

Education Review

Reseñas Educativas



Resenhas Educativas

October 21, 2026

ISSN 1094-5296

Kumashiro, K. (Ed.). (2026). *Collectives and the commons: The role of educational scholars in movement building for justice*. Myers Education Press.

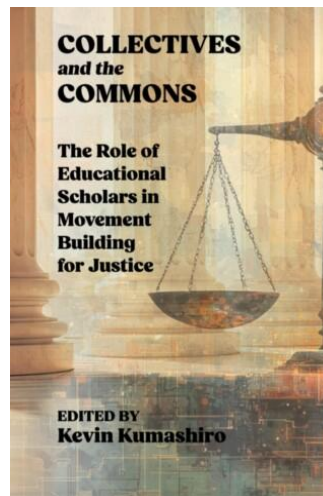
198 pp.

ISBN 9781975509378

Reviewed by Michael W. Apple
University of Wisconsin, Madison
United States

Connecting to Reality

This is a truly challenging time for educators and communities as they face a set of powerful economic, political, ideological, and epistemological agendas that seek to transform the ends and means of education in much more conservative ways. *Collectives and the Commons* represents a specific kind of tactical response to many aspects of this situation. Thus, the issues that **Kevin Kumashiro** and his colleagues and allies deal with here, and how deeply committed critically democratic educators should act on them, are clearly worthy of our attention. The stories of the collectives that form the core of this volume are valuable, especially if they are seen as one part of the larger set of projects in education and the larger society to deal with this.



As some of the readers may already know, the work of understanding the current reality and acting back have been and are also at the center of some of my own and others' efforts over quite a long time. Because of this, in my review at times I may also point to parts of my own and others' work that both confirm and extend the importance of what *Collectives and the Commons* highlights.

Let me begin by saying something about Kevin Kumashiro. He is justly well-known for his commitment and contributions to a more socially just education (see, for example, Kumashiro, 2024). As I have said in one of my reviews of his previous books in this journal,

Kevin Kumashiro has been among the most committed and clearest writers of critical material in education for a number of years. In previous books such as *Against Common Sense*, *Bad Teacher*, and *Troubling Education*, he has documented the ways in which many supposed educational “reforms” have led to deeply

unequal results along an important range of oppressive dynamics and has articulated significant reasons to move beyond them. (Apple, 2021)

In *Collectives and the Commons*, Kumashiro plays a more limited role than in most of his previous books. In this volume he acts as an editor and compiler. His voice is less present. But anyone familiar with his work will recognize that many of his positions are clearly represented in the material that comes after his introductory chapter.

The book is basically an archive of briefs made up of politically committed public documents both challenging existing educational and social policies and practices and opening the space for more critically responsive and progressive alternatives. These are accompanied by thoughtful and honest discussions of each of four progressive collectives and of their histories, agendas, and actions.

There are four collectives involved: Chicagoland Researchers and Advocates for Transformative Education (CReATE; California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education CARE-ED); Hawai'i Scholars for Education, Social Justice and Diversity (HSESJD), and Education Deans for Justice and Equity (EDJE). In many ways, these documents and the honest discussions of their genesis and (sometimes mixed) possibilities, limits, and results give us a greater sense of some of the kinds of collective educational/political initiatives that are being built in response to the rightist agendas that are having profound effects on educational policies and practices in all too many places.

These initiatives need to be seen as connected to larger set of questions as well. Among the key questions that we need to place at the front of our concerns are the following: What role can education play in social transformation? Who are the “we” who engage in these collective actions? What role can socially committed scholars play in these movements and struggles and in expanding that “we”?

In *Can Education Change Society?* I detail a number of tasks in which critical scholar/activists should engage. Making interruptive work visible, what I have called acting as “critical secretaries” of successful movements and real-life actions against oppressive policies and practices, is one of the most significant of these tasks. Another is not “standing on the balcony.” This involves actually working with and participating in movements and actions that counter the current neoliberal, neoconservative, authoritarian populist religious nationalist, and managerial agendas that increasingly dominate a good deal of conservative educational “reforms” (Apple, 2006, 2013, 2024; see also Burawoy, 2005). The collectives at the center of the book provide honest and valuable examples of critical educators dealing with these issues in ethically, politically, and educationally valuable ways.

