

**Dr. Vajra Watson, Faculty Director  
Doctorate in Educational Leadership  
College of Education, CSUS**

**Research Areas:** educational equity, community-university-school partnerships, social justice youth development, critical race theory, scholar activism, qualitative research methods.

**Fields of Specialization:** As a campus administrator and scholar, my work focuses on racial justice, equity, and belonging. I support transformative practices inside classrooms (micro-level) as well as at the institutional level (macro-structural). I purposefully aim to disrupt and dismantle narratives of underachievement and inequality by uncovering how to make school systems (P-20) socially just, democratic sanctuaries of revitalization and community empowerment. I strive and am deeply committed to use research in service of social change.

**Bio:** Dr. Vajra Watson is an award-winning scholar who focuses on moving systems towards educational equity. She currently serves as the Faculty Director of the Doctorate in Educational Leadership at California State University-Sacramento. From 2008 to 2020, she was the UC Davis Director of Research and Policy for Equity. As the architect of this unit, she designed policies and programs that supported and impacted thousands of students, educators, and community leaders. Her research has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Essence*, and other national news outlets.

In 2008, Dr. Watson founded Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS), a social justice educational model that breaks the barriers of underachievement by elevating the voices of students as the authors of their own lives and agents of change. In this capacity, she designed an grassroots training program that brings community-based educators and teaching artists into schools to reclaim and reimagine schooling: [www.says.ucdavis.edu](http://www.says.ucdavis.edu).

In addition, Watson serves on a number of Board of Directors, including *United Playaz* in San Francisco (Board President), the *National Urban Education Teacher Policy Project*, the *National Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, *Kingmakers of Oakland*, and *Fathers and Families of San Joaquin* in Stockton, CA.

As a scholar-activist, Dr. Watson examines both the perils and promises of education and the potential of innovative community-university-school partnerships. She is the author of two books, *Learning to Liberate: Community-Based Solutions to the Crisis in Urban Education* (Routledge, 2012) and *Transformative Schooling: Towards Racial Equity in Education* (Routledge, 2018), and has published dozens of peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. She is the recipient of the UC Davis Early Career Award, Sacramento's 40 Under 40 Leadership Award, the Chancellor's Soaring to New Heights Individual Achievement Award for Diversity, the California Educational Research Association's Annual Award, the Congressional Woman of the Year Award, the NBA Sacramento King's Woman of the Year Award, and the American Educational Research Association's Social Impact Award as well as AERA's Social Justice Leadership Award.

Dr. Watson leads with the ancient adage that: *If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.* Along this journey, she received her B.A. from UC Berkeley and her Doctorate in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy from the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. Her proudest accomplishments, however, lives with her children; she is the proud mom of a freshman at UC Berkeley and a sophomore at Inderkum High School.

### Degrees:

- Ed.D. – Harvard Graduate School of Education, Doctorate in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy with a focus on Communities and Schools
- Ed.M. – Harvard Graduate School of Education, Master’s Degree in International Education
- B.A. – University of California, Berkeley in Political Science/International Relations and Education (Summa cum laude)

### Solo-Authored Books:

- **Watson, V.** (2018). *Transformative Schooling: Towards Racial Equity in Education*. New York: Routledge.
- **Watson, V.** (2012). *Learning to Liberate: Community-Based Solutions to the Crisis in Urban Education*. New York: Routledge.

