discover new questions to explore that will continue our professional and personal development. And so the work becomes a continuing cycle of discovery and growth.

- When we share our new understandings with our colleagues, and perhaps with our students, they change, too, opening up new opportunities for cooperation.

- When we **talk** and **write** about our experience of action research, we contribute to our field as a whole, offering new understanding that arises from practice, and encouraging others to join in.

- Even though we can write only from our own contexts, we may have suggestions for others to try out in their own situations. Or they might learn something from our reports very different from what we set out to say. Both kinds of learning are useful and both arise from our willingness to cooperate and to share.

Can you give me an example?
Yes, at the end of this guide, we include an article that reports on an action research project carried out in Bogotá, Colombia. You could read that article now, or wait until you have read the rest of this guide.

Whenever you read the article, please keep these thoughts in mind:

An example is just that — one example. One example of a bird is an eagle, another is a duck, another is a penguin. Eagles, ducks and penguins have very good reasons for being the way they are — very different. The article that we include has been written in the way required by the journal that it appeared in. The action research that it reports grew out of its own context, which may be nothing like yours. The question for the reader is *not*, "*Would this work for me in my context?*" The questions is: "*What can I learn from this?*"

In the previous section on the action research cycle, I wrote at one stage:
> The person concerned **reflects** on this issue and informs themself about it, drawing on personal experience, reading, conversations with colleagues and also their own ability to analyse the issue concerned and to express their ideas.

What I call '*reading*' there is reported in the article under the heading, 'Literature Review'. That sounds more formal, but don't let that put you off. It is important that we inform ourselves as fully as we can about the area we are interested in, and reading 'the literature' is a central part of that process. Your mentor will help you with your reading and with your writing.

Your own action research cycle
We are going to look at the different phases of action research in more detail. At any point, remember that your mentor is there to advise you, so be sure to keep in touch with him or her. Keep your mentor informed about your thinking and your actions. If you are not sure about something, ask. However, remember that you are the expert on your teaching situation, so here is one piece of advice about *how* to ask.

If at all possible, do **not** ask '*What should I do?*'
Say, instead, '*I have thought about the possibilities and I think I should do **this for these reasons**.*'

That gives your mentor a much better chance of understanding your situation and giving you advice that you can actually make use of.

Getting started

Some of this work should have been done before your project was accepted, but let us begin anyway at the beginning.

Permission and cooperation

Before you do any action research, you need to be as sure as possible that you are not going to upset anyone. So, ask yourself, '*Whose permission do I need?*'

The answers will differ in different situations, but there will be a list of people something like this:

- your school director
- your students
- the parents of your pupils, if they are children

You also need to talk to your colleagues about your intentions. Some of them may be interested enough to join in, or to discuss your work with you as you go along. Some of them may not be happy about the idea. They may feel that you are drawing attention to yourself, or suggesting that they are somehow inferior to you. You need to listen to their concerns and try to reassure them. Make them feel that you would be happy to share what you are doing with them, but you don't want to bother them with it.

People differ in how they take to new ideas, don't expect everyone to be pleased, but don't shut anyone out.

Finding your focus

Again, this should be relatively clear at this stage. On the other hand, you might find that some colleagues become interested in carrying out their own action research and some people find it difficult to pin down a particular focus. Tell them what you did. You might also want to show them some other ways to start. Here are three possibilities:

Make recordings of some of your classes.
Listen carefully to what happens, to what you say, to what the students say. You may be surprised, not always pleasantly! However, it is very likely that you will find something that interests you, or that you would like to change, or to learn from.

Complete as many of these sentences as you can:
•   As a teacher, the kind of activity I most enjoy is . . .
•   As a teacher, the kind of activity I least enjoy is . . .
•   One type of activity I think students learn a lot from is . . .
•   The kind of change I would like to make in my teaching is . . .
•   One aspect of my teaching I'm really pleased about is . . .
•   One thing I would like to do more of in my teaching is . . .
•   One thing I don't like about my teaching is . . .
•   One technique I would like to try out in class is . . .
•   The kind of student I'm best with is . . .
•   The sort of student I can't stand is . . .
Can you make up any more sentences like this that express something about you and your teaching? If you talk to a colleague about your sentences, might you find something in there worth investigating?

Make a list of the *things that get in your way* at work.
        Examples might be such things as:
•   Some students always come late.
•   There's too much external noise in some of the teaching rooms.
•   My senior colleagues don't take the need for change seriously.