This honesty is often visible in the ongoing critical self-reflections about the briefs and actions of the collectives themselves. Thus, they ask, “Is what we are doing enough?” In the words of the California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education (CARE-ED):

We continually ask ourselves: Is our strategy of writing briefs interrupting the structural and systemic inequities in education that we seek to counter? Are our briefs impacting not only state policy and legislation but also local efforts? Can our efforts be coupled with on-the-ground organizing? (p. 55, italics in original)

It is exactly these kinds of question that remind us that such counter-hegemonic projects are exactly that—projects. They continue. They learn from their sometimes only partial victories and even their defeats. In the process, they then learn lessons that are crucial.

Something else should be noted. One of the key elements of a book such as this is that it is not merely rhetorical. This is an important characteristic. Speaking honestly, parts of the literature in critical education and critical pedagogy are simply rhetorical. They unfortunately are all too often not closely connected to the realities and struggles over actually existing schools, teaching, curriculum, diverse communities, teacher education, and fast growing and supposedly “more democratic” reforms such as homeschooling, and other hybrid initiatives. It may be quite manipulative, but the hegemonic alliance that constitutes the Right clearly understands the significance of connecting its agendas to such realities—and it’s been darn good at doing this (see, for example, Ramos, 2024; Stewart, 2025).

In many ways, *Collectives and the Commons* recognizes that it is tactically productive to reassert connections to the experiences of communities and to take very seriously the realities that are faced by educators at multiple levels.

Some Additional Steps

Let me now speak to a number of things that could push us further and could add to the contributions that scholar/activists might make, this time with a focus on the committed scholar part. We very much need long-term accounts of these and other collectives. What was successful? Given the fact that the Right is increasingly powerful in all levels of education, including in higher education and in so much else in this society, how did rightist movements respond? How did the collectives face up to conservative attacks? What, if any, compromises had to be made? What lessons can we learn from this more extended view? (Apple, 2018; see also Apple et al., 2018).

We also have a good deal to learn from counter-hegemonic movements and actions internationally (see, e.g., Apple et al., 2026). We are definitely not alone in our struggles to build and defend more critically democratic alternatives to the conservative policies now being put in place. Thus, it would be an important step if we could form collectives and alliances with critical scholar/activists in other nations. Being open to what these actions and movements could teach us would broaden the intellectual and political resources that are available (see, e.g., Anderson et al., 2023).

Those of us in critical education are not alone in other ways. There is a robust and insightful literature in multiple sites that can give us tools in choosing the best issues and strategies that both interrupt dominance and create and defend more socially just alternatives. These center around the

difference between “reforms” and “non-reformist reforms” (see Wright, 2010). This involves selecting those strategies and actions that not only help us deal with a particular serious problem we face, but just as importantly open further doors that connect to the next set of substantive actions that are required to go even further.

This opens us up to another set of concerns. As I noted earlier, one of the positive aspects of the book as a whole is its focus on a significant question that is all too often not given the attention it deserves. The question is a simple sounding one, but it is often politically, ideologically and educationally complex. Who is the “we”? In answering this question, it is increasingly important to ask about “absent presences,” about what and who is missing. A prime example here are the complex roles that religion does and can play in the building of alliances. We know that authoritarian populist religious groups are powerful influences in the rightist agenda. But there are crucial ethically driven and more liberatory religious traditions and movements that consistently act to support a wider “we” and a more progressive set of policies in race, gender/sex., class, ability, and other power relations in education and the larger society.

Given this, we need to ask whether we have vacated the space of religion too easily. What roles can progressive religious understandings and activists play in existing and newly formed collectives? I am not romantic about the fact that many popular religious sentiments may have quite conservative positions. But are there things that we can agree on tactically? What can we learn from the Right about how people can be moved from one set of understandings to another? Are there hybrid alliances that can be built with religious groups that interrupt aspects of dominant policies? (Apple, 2026).

Let me conclude with a last suggestion for the book itself. Even with my positive evaluation of it, the book would have been strengthened if there was a substantive final chapter that pulled the arguments and actions together and discussed what we have to learn from the efforts, possibilities, and limits of these collectives as a whole. From personal experience, I know that this can be a difficult task and risks homogenizing movements and what can be complex actions. But as we learned from our own experiences in putting together a volume that tells different stories that speak back to dominant rightist policies and practices, it is worth the effort (Apple et al., 2026).

These reflections are not meant to diminish what Kevin Kumashiro and the collectives stand for and what the briefs, the discussions around them, and the underlying projects embody. Rather they are meant to point to some further areas that the larger politically committed scholar/ activist communities in education have also paid more attention to when trying to better understand and interrupt the Right. Building, defending, and expanding communities and alliances that deal with what is happening in education is a project of great importance.