### Articles/Book Chapters:

- Watson, V. (June, 2020). *What is a world without whiteness?* – <https://medium.com/@vajrawatson/open-question-what-is-a-world-without-whiteness-3fcc188bc7ae>
- Hope, J. and **Watson, V.** (2020). “Hood Civics: Intergenerational Healing and the Quest for Educational Justice for/with Black Girl Activists.” In *Black Girl Civics: Expanding and Navigating the Boundaries of Civic Engagement*. Editors: Ginnie Logan & Janiece Mackey. Information Age Press.
- **Watson, V.** (2019). “Embodied Justice: We are the Divine Text.” In *The Whole Person: Lectio Divina as Transformative Practice in Teaching and Learning*. Editors: Jane Dalton and Maureen Hall. Rowman & Littlefield.
- **Watson, V.** (2019). “Liberating Methodologies: Reclaiming Research as a Site for Radical Inquiry and Transformation.” In *Community-Based Participatory Research: Testimonios from Chicana/o Studies*. Editor: Natalia Deeb-Sossa. The University of Arizona Press.
- Oliver, K., Hall, M. P., Dalton, J., Jones, L. F., **Watson, V.**, Hoyser, C. & Santavicca, N. (2019), “Drawing out the soul: Contemporary arts integration.” In *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 15:2, pp. 165–81, doi: 10.1386/eta.15.2.165\_1
- Chatmon, C. and **Watson, V.** (2018). “Decolonizing School Systems: Racial Justice, Radical Healing, and Educational Equity inside Oakland Unified School District,” *Voices in Urban Education*, 48. Online access, [https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/emj309/vue48/02-VUE\\_48\\_Chatmon\\_0.pdf](https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/emj309/vue48/02-VUE_48_Chatmon_0.pdf)
- **Watson, V.** (2018). “Cultural Keepers as Movement Makers: Towards the Alignment of Artists, Activists, and Academics.” *Public: A Journal of Imagining America*. Volume 5, Issue 1. Online Journal, <http://public.imaginingamerica.org/blog/article/cultural-keepers-as-movement-makers-towards-the-alignment-of-artists-activists-and-academics/>.
- **Watson, V.** (2018). “#schoolismyhustle: A youth movement to transform education.” In *Lift Us Up! Don't Push Us Out! Voices from the Frontlines of the Educational Justice Movement*. Editors: Mark Warren and David Goodman. Boston: Beacon Press.
- **Watson, V.** (2018). “Artistic Resistance: Creating a Transformative Teaching Praxis Through Hip-Hop.” In *Hawai'i Review*. <http://hawaiireview.org/hr-educational-materials/2018/2/16/dr-vajra-watson-artistic-resistance-creating-a-transformative-teaching-praxis-through-hip-hop>
- **Watson, V.** (2017). “Life as Primary Text: English Classrooms as Sites for Soulful Learning.” Invited submission for *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English.

- **Watson, V.** (2016). "Literacy Is A Civil Write: The Art, Science And Soul of Transformative Classrooms." In Papa, R., Eadens, D. M., & Eadens, D. M. (Eds), *Social Justice Instruction: Empowerment on the Chalkboard*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing. (Book Series on Education, Equity and the Economy)
- **Watson, V.** (2014). *The Black Sunrise: Oakland Unified School District's Commitment to Address and Eliminate Institutionalized Racism*. Final evaluation report submitted to Oakland Unified School District's Office of African American Male Achievement. <http://www.ousd.org/Page/12267>
- **Watson, V.** (2013). "Censoring Freedom: Community-Based Professional Development and the Politics of Profanity." In *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46:3, 387-410.
- **Watson, V.** (2008). *Risking Change: Portraits of Four Community-Based Educators Successfully Reaching and Teaching "High-Risk" Youth*. Dissertation, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA.
- **Watson, V.** (2004). *It's bigger than hip-hop: Rappers educating educators about the purpose of school*. Qualifying Paper, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA.
- **Watson, V.** (2003). "Reflections on the Juvenile In-justice System." *Community Justice Network For Youth* newsletter.
- **Watson, V.** (1999). "Lighthouse in Starvation." In *We are the ones we have been Waiting for*, J. Jordan (Ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