Before you read on, you have to stop and make your own list; otherwise you will disable the task.

No! Don't look ahead. Make your list. Do it now.

When you have made your list, re-phrase your statements to focus the problem in yourself.
e.g.
• I don't know what to do about late arrivals.
• I am unable to adapt my teaching to my environment or change my environment.
• I can't convince my senior colleagues that we should make some changes.

Maybe you'll find something to work on there.

Checking your focus
Before you get too involved, it's worth checking again the practicality of your focus against the following headings;

Scale
Don't try to take on a large-scale issue. Keep your focus small enough for you to be able to do something about it and find out what happens in the time available.

Collaboration
Will this topic encourage others to get involved? A group can give support to its members and help spread news about the work being done and its outcomes.

Relevance
Are you focusing on something that is a part of your everyday work? You do not want to create an extra burden on top of your teaching. Nor do you want to have to start reading about a topic that you know very little about. You want to be exploring your teaching and the context in which it takes place.

Authority
Have you got sufficient authority to make sure that the necessary work gets done? You do not want to rely on someone else who might lose interest.

Motivation
Does this topic really, truly motivate you? There will be times when your enthusiasm will fade, so you need to be asking questions that you definitely want the answers to!

Orientations and aspects of action research
Finally, here, it is worth remembering that action research can focus on all kinds of aspects of teaching and learning contexts. One way to divide them up is like this:

Orientation	We want to focus on …
Means	… the ways we that we use to reach agreed goals.
Ends	… the goals that we set ourselves.
Theory	… our understanding of our practice.
Institution	… how our institution works and its role in our society.
Society	… how our work supports values important to our society
Personal	… how personal/professional development is supported for students and teachers.

However, it is also necessary to remember two points here:

First, the above divisions, like any kind of category analysis, should only be understood as 'as-if' categories. That is to say, we know that the real world cannot be divided up into separate boxes. Everything is connected to everything else. But sometimes it is helpful and useful to divide up 'the whole-thing' *as-if* the categories were real. How useful? Well, that depends on how successful we are at increasing our understanding of 'the whole thing.'

Second, a single action research project may well touch on all of the above orientations. By the same token, it may focus almost exclusively on one of them. It is also true that the question you have in mind when you start your research project may change as your work goes forward, leading to a broader, or narrower, focus. Our general advice is to start with a narrow focus — see that point under Scale, above.

Collecting data

'Data' means relevant information. The important word is 'relevant'. It is *so easy* to collect information about what goes on in a classroom or a school, but what information is *relevant* will depend on what you are trying to change and how you will evaluate your success.

You can take photographs, make recordings, observe classes, be observed in your own class, keep notes, write a diary, have students keep diaries, start discussions, hold interviews, set assignments, give out questionnaires, draw diagrams, organise projects, set tasks, review materials. You will want to gather data from different perspectives because when something happens, different people will have different interpretations of it, different opinions, and different memories. The action researcher wants to collect them and bring them together. That way, we have a much fuller understanding of what is going on.

Wherever possible, your way of collecting data should be a part of your normal teaching routine or professional duties. Remember that as long as your students are using English to explore something that interests them, you are doing your job. The difference is that you are now more aware of the information that is available to you, because you are using it for research purposes.

Let us take one small example. In 'Finding your focus,' above, we raised the possible issue:
I don't know what to do about late arrivals.

I might decide to intervene in this situation by starting a small project on punctuality and how the rest of the class feels about their classmates coming late. The aim is for the class to agree on a set of rules regarding time-keeping. My intention is that, by focusing on this issue, I will have a positive effect on student punctuality, which will make my teaching easier and more effective. I also hope to 'teach' the idea that the students have the authority to set the rules for their own behaviour out of a sense of mutual respect.

But what will I actually learn? I don't know, of course, until I do it. What I invite you to do is to think about how you might plan that intervention, what data you would collect, and how you would collect it. To my way of thinking, for example, diagrams of where students sit, which might be vital to answering another question, would not be useful or relevant here. On the other hand, a sentence completion task such as the following might be:

When other students arrive late, I feel …
When I arrive late for class, I feel …
Julian is asking us about this because …
If Julian arrived late for class, he would feel …
etc.

