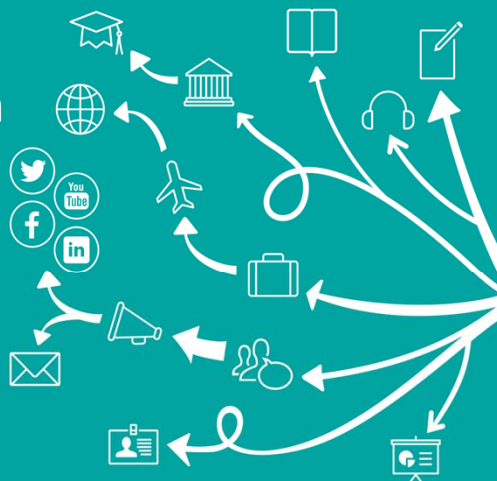

Using Action Research for Professional Development

Fiona Barker

English UK Management Conference
Edinburgh, 10 March 2017

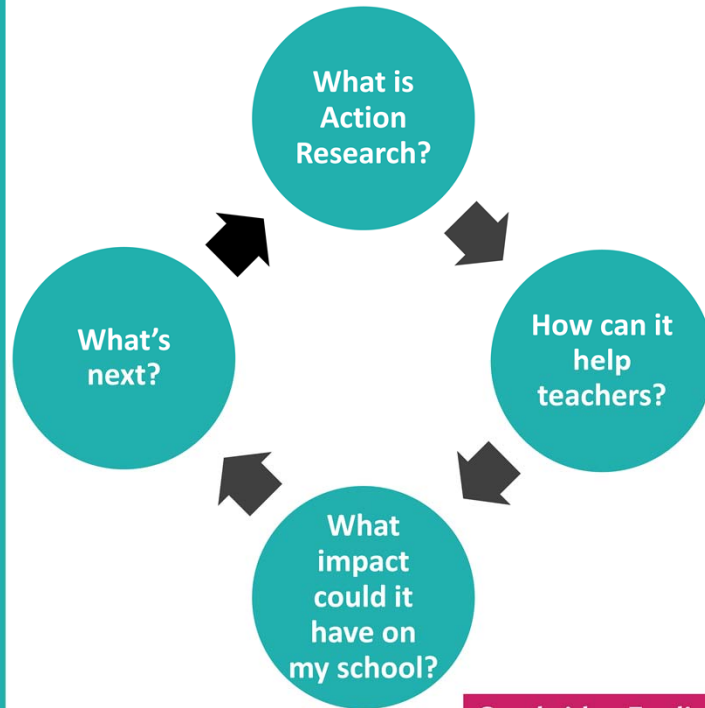


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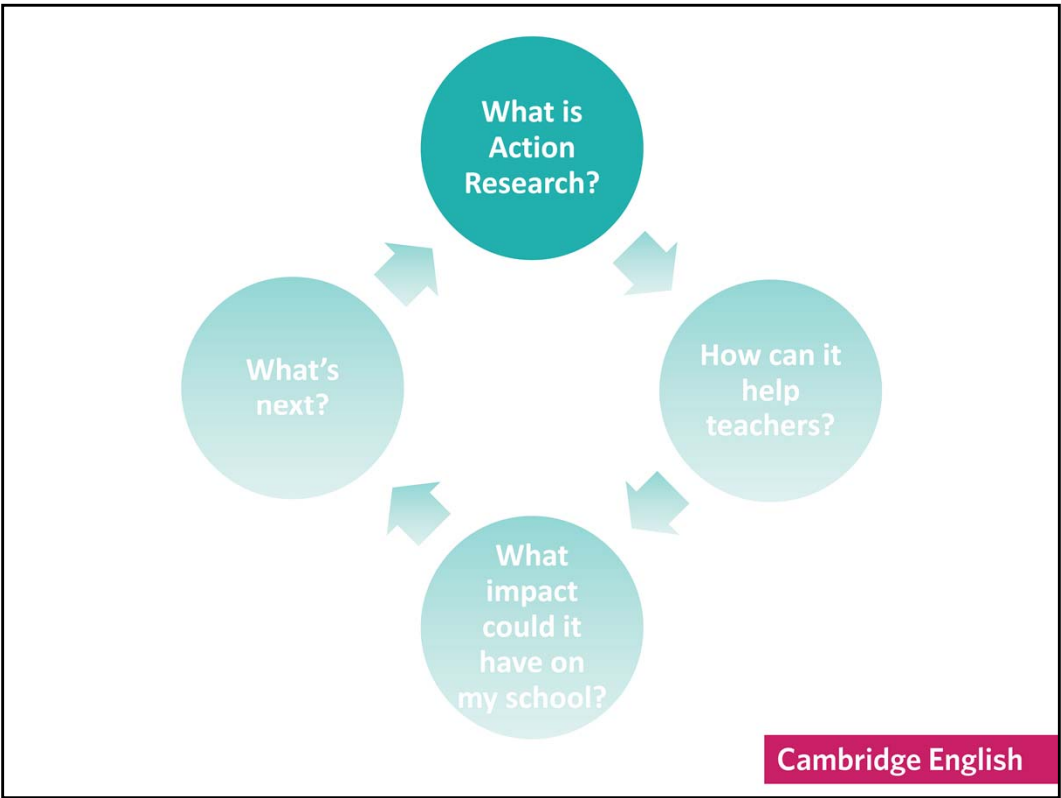
Our aim today