References

- Anderson, G. L., Desai, D., Heras, A. I., & Spreen, C. A. (2023). *Creating third spaces of learning for post-capitalism: Lessons from educators, Artists, and activists*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003345015>
- Apple, M. W. (2006). *Educating the “right” way: Markets, standards, god, and inequality* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2013). *Can education change society?* Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203083550>
- Apple, M. W. (2018). *On doing critical policy analysis*. *Educational Policy*, 33(1), 276-287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818807307>
- Apple, M. W. (2021, August 4). Review of *Surrendered*. *Education Review*, 28. <https://edrev.asu.edu/index.php/ER/article/view/3269/1129>
- Apple, M. W. (2024, August 14). On being a scholar/activist: Personal history and acquired knowledge. *Education Review*, 31. <https://doi.org/10.14507/er.v31.3863>
- Apple, M. W., Gandin, L. A., Liu, S., Meshulam, A. & Schirmer, E. (2018). *The struggle for democracy in education: Lessons from social realities*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315194684>
- Apple, M. W. (2026). United States: Can we win? Social mobilizations and the politics of official knowledge. In M. W. Apple, I. Gomes de Lima, & L. A. Gandin (Eds.), *Education and the politics of interruption: Does the right always win?* (pp. 16-38). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003582564-2>
- Apple, M. W., Gomes de Lima, I. & Gandin, L. A. (2026). (Eds.). *Education and the politics of interruption: Does the right always win?* Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003582564>
- Burawoy, M. (2005). For public sociology. *American Sociological Review* 70(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000102>
- Gandin, L. A. & Apple, M. W. (2018). Can critical democracy last? Porto Alegre and the struggle over “thick” democracy in education. In M. W. Apple, L. A. Gandin, S. Liu, A. Meshulam & E. Schirmer, *The struggle for democracy in education: Lessons from social realities* (pp. 104-134). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315194684-5>
- Kumashiro, K. (2024). *Against common sense: Teaching and learning toward social justice* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003442394>
- Ramos, P. (2024). *Defectors: The rise of the Latino far right and what it means for America*. Pantheon.
- Stewart, K. (2025). *Money, lies and god: Inside the movement to destroy American democracy*. Bloomsbury.
- Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning real alternatives*. Verso.

About the Reviewer

Michael W. Apple is the John Bascom Professor Emeritus of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. A former elementary and secondary school teacher and past-president of a teachers union, he has worked with educational systems, governments, universities, unions, and activist and dissident groups throughout the world to democratize educational research, policy, and practice. Professor Apple has written extensively on the politics of educational reform, on the relationship between culture and power, and on education for social justice. Among his recent books are: *Can Education Change Society? The Struggle for Democracy in Education: Lessons from Social Realities*; and the enlarged 4th edition of his classic text *Ideology and Curriculum*. Professor Apple has been selected as one of the 50 most important educational scholars in the 20th century. His books *Ideology and Curriculum* and *Official Knowledge* were also selected as two of the most significant books on education in the 20th century.



About the Book Editor

Kevin Kumashiro is the former Interim Dean of the School of Education at Hofstra University (2023-24) and former Dean of the School of Education at the University of San Francisco (2013-2017). He previously served as Chair of Educational Policy Studies, interim Co-Director of the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy, founding Coordinator of Asian American Studies, and Director of the AANAPISI (Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution) Initiative at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has taught in early childhood, K-12, and higher education across the United States and abroad (public, private, and religious), and has consulted for school districts, organizations, and agencies. He founded and directed the Center for Anti-Oppressive Education from 2002-2013. Dr. Kumashiro has authored dozens of articles and essays in academic journals and periodicals, as well as research briefs and position statements, and his work has been supported by over \$4 million in federal grants. He is an award-winning author and editor of 10 books, including *Troubling Education* (recipient of the 2003 Gustavus Myers Outstanding Book Award), *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning toward Social Justice* (now in its third edition), *Bad Teacher!: How Blaming Teachers Distorts the Bigger Picture*, and *Surrendered: Why Progressives are Losing the Biggest Battles in Education*.



Education Review

**Reseñas Educativas****Resenhas Educativas**

Education Review / *Reseñas Educativas* / *Resenhas Educativas* edited by Gene V Glass & Yanming Ren (English), Gustavo E. Fischman (Spanish/Portuguese), and Stephanie McBride-Schreiner (Managing Editor)

and supported by the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, distribute, and adapt this article, if the work is attributed to the author(s) and *Education Review*, the changes are identified, and the same license applies to the derivative work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. *Education Review* is **free-to-read and free-to-publish**.