Whatever your topic, you have to be careful to choose ways of working and data-collection instruments that suit your situation and the time-frame that you have available..

Analysing data

As I said above, it is *so easy* to collect lots of information about what goes on in the classroom. Another way of usefully limiting the data you collect is to be sure what you want it for and how you intend to analyse it. In action research, we can be interested both in *quantitative* analysis, the kind of information that can be represented in numbers, and in a more *qualitative* approach that helps us find out about other people's experiences and perspectives. The latter is more usual.

Let us return to our above example. There are some quantitative elements to it. I will certainly want to know how many students are as annoyed as I am by those who come late, as I am hoping to change this tendency. If things work out that way, I hope to see the students work out a set of rules (and perhaps penalties) that will encourage greater punctuality. If punctuality does improve, which I can also check in a quantitative way, that would count as success.

On the other hand, I may discover a whole new perspective on the issue. What I see as '*coming late*' in terms of my carefully planned lesson, my students may see as an acceptable variation in the necessary comings and goings of everyday life. And I might receive a sentence-completion that says:

When I arrive late for class, I feel … very tired, because I have to take my brothers to school and visit my mother in hospital before I come.

In these cases, perhaps I have to learn to see my class boundaries in a different way and adjust my teaching to allow for them. That is what I learn, and that would also count as success.

The important question for the teacher is not, "*Did it work?"* but "*What have I learned from this?*"

One way or another, analysis involves identifying pieces of information and putting them into different categories. If you have asked some direct questions, then this is quite easy. For example, imagine you observe that the students in one class do not seem very interested or motivated. You might set a task with a number of statements like this:

How much do you agree with the following statements?

1   I know I have to learn English, but I don't like it.

Strongly   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly
agree   disagree

Here, you have provided the choices and you can see how many answers go into which category. This is a kind of *deductive* analysis, where you bring your categories to the data.

However, perhaps you arranged a class discussion on this same subject and you are now listening to a tape recording of what the students said. This gives people a much better opportunity to say what they actually think and feel, but it is more difficult to analyse. You will probably need to make a transcript (a written version) of what they said so that you can study it properly. Then, as you listen and listen and listen, you try to *create* categories that allow you to capture the important features of what you hear. For example, you hear one student say,
Liking it is not important. I don't like maths, but I need to learn it.
and you give this a code: (motivated by *need*)
Another students says,
For me, I learn better if I enjoy. I like to watch movies.
and you give this a different code: (motivated by *enjoyment*)
And another student says,
I want to work with tourists, I have to be good at English.
Can you use one of the previous codes? Or do you need a new one?
And so you continue. This is called an *inductive* approach to analysis, where you create the categories from the data.

When you have coded all the data, you see if you can combine some of the codes into larger themes.

Allow me to repeat myself: It is important to know *why* you are collecting data and *what* you want to do with it before you start collecting. Otherwise, you can just go on and on collecting information which piles up into a problem that does not help you at all. As with all things, your mentor will advise on these issues.

One final point: despite what I said in the last paragraph, it is OK to change your mind; it is OK to change your plan; it is OK to discover something more interesting that what you set out to find. In fact, this is another reason why it is so important to *have* a plan — so that if you change it, you know what it is that you are changing. Data collection and data analysis often interact with each other, so clarity of purpose and flexibility are both essential. Action research is not about fixed experiments that set out to discover the truth. Action research is about exploring our lives with other people and trying to make things better.

Outcomes
The aim of action research is not to come up with generalisations, but with a deeper understanding of a specific situation. The purpose of the work is:

1. to improve the quality of experience available for all participants in that situation;
2. to formulate what you have learned;
3. to pass that knowledge on;
4. to stay involved in that cycle of experience and learning;
5. to demonstrate to others the personal and professional effects of working in this way.

In this section, we are particularly concerned with points two and three above. As you start to put into words what you have learned from your action research experience, this will itself take your learning forward. As you develop those words in order to communicate what you have learned to someone else, this will take your learning forward again. Be prepared for this. The learning from action research is not simply in the experience itself, but in the noticing and the reflecting and the putting into words. These days, those words are not translated into a high academic style. It is more usual to express oneself in a first-person, active voice, rather than a third-person passive. That is to say, I would write, for example:

I told the students to …

rather than:

The students were told to …

Your mentor will advise on the best way of passing on what you have learned. Let us look briefly at two main possibilities, writing an article or making a presentation. One thing that they have in common is that they need to organise the experience that you have had and the learning that you have done into a form that is easy for someone else to understand. The experience of actually *doing* action research can sometimes be messy and confusing and frustrating. The *reporting* of action research needs to be clear and well-organised. That organisation will include some version of the following:

A title
This should make clear the focus of your research in order to attract people likely to be interested. It is often good to include a gerund (an *–ing* form of a verb) in the title in order to remind yourself and the reader that your focus is on *action*. See the sample article.