Explore:

- key questions
- resources
- impact on ELT



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What do you think Action Research is?



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Understanding Action Research

AR involves teachers exploring a specific challenge
... that they have identified
... in their own teaching context

AR is a form of teacher research.

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Aspects of Action Research

- a self-reflective, systematic and critical approach
- participants are actors but also researchers
- aims to identify 'problematic' situations or issues
- brings about critically informed changes

(Anne Burns, 2010)

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Why should teachers do Action Research?

“It is practitioners in their **immediate social situation** who are best placed to **understand, examine** and **innovate** in curriculum-related issues and challenges.”

(Burns, 2011, p.3)

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The nature of Action Research

- Research does not have to be academic in nature or carried out by expert teachers or researchers
- AR is both dynamic and inclusive, involving many people
- AR is based on a clear idea of:
 - the *challenge*
 - the teaching and learning *context*
 - the research *cycle*

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TIPS for Action Research:
1. Outline the CHALLENGE

- WHAT is the idea/issue to be investigated?
- WHY is it relevant to the teacher-researcher?

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2. Understand the CONTEXT

- WHAT is the teaching & learning context like?
- WHO are the learners?

3. Implement the research CYCLE

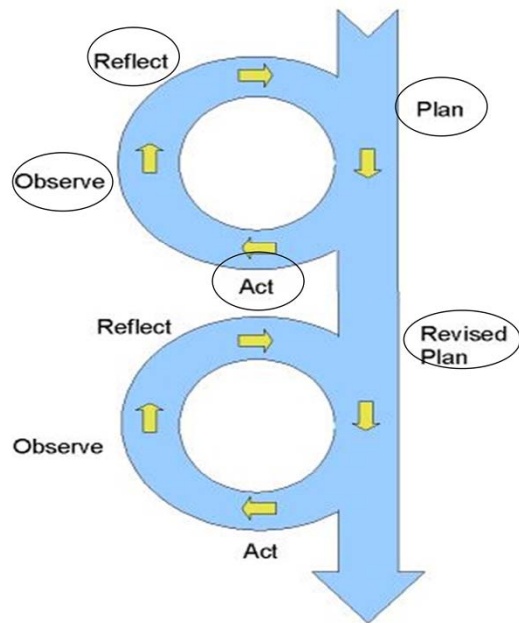
- An iterative way of planning, acting, observing and reflecting
- Without cycles of activity, it's not AR!

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An Action Research cycle

- Develop a **plan** of critically informed action to improve what is already happening
- **Act** to implement the plan
- **Observe** the effects of the critically informed action in its context
- **Reflect** on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action, [etc.] through a succession of stages.

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p10)



Examples of Action Research in the UK

- The effects of an extensive reading programme
- The effects of using correction codes and redrafting on intermediate students' writing
- Using synthetic phonics to improve listening awareness and accuracy in pre-intermediate learners
- Can learners make realistic peer assessments of oral presentations?
- Self-assessment of progress for short-stay students
- Creating ePortfolios to facilitate and evidence progress using learning technologies

(2014 projects, see *Research Notes* 61)

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What is your experience of Action Research?