#### **Keynote Speaking and Peer-Reviewed Research Presentations (sample)**

- Watson, V. (2019). *Leveraging Collaborative Strength to Develop District Racial Equity Leadership*, Session at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada.
- Watson, V. (2019). *Artivism as Holistic Praxis*, Symposium for the Holistic Education SIG at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada.
- Watson, V. (2019). Featured Research Talk: *Community-based Scholarship: Reimagining Higher Education in the Lives of Young People*. University of California Office of the President Division of Academic Affairs, Oakland, CA.
- Watson, V. (2019). Featured Book Panel: *Lift Us Up! Don't Push Us Out! Voices from the Frontlines of the Educational Justice Movement*. The University of Utah.
- Watson, V. (2019). Featured Lecture. *Radical Pursuits: Towards Systems Change for Social Justice*. University of California, Santa Barbara (co-sponsored by the Departments of Sociology and Education).
- Watson, V. (2019). Featured Lecture. *Transformative Schooling: Racial Justice and Educational Equity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. University of California, Los Angeles (sponsored by the School of Education).
- Watson, V. (2019). Featured Lecture. *The 3 Keys of Social Transformation*. University of California, Merced (sponsored by the Office of the Vice Chancellor & Provost).
- Watson, V. (2018). *School is my Hustle: A youth movement to transform education*. Symposium at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, New York
- Watson, V. (2017). *Expanding Educational Opportunities for Black and Latino Male Students: Lessons From Four Urban School Districts*. Symposium at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, TX.
- Watson, V. (2017). *mythologies of white supremacy*. Symposium at the National Council of Teachers of English, St. Louis, MO.
- Watson, V. (2016). Featured Speaker as a *Changemaker Fellow*. TEDx Sacramento.

- Watson, V. (2016). Keynote Speaker. *Literacy is a Civil Write: Teaching Tools For Social Resistance Within And Beyond The Walls Of Schools* at the English Learner Leadership Conference. Sonoma County Office of Education, CA.
- Watson, V. (2015). Keynote Speaker. *The Pedagogy Of Our Lives: Teaching Tools For Social Resistance Within And Beyond The Walls Of Schools* at the Transformative Researchers and Educators for Democracy Conference. University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth.
- Watson, V. (2015). Keynote Address. *Education for Liberation* at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Transfer Conference at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.
- Watson, V. (2012). Research Presentation. *Results from an Innovative Literacy Program in Urban Special Education Support Classes*. Council for Exceptional Children Convention. Denver, CO.
- Watson, V. (2011). Keynote Address. *Building Community for Educational Improvements*. Stockton Unified School District Honoring Educators Forum for Teachers, Administrators, and Staff. Stockton, CA.
- Watson, V. (2011). *Grassroots pedagogy: Community-based classrooms for social change*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Watson, V. (2010). Invited Research Symposium. *Gangstas, Gunshots, and Grades: Effectively Responding to "Present" Traumatic Stress Disorder Among Today's Urban Youth*. San Francisco General Hospital in partnership with the University of California, San Francisco. San Francisco, CA.

#### **Service to the Community (sample)**

- Board President, *United Playaz*, San Francisco, CA
- Board Member, *Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* with the National Council of Teachers of English
- Board Member, *Fathers and Families of San Joaquin Valley*, Stockton, CA
- Board Member, *The Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Project*, New Jersey City University. (2016-present)
- Board Member, *Kingmakers of Oakland*

#### **Awards**

- *Woman of the Year Award* from the United States Congress (2019)
- *Woman of Inspiration Award* from the Sacramento Kings (2019)
- The California Educational Research Association's *Annual Research Award* (2019)
- American Educational Research Association *Social Justice Leadership Award* (2018)
- American Educational Research Association *Social Impact Award* (2016)
- *Early Career Award*, UC Davis, (2013) <http://www.ucdavis.edu/one/stories/staff/watson.html>
- *40 Under 40 Award* for exemplary achievement in the region, Sacramento Business Journal (2011)
- *Diversity and Principals of Community Soaring to New Heights Individual Achievement Award* from the UC Davis Chancellor's Office (2011)