Introduction
This gives a brief overview of the article/presentation, thus reinforcing the title.

Situation
Information about the setting in terms of students, institution, course, etc. This where you set out the **context of action** from which you began. You invite the reader/listener into your world and help them see it as an authentic teaching/learning space.

Focus

What is it that you decided to focus on and why did you choose this focus? This is where you report on the period of *observation*, perhaps including reading and discussion, that led you to identify what you wanted to change.

Intervention

This is where you talk about the plan that you made. You report on what you read and any other reasons for *planning* in that way. Then you tell what you actually *did* and what *happened* as a result. This is the longest part of your article/presentation and may be divided into sub-sections.

Learning

Here you tell the reader what you learned from *reflecting* on your intervention, explaining why you believe you are justified in making this claim. You may want to include feedback from your students and/or colleagues. You may also want to say what you learned about yourself and how this learning has changed you in some way. You may want to say what new questions have arisen for you because of this project. You may have some suggestions to make.

In a written article, or a formal spoken presentation, you can follow this framework quite straightforwardly (unless a journal editor wants something different). If you are offering a workshop for teachers, my experience is that colleagues like to work. That is, they like to get their hands on someone else's data and see what sense they can make of it. They are prepared to listen to your story, but they want to tell their own. So, leave time for workshop participants to look at some actual data and some of your analysis. Give them time to talk and time to say what they think. Then they are likely to enjoy themselves and remember your workshop. If people disagree with your analysis or your statement of learning, that is, they disagree with your theory, do not get defensive or upset. Show that you are more interested in learning than in being right and that you trust your fellow-teachers to feel the same way. It is much more impressive to say, '*Mmm, that's interesting. I have explained why I think the way I do. Perhaps you would like to explore your ideas practically, as I have, and offer another workshop?*'

We also hope that you experience a sense of empowerment as you join those who take the trouble to pass their knowledge on.

A sample article

We have taken this article (Urrutia León & Vega Cély 2010) from an archive built up by the journal *Profile*, edited by the PROFILE Research Group at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, led by Melba Libia Cárdenas Beltrán. Prof. Cárdenas has provided exemplary leadership in the area of action research for many years and the journal is only one evidence of this. We are very grateful for permission to include this

article here and we give more details about *Profile* and other articles to be found there in our Resources section.

Please remember what I said earlier about the role of examples. An example can be useful if it helps clarify what it *possible*. It is not helpful if you see it as a definition of what is *necessary*.

Before you read this article in detail, let us look briefly at how it is organised. The headings in the article are:

> Introduction
> Research questions
> Context
> Participants
> Methodology
> Techniques for collecting data
> - Video recording
> - Teacher's journal
> - Questionnaires
> Stages to develop the project
> - Literature review
> - Speaking skills
> - Games and motivation
> Pedagogical design
> Data analysis and results
> - Games from different perspectives
>   - Students' perspectives
>   - Teachers' perspective
> Conclusions
> Further research
> Recommendations

How do these headings relate to the very general advice that I gave above? Well, there is not a perfect match, but we can see those basic elements in this way:

Introduction
Introduction (In this case, the Focus is introduced immediately)
Research questions

Situation & Focus
Context
Participants

Intervention (planning)
Methodology
Techniques for collecting data
- Video recording
- Teacher's journal
- Questionnaires

Stages to develop the project
- Literature review
- Speaking skills
- Games and motivation

Intervention (action)
Pedagogical design
Data analysis and results
- Games from different perspectives
  - Students' perspectives
  - Teachers' perspective

Learning
Conclusions
Further research
Recommendations

Each journal will have its own requirements for how you communicate your research, but the basics will always be there. Your mentor will help you design your communication to suit the audience that you are aiming for.

After reading this article, how do you feel? Excited? Worried? Confused? Motivated? These are all very reasonable reactions. Talk to your mentor about your own reaction.