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Your experience of action research

- Have you ever taken part in any action research?
- What area were you looking at?
- What did you learn from the experience?

OR

- What challenge in your context would you like to explore using AR?

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Case study 1: Teaching pronunciation

Context:

- Language college in Western Australia
- Mixed nationality class at levels B2-C1 of CEFR
- General English course
- Rolling enrolment – 1-10 weeks
- Diverse learning goals

Rationale:

“Pronunciation is often neglected yet makes a huge difference in the confidence and communicative ability and motivation of students.”

(Brendan Brown, 2012)

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Research questions

- How can students be encouraged to become more aware of specific aspects of their pronunciation difficulties?
- Is it effective to have students practise their pronunciation outside of the classroom?

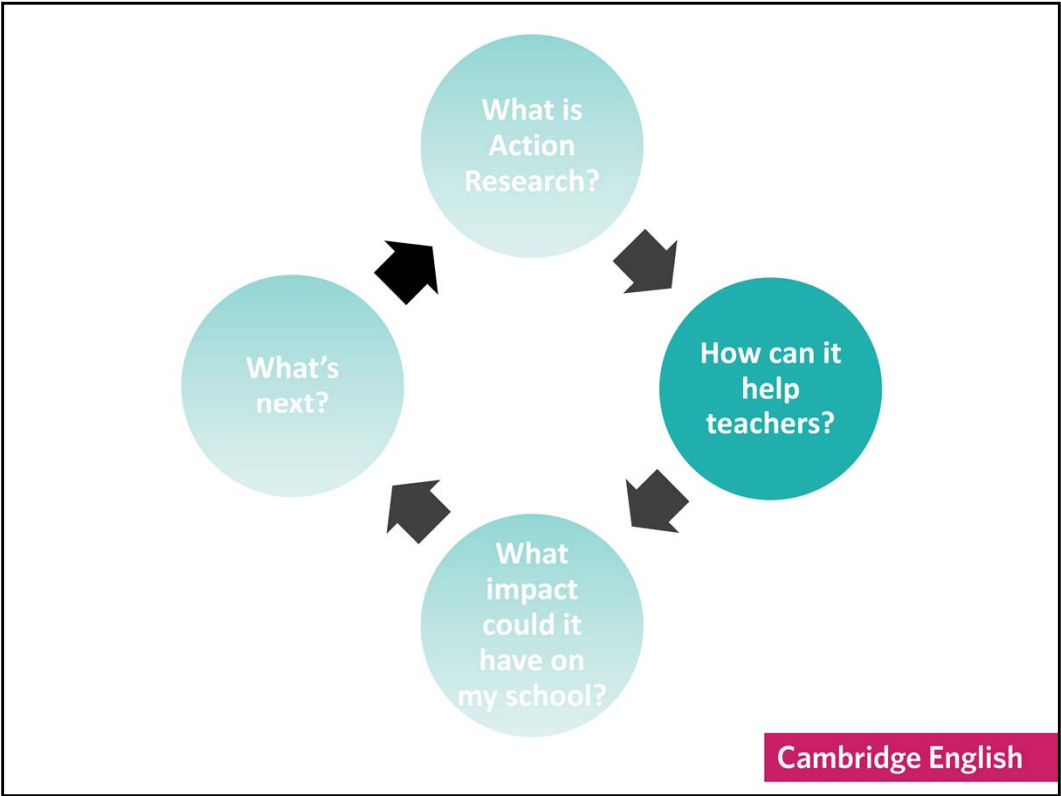
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Brendan's Action Research cycle

1. The teacher explored his students' current awareness of difficulties and previous experience of instruction through a **survey**.
2. Students did a self-assessment using a **needs analysis checklist** of segmental and suprasegmental skills.
3. They **evaluated** their comprehension of native and non-native speakers, concluding that *nativeness was not a pre-requisite for comprehensibility*.
4. Students **recorded** themselves speaking and **analysed** their own difficulties.
5. After completing several pronunciation activities on personal difficulties they were **re-recorded** and completed a further **survey**.

 see Brown (2012) in Research Notes 48
www.cambridgeenglish.org/researchnotes

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How can AR help teachers?

