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Are we there yet? Research with and for teachers and children and the possibilities of schooling in a complex world?

Shifting the relationship between schooling, social justice and equity, and the present and future experiences of children, young people, and their families and communities, has been a focus of educational research, and indeed policy and practice, for many decades. Much of this research is justified as occurring in profoundly and rapidly changing conditions. Of course our current conditions of schooling are embedded in the present social, cultural, economic, material and political contexts of now. This impacts on the ways that systems and institutions can provide for the diverse range of children and young people attending schools. And there is little doubt that these conditions are continually changing and that the change is becoming more rapid. However when I recently reread Connell and colleagues' formative work on schools, families and social division (Connell et. al., 1982), I noted that these researchers argued that "central government policy now tends to increase educational inequality rather than reduce it". So three decades on, and while the policy, practices and conditions of schooling may be different, it seems that so much remains the same. In this address, I discuss the current contexts of schooling. There is a particular focus on schools within communities that are currently left to deal with the impacts of national and international policy trends that serve the interests of a few, but at the expense of many. Drawing on examples across a number of studies I consider the possibilities for teachers and young people and children in schools today and present several counter narratives to those in popular circulation.