INSERT HERE:

Urrutia León, W. & Vega Cely, E. 2010. Encouraging Teenagers to Improve Speaking Skills through Games in a Colombian Public School. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *12*(1), 11-31.
http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/13831

Another kind of beginning
This introductory guide to action research has been written especially for the project that you are beginning.

It cannot answer all the questions that you already have, and certainly not the questions that you will create as this work goes forward. However, we hope that it will provide the basis for a common understanding among all members of the project. Starting from that common understanding, we hope that we can cooperate in producing better and better questions.

In the references section at the end of this guide, we have listed a number of articles that you could look at. If you have read something else that you have found useful, please do pass the reference on to the rest of the group.

The most important message to take away for the next stage is this:

Keep in touch with your mentor and with other group members. Your individual development is a part of all our collegial development, and all our collegial development is a part of yours.

And finally, in terms broader than teaching practices or theories, and in our own small ways, we want to be a part of what Reason & Bradbury (2001:2) describe when they write that:
'… *the primary purpose of action research is not to produce academic theories based on action; nor is it to produce theories about action; nor is it to produce theoretical or empirical knowledge that can be applied in action; it is to liberate the human body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer world.*'

This is your invitation to join in.

Acknowledgements

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General themes
In all projects, we will be looking for interventions that:

- are sensitive to the local context;
- encourage cooperation;
- further the use of English as an equalising force in society, rather than one that adds to already existing divisions.

We have proposed three general themes for proposals, with each theme further subdivided. In each case, we have also suggested some examples. Neither the themes nor the examples should be seen as restrictive. We welcome innovative proposals from outside our own current thinking.

Developing methods, materials and syllabus/curriculum

For example, action research into **classroom procedures** might recognise particular strengths, or traditional learning skills, that students have and introduce new ways of using them. Or it might introduce a complementary approach that would be novel, but thought to be potentially motivating. We are particularly interested in multilingual approaches that recognise the significance of indigenous languages.

In a context where **teaching materials** are seen as alien to learners' backgrounds, materials from the local context might be introduced. Conversely, learners might be motivated by materials that take them out of their context and enthuse them with the international reach of English.

An intervention at **syllabus/curriculum** level might invite learners (and teachers, parents, employers and others) to consider more closely the actual purpose of the teaching of English in a particular programme or institution.

Introducing new technologies

What exactly is *new* will depend on the context. In any context, however, it is likely that the pace of change with regard to information technology will only increase. Perhaps the biggest challenge to teachers worldwide will be their inability to keep up as the gap between their own skills and those of their learners widens. We have, therefore, at least four types of possible focus for action research projects.

1. One type of intervention would involve introducing a new technology to achieve recognised learning goals and procedures.
2. A second type would involve introducing new goals and procedures made possible by the new technology.
3. A third type would involve the teacher demonstrating how s/he is learning to use a new technology as a member of the digital community shared with his/her students, and perhaps helped by them.

4. A fourth type would involve the introduction of technology familiar to the students, but not to the teacher, in which the teacher demonstrates her teaching skills without having to master the new technology.

Experiencing professional development with colleagues

Continuing, contextualised professional development is an important key to improved teaching, and also to the quality of life of a practising teacher. Action research is a major element of continuing development and the profession needs more studies of how this development takes place. A project might explore the effects of an intervention in continuing development from the perspective of the person leading that intervention, or from the perspective of a participant, or both.

Clearly, there are many possible areas of overlap among the above themes. This is inevitable, the world of teaching and learning does not divide up into discrete parts, it is one. That one world, however, can be looked at from different perspectives. We hope that the above perspectives will be useful in helping teachers form their proposals. If the themes are not helpful, ignore them and write the proposal that best expresses the action research that you would like to carry out.

Resource Articles

In our guide to action research, we gave you one sample article to read. In this resource, we give you access to many more. They are divided into five sections.

We begin with articles from the journal, *Profile,* from which that initial sample article was taken. We then turn to the *ELT Journal*, an international journal in which the British Council has some editorial involvement. In that section, we also suggest a reading strategy to help you make the best use of any articles that you find difficult to read. This may happen as you start to read articles in this area. Don't let that worry you. You will get used to the way in which such articles are written. Also, your mentor will be on hand to help when necessary.