- research skills
- networking
- publications and presentations
- training peers
- route into further study or research
- ...

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What is the wider impact of Action Research?



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The impact of Action Research

- Who else benefits from action research?
- What impact does action research have on these groups?

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Who else benefits from Action Research?

- *Learners* – improved knowledge, skills and use of language or other areas, voices heard, use of new approaches or new technologies, improved autonomy or awareness, different classroom activities, extra-curricular activities, extra challenge ...
- *Language schools* – developing staff, staff recruitment and retention, training for peers, links to other providers undertaking research, unique selling points ...
- *ELT* more widely ? ...

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Case study 2: Investigating an Action Research programme

- Looked at the impact of the first two years of the Action Research in ELICOS Programme in Australia
- quantitative + qualitative approaches = rich picture of the participants' experience
- Focus on the impact on: teachers, institutions and the ELICOS community

(Burns 2012)

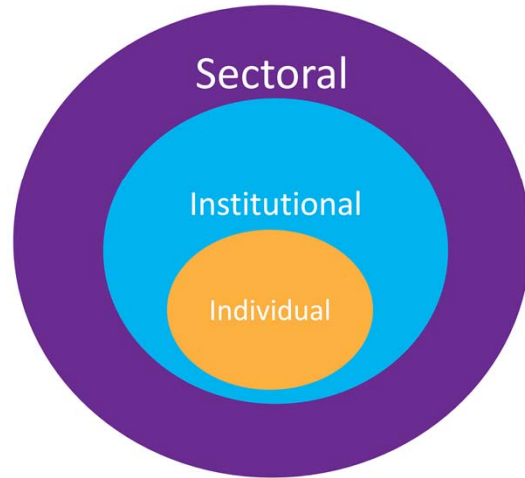
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Data collected

- Surveys and interviews with Directors of Studies, teacher participants, English Australia members
- Teacher participants:
 - workshop evaluations, recordings, photographs
 - invitations to present or publish
 - feedback from colleagues and managers
 - evaluations of their presentations

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What types of impact were investigated?



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Impact on individuals

1. Teaching skills and knowledge

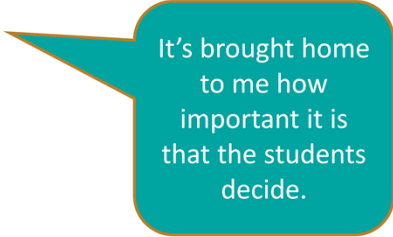
- Development of skills and knowledge about **own practices**
- More **analytical** ways of thinking about teaching that **link theory and practice**
- Greater **reflection** on teaching practices

I've looked closely at how I teach speaking as well as at existing courses and curriculum at my centre.

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2. Knowledge of learners and learning

- **Closer consultation** with learners
- Greater willingness to integrate **learner participation and decisions** into practice
- Greater appreciation of the **knowledge, skills and preferences** that learners bring with them.

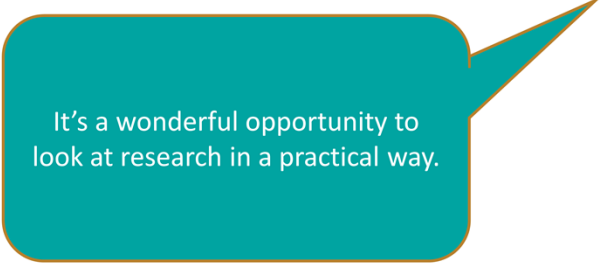


It's brought home to me how important it is that the students decide.

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3. Research skills

- Development of **knowledge about research**
- Greater appreciation of **relevance of research** to practice
- Development of **skills** in doing research



It's a wonderful opportunity to look at research in a practical way.

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4. Professional development

- High **relevance** to professional needs
- **Revitalisation** of practice
- Impetus for **future professional development**

Reflecting on our teaching and making systematic changes is vital for continuing professional development.

