Abstract – Three forms of research activity are defined: free, policy-oriented and development. In the United Kingdom, structures for each of these have developed rapidly in the past twenty years; and there is now a variety of research organisations, different in pattern, function and funding. The present need is to sustain a vigorous programme of research and development through these organisations, but their level of funding is relatively low (less than one per cent of all educational expenditure), contrary to an OECD, 1972, forecast of continuing growth.

Research-based knowledge has influenced educational policy, but its effect is not fully recognised. Research seldom has direct impact but influences policy indirectly, through interaction and by aggregation, penetrating public consciousness.

Present weaknesses are the lack of collaboration between research institutions (though there are advantages in a plurality of organisations), and in the small scale of financial support for research, which reflects a lack of public will or confidence in the use of research in education.

Résumé – Trois types d’activité de recherche sont définis: la recherche indépendante, la recherche visant à répondre à une politique, et le développement. Au Royaume-Uni, les structures de chacune d’elles se sont rapidement développées au cours de ces vingt dernières années; il existe maintenant toute une variété d’organisations de recherche, différent quant à la forme, la fonction et le financement. Ce qui est nécessaire, désormais, c’est de mener un vigoureux programme de recherche et de développement grâce à ces organisations, mais leur financement est relativement faible (moins de 1% du budget total de l’éducation), bien que les prévisions de l’OCDE en 1972 aient envisagé un développement croissant.

La connaissance basée sur la recherche a influencé la politique de l’éducation, mais son effort n’est pas pleinement reconnu. La recherche a rarement un impact direct; son influence sur la politique de l’éducation se fait sentir indirectement, par un phénomène d’interaction et d’agrégation accumulatives, en pénétrant progressivement la conscience publique.

Les présentes faiblesses sont imputables au manque de collaboration des institutions de recherche (bien qu’une pluralité d’organismes présente des avantages) et aussi à la modicité des moyens financiers mis à la disposition de la recherche, reflet du manque de volonté ou de confiance de la part de la société en ce qui concerne l’utilisation de la recherche dans le domaine de l’éducation.

Zusammenfassung – Drei Arten von Forschung werden definiert: freie, Bildungspolitik-orientierte und Entwicklung. Im Vereinigten Königreich haben sich Institutionen für jede dieser Arten rapide entwickelt, so daß es jetzt eine Vielfalt von Forschungsorganisationen gibt, die sich in Aufbau, Funktion und Finanzierung unterscheiden.
Classifying R and D

Although there are considerable differences between countries in the ways in which research and development work in education is supported and organised, there is provision in nearly all of them for three rather different forms of activity.

First, what might be called 'free research', in that it is not oriented towards the needs of a particular national policy or dependent upon commissioning by a government or other agency. Such work has also been described as 'conclusion-oriented' as distinct from 'policy-oriented' or 'decision-oriented', although for reasons developed more fully in my Research Perspectives in Education (1973), I am sceptical about outcome-based classifications. Whatever the intentions of the researchers themselves and those who support them, work that starts off as basic scientific exploration often turns out to have important implications for policy, whilst some studies commissioned by official agencies as contributions to decision-making end up by influencing the concepts and ideas that we employ to classify and comprehend basic educational phenomena. The key characteristics of what I have chosen to call 'free research' are that it is either supported by money already at the disposal of a university or research institute or funded in the responsive mode, i.e., the immediate initiative arises from the researchers themselves rather than from an office-holder or policy-maker – although the political and social debates in which the latter participate may, of course, help to create a climate in which certain sorts of proposal are more likely to come forward from researchers than others. The complexities of the interactions between researchers, funding-agencies, policy-makers, and practitioners are such as to preclude any hope that really sharp lines can be drawn between one type of research activity and another.

Accepting the limitations of any attempt to classify research activity, a second type can be labelled 'policy-oriented', initiated and funded on the assumption that it will help in the elucidation of an educational problem or