Action research, of course, is not an English language phenomenon and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Peru offers a catalogue of AR articles in Spanish. For some of you, that might be a very useful way of getting used to reading about the field. For an example of action research in Portuguese, please see the last section of this resource document.

The fourth resource we introduce you to is *Networks*, an international on-line journal of teacher research.

Finally, we have a mixed collection of articles, including one from one of the mentors on this project about his experience as an action-researcher in an Argentinian secondary school, and one from Prof. Cárdenas, the editor of *Profile*, on the subject of writing about your action research projects.

Profile

The archives of the journal contain a wonderful collection of action research articles that you can search and download. Here is a selection of articles written by colleagues teaching in Colombian schools. As you approach them, remember the advice on reading given in the AR guide.

Adolescents' Awareness of Environmental Care: Experiences when Writing Short Descriptive Texts in English
Lorena Jaramillo Urrutia, Ana Stella Medina Gutiérrez
http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/20579

The Role of Warming Up Activities in Adolescent Students' Involvement during the English Class
Rosalba Velandia
http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/10561

The Role of Collaborative Work in the Development of Elementary Students' Writing Skills

Yuly Yinneth Yate González, Luis Fernando Saenz, Johanna Alejandra Bermeo, Andrés Fernando Castañeda Chaves

http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/37858

An English Syllabus with Emphasis on Chemistry: A Proposal for 10th Graders of a Public School in Colombia

Sandra Juanita López Clavijo

http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/10476

Using Songs to Encourage Sixth Graders to Develop English Speaking Skills

Mónica Duarte Romero, Luz Mery Tinjacá Bernal, Marilú Carrero Olivares
http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/29053

Encouraging Teenagers to Improve Speaking Skills through Games in a Colombian Public School

William Urrutia León, Esperanza Vega Cely
http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/13831

Promoting Oral Production through the Task-Based Learning Approach: A Study in a Public Secondary School in Colombia

Mireya Peña, Amparo Onatra
http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/11438

Using the Dictionary for Improving Adolescents' Reading Comprehension of Short Scientific Texts

Ximena Becerra Cortés
http://www.profile.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/36968

ELT Journal

Here we have six articles reporting on action research projects in Argentina, Hungary, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and the USA. As you can see, the articles refer to the teaching of grammar, conversation, reading and writing, as well as to the use of drama techniques and the learning of communication strategies.

Liu, J. 2000. The power of readers' theatre: From reading to writing. *ELT Journal* 54/4: 354-361.

Porto, M. 2001. Cooperative writing response groups and self evaluation. *ELT Journal* 55/1: 38-46.

Sayer, P. 2005. An intensive approach to building conversation skills. *ELT Journal* 59/1: 14-22.

Schneider, J. 2005.Teaching grammar through community issues. *ELT Journal* 59/4: 298-305.

Macalister, J. 2007. Implementing extensive reading in an EAP programme. *ELT Journal* 62/3: 248-256.

Skinner. B. & Madden, M. 2009. Help seeking in English language learning. *ELT Journal* 64/1: 21-31.

Most of the above teacher-researchers are working with undergraduates, but Macalister (2007) is teaching non-university young adults and Skinner & Madden (2009) reports on a secondary school in Hungary and immigrant workers in Ireland.

You may find these articles difficult to read at first. If so, remember what you perhaps say to your students: you don't have to understand everything the writer writes; what you have to do is to *use the text* for your own purposes.

So, as we have discussed previously (p. 13 of the AR Guide), there is some key information that you are looking for:

Teaching Situation:	Country, students' level, type of institution, etc.
Focus of the research:	Area of learning, teaching, language, management, etc.
Intervention:	What did the teacher-researcher do?
Learning:	What did the teacher-researcher learn?

You may find that the most direct way into the articles is this:

1. Check the Focus of the research from the title.
2. Look through the article for the part where the writers tell you what they actually *did*. Different writers use different sub-headings, such as: *methodology*, or *the study*, or they repeat the gerund of their title, such as *Introducing*, or they refer to *Step 1*, *Step 2*, etc. as they describe what they did. You will also notice that the verbs shift into the past tense for these sections. That is where the action is.

If what you find seems interesting to you, you can go back and read more about the teaching situation and what the writers learned from their action research.

As ever, your mentor will be happy to help out with any difficulties you may have with these texts, and also to help you move forward from any ideas that you discover, as well as those that you create.