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5. Longer-term impact

- Greater **consciousness** and **curiosity** about classroom practice
- Increased **ability** and **confidence** to resolve classroom issues
- The '**ripple-effect**' to their colleagues
- **Satisfaction** of having conducted successful research
- **Credibility** as a teacher doing research

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Impact on the institutions

- Strengthened practice
- Enhanced PD and professionalism
- Wider engagement
- Motivation and 'ripple-effect'



**Their experiences
became very motivating
to others.**

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Impact on the sector

- New reputational dimension
- Rejuvenation of practice
- Career options

It's generated not only **discussion** but also applications ... To **do things beyond the classroom.**

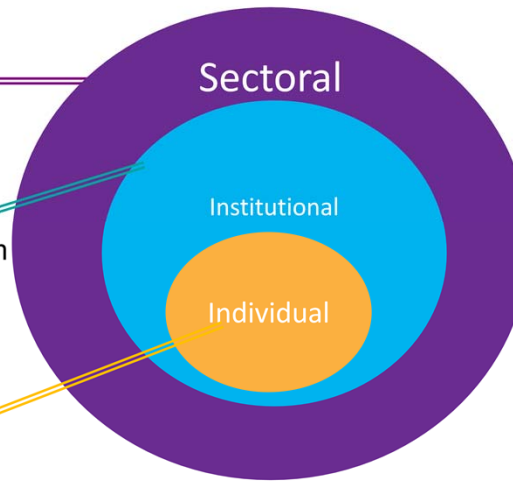
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Summary of the impact of Action Research

- new reputational dimension
- rejuvenation of practice
- career options

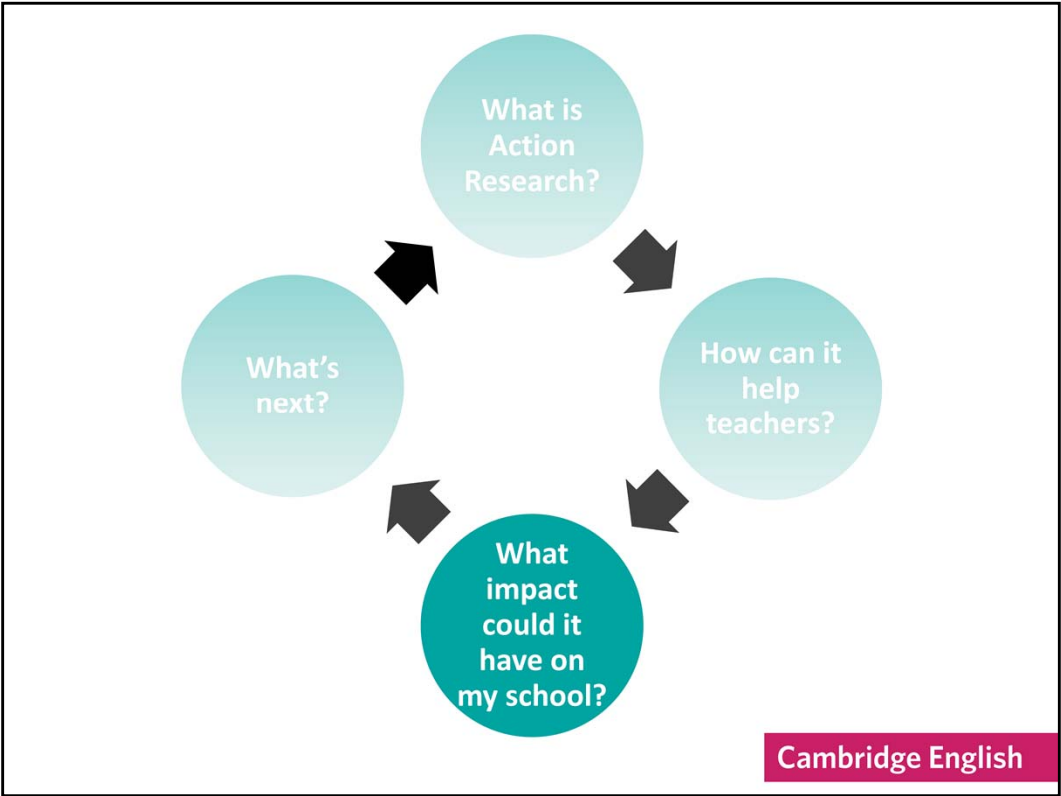
- strengthened practice
- engagement & motivation
- enhanced PD & professionalism
- 'ripple-effect'

- teaching/research skills & knowledge
- professional development
- longer-term impact



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comments box now.



