

Workshop B:

**“Relations between inspection and educational research by other actors”:
Bill Maxwell (Leader), Gonnie van Amelsfoort (Reporter)**

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The participants of workshop B mapped out a number of different types of ‘research activity’ in the education field (if ‘research activity’ is conceived in its broadest sense, including the gathering and analysis of inspection evidence).

They agreed on 4 main ‘types’ of research in this sense

- Inspection activity, including thematic reviews/studies by inspectorates and analysis of evidence gathered through more ‘routine’ cyclical programmes of inspection schools, colleges etc
- ‘Pure’ or more theoretical academic research, typically undertaken by universities
- More ‘applied’ or ‘action’ research often undertaken by a wide variety of players, including ‘practitioner research’ undertaken by teachers
- ‘Market research’ type activity often undertaken by commercial providers, for example to survey views of stakeholders on issues.

After agreeing these were not discreet categories, but tended to overlap in places and lie along a spectrum, they discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each ‘type’ of research activity and followed that through with discussion about how to judge when a particular type of ‘research’ would be ‘fit for purpose’.

It was agreed that the ‘pure/academic’ end of the spectrum tended to offer high reliability but not necessarily high validity or generalisability (due to artificially controlled conditions for example) whereas inspection studies tended to be at the other extreme being high on validity (rooted in real practice) but not necessarily offering the same strict reliability or ability to disaggregate potential causal factors.

They noted, for example, that ‘pure’, more academic research was often most appropriate for exploring issues where it was possible to identify and isolate a very

specific research questions, and where a high level of 'proof' was being sought, but that many educational research questions did not fit that pattern.

Often more applied research, or inspection studies/reviews were more useful to policy makers in determining on 'the balance of probability' whether or not a policy was effective or otherwise, for example.

So they concluded that all types of activity have their place but that it is important for whoever is commissioning the research to be very clear about the purpose to which they wish to put its results, before deciding which option to pursue.

In some countries they noted that there was tendency for government to ask for multiple types of 'research activity' (getting inspectorates and academics to research new policies simultaneously for example) without being clear enough about what they were expecting from each piece of work.