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http://blog.pucp.edu.pe/media/1552/20140113-listado_de_articulos_sobre_ia.pdf

Here, you will find a bibliography of articles in Spanish reporting on action research projects, ranging from pre-school to postgraduate education, carried out in Latin America between 2000 and 2013. Only a minority of them relate to language teaching directly, but they all help show the diversity of the action research community flourishing across the continent.

You might enjoy reading about action research in other parts of the curriculum. As always, the appropriate question is, '*What can I learn from this?*'
You might also notice differences in the ways that action research reports are written, between articles written in this tradition, in the ELT Journal examples above, and again in the Profile articles that you have looked at.

And if you ask yourself then, '*What can I learn from this?*' the answer might be that there are indeed multiple ways in which we express ourselves, individually, culturally, and in the requirements of each journal. Again, do not let that put you off. Take it as an invitation to find the best way for you to express yourself, and ask your mentor for advice.

Networks – An on-line journal for teacher research

http://journals.library.wisc.edu/index.php/networks

The home page of this site begins with:

> *Networks* offers a place for sharing reports of action research, in which teachers at all levels, kindergarten to postgraduate, are reflecting on classroom practice through research ventures. It also provides space for discussion of other ways in which educational practitioners, alone or in collaboration, use inquiry as a tool to learn more about their work with the hope of eventually improving its effectiveness.

Once again, there is no direct focus on teaching English, but the site is easy to search and there are examples of work relevant to our field. For example:

Breeze, R. 2002. Change in action: From reading to surfing. Vol.5, No.2.
http://journals.library.wisc.edu/index.php/networks/article/view/47/50

Lehman, A. 2000. Student-generated discussion in the senior secondary English classroom. Vol. 3, No. 2. http://journals.library.wisc.edu/index.php/networks/article/view/142/141

Single Texts

From outside the above sources, we also want to provide access to the following single texts.

In Portuguese, an example of an action research project very much in our field is:

Lima Junіór, R. 2010. Uma investigação dos efeitos do ensino explícito da pronúncia na aula de inglês como língua estrangeira. *RBLA 10*(9), 747-771. http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbla/v10n3/a13v10n3.pdf

An article that focuses on the professional development side of action research from the perspective of the teacher-researchers concerned comes from one of the mentors on this project, Darío Banegas and his colleagues in Argentina:

Banegas, D., Pavese, A., Vealásquez, A. & Vélez, A. 2013. Teacher professional development through collaborative action research: Impact on foreign English-language teaching and learning. *Educational Action Research 21* (2), 185-201.

And finally, an article to read when you are thinking about how to report on your research and share your discoveries with the wider field of the action research community:

Cárdenas, M. 2003. Teacher-researchers as writers: A way to sharing findings. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal 5*(5), 49-64. http://revistas.udistrital.edu.co/ojs/index.php/calj/article/view/181/299

Endings and beginnings

We hope that these references help you find a way into the literature of action research. We also hope and trust that you will find different ways in yourselves, and that you will share those ways with the rest of us. If you do discover an article or a book or a website that you find particularly useful, please do pass that recommendation along to your mentor. S/he will make sure that it is sent along to other members of the project.

Finally, for now, if you want to buy a book aimed at action-researchers in English language teaching, then many people speak well of this one:

Burns, A. 2010. *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching. A Guide for Practitioners.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Selection criteria

In order to qualify for the award, teacher-researchers should:

1. be a native of the country where they live and work;
2. be a qualified teacher in terms recognised in that country;
3. have a minimum of five years' teaching experience following qualification;
4. be in regular employment, teaching English for at least 12 hours per week;
5. have a communicative ability in English at least equivalent to CEFR B1;
6. have reliable internet access and be in a position to communicate via email and skype, or other appropriate electronic media.

We expect successful proposals to demonstrate that teacher-researchers:

1. have observed their working context carefully;
2. have identified a credible focus for their action-research project;
3. have done some preparatory thinking and reading about how to proceed, both methodologically and with regard for the welfare of all concerned;
4. have done some preparatory thinking about how they might want to spend the research funding;
5. have gained the necessary permission from all interested parties to carry out the proposed research;
6. have given some thought to how they might communicate the results of their research.

We are particularly interested in applications from teachers who:
- work at primary and secondary levels in their state education systems;
- have established the possibility of cooperation on their project with one or more colleagues,

but we do not exclude other possibilities.