What impact could it have
on my school?



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Reflection: How do my teachers currently engage with research?

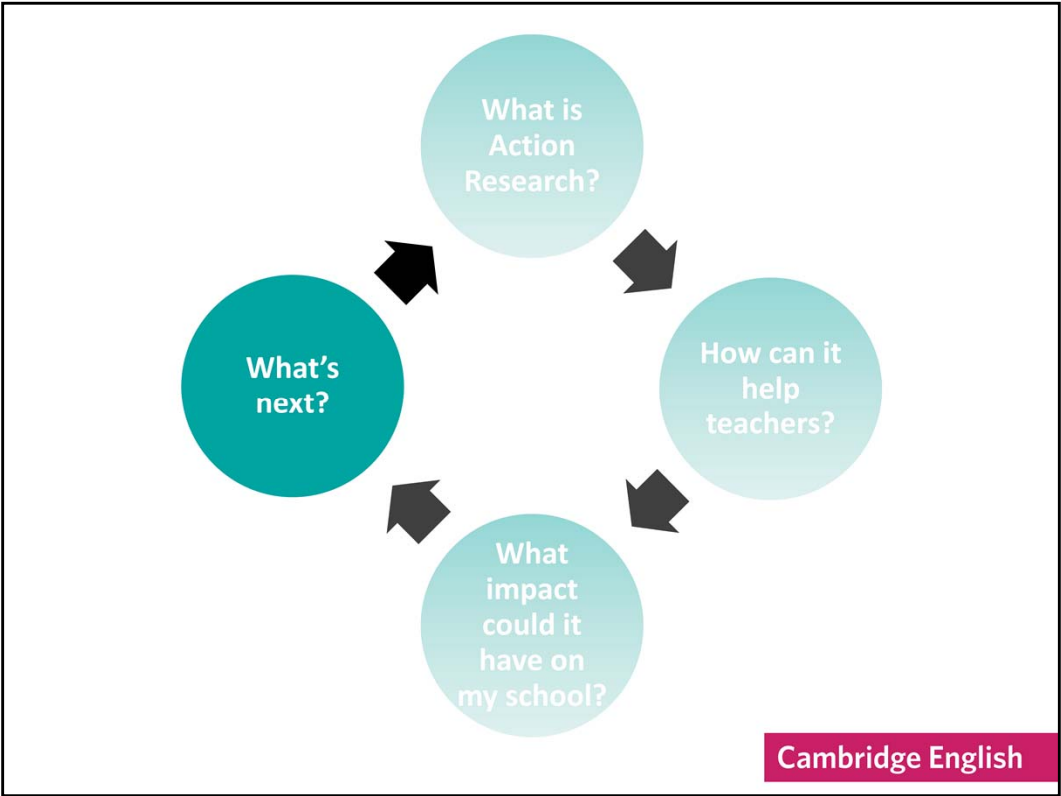
- What do we currently do?
- How often do we do it?
- How long does it take?
- Who instigates it?
- Why do we do it?
- Is the learning shared?
- Who benefits?

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Key questions:

- What do you want your teachers to get out of doing research?
- How do you judge or measure a teacher's engagement with research?

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To sum up:

- We've looked at what action research is and outlined the challenge, context and the research cycle.
- We've thought about areas that can be researched with AR.
- We've thought about the impact of AR on teachers, institutions and wider ELT sector.

Find out more:

Key writers:

- Simon Borg, resources at: <http://simon-borg.co.uk/free-sources-of-language-teaching-research>
- Anne Burns, start with her *Action Research video* at: <http://professoranneburns.com/arvideo.htm>

Action Research articles:

- **Research Notes** 44, 48, 53, 56, 60, 61, 64, 66
www.cambridgeenglish.org/researchnotes/

Current teacher-researchers:

- Hear about our 5 funded AR projects at the 2017 English UK Teachers' Conference

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