

## DR. VAJRA M. WATSON CURRICULUM VITAE

**Research Areas:** urban education, sociology of education, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, social justice youth development, portraiture.

**Fields of Specialization:** As a campus administrator and scholar, my work focuses on access, equity, and diversity. I support social justice as a daily practice 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.

**Contact Information:**

University of California, Davis  
One Shields Ave., 183 Mrak Hall  
Davis, CA 95616  
Email: [vmwatson@ucdavis.edu](mailto:vmwatson@ucdavis.edu)  
Websites: [says.ucdavis.edu](http://says.ucdavis.edu)/[equity.ucdavis.edu](http://equity.ucdavis.edu)

### EDUCATION

---

- 2001–2008      Harvard University, Graduate School of Education  
Doctorate in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy with a focus on Communities and Schools  
  
Dissertation: *Risking Change: Portraits of Four Community-Based Educators Successfully Reaching and Teaching "High-Risk" Youth*, June 2008.  
  
Committee Members: Pedro Noguera, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Mark Warren
- 2001–2002      Harvard University, Graduate School of Education  
Ed.M. in Learning and Teaching
- 2000–2001      Harvard University, Graduate School of Education  
Ed.M. in International Education
- 1996–1999      University of California, Berkeley, College of Letters and Science  
B.A. in Political Science/International Relations and Education  
Dean's Honors List, Magna cum laude  
  
Undergraduate Honors Thesis: *Holistic Human Rights: Using a Critical Multicultural Approach to Human Rights Education in Secondary Schools*
- 1999              Michigan State University, Department of Linguistics, African Studies Center  
Summer Intensive Language Study (Amharic)
- 1997–1998      Meiji Gakuin University, Department of Economics, Yokohama, Japan  
Study abroad for partial fulfillment of B.A. degree
- 1997              University of the West Indies, School of Education, Cave Hill, Barbados  
Study abroad for partial fulfillment of B.A. degree

1992–1996	Berkeley High School Valedictorian
1994–1995	Berkeley High School-Yurok Exchange Program (one semester) Studied with Yurok First Nation on the Klamath River

## PUBLICATIONS

---

**Watson, V.** (forthcoming, 2019). Liberating Methodologies: Reclaiming Research as a Site for Radical Inquiry and Transformation. In *From the Field and the Trenches: Community Empowerment, Sustainability and Community Based Research in Chicana/o Studies*. Editor: Natalia Deeb Sossa. University of Arizona Press.

**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). *Transformative Schooling: Towards Racial Equity in Education*. New York: Routledge.

Chatmon, Christopher P., and **Watson, V.** (2018). "Decolonizing School Systems: Racial Justice, Radical Healing, and Educational Equity inside Oakland Unified School District," *Voices in Urban Education*, 48.

**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://hawaiiireview.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.** (2012). *Learning to Liberate: Community-Based Solutions to the Crisis in Urban Education*. New York: Routledge (Michael Apple Series, Critical Social Thought).

### Peer Reviews:

- *Learning to Liberate* reviewed by Ricardo Rosa (2014 January 8) in **Education Review**, 17(1).

<http://www.edrev.info/essays/v17n1.pdf>

- *Learning to Liberate* reviewed by Sarah Becker (2013) in *Contemporary Sociology* 42 (4): 628-530.
- *Learning to Liberate* reviewed by Michael Pezone (2012) in *Open Journal Systems-Great Ideas*: <http://ojs.great-ideas.org/index.php/ENC/article/viewFile/901/988>

**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.

### Journal Articles / Manuscripts in Preparation

Murray-Garcia, J. and **Watson, V.** School Suspensions: Racial Disparities and the Institutional Crafting of Identities. In preparation for *The Journal of Pediatrics*.

**Watson, V.** Artistic Resistance: Creating a Transformative Teaching Praxis Through Hip-Hop. In preparation for *The Educational Forum*.

**Watson, V.** and Enright, K. The Write to Go Home: Multilingual student poems and the languages of learning inside urban English classrooms. In preparation for the *Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy*.

**Watson, V.** Teaching for Social Change: A Community-Based Approach to the Recruitment and Training of Future Educators. In preparation for *Teacher Education*.

### **SAMPLE of EXTERNALLY FUNDED RESEARCH GRANTS AND DEVELOPMENT**

Principal Investigator. **\$300,000**. SAYS awarded funding from Youth Speaks, Inc. to participate in the National Brave New Voices Network Initiative. Grant supports building a sustainable field of literary arts organizations. (2014-2017)

Principal Investigator. **\$100,000**. Awarded to SAYS by AT&T. (2016-2017)

Principal Investigator. **\$250,000**. Awarded to SAYS by the City of Sacramento. (2015-2017)

Watson, V. **\$65,000**. Yolo County Office of Education contract with SAYS for programming in juvenile hall. (2015-2017)

Watson, V. **\$25,000**. San Juan Unified School District contract for SAYS programming. (2016-2017)

Principal Investigator (with Co-PI, Christopher Thaiss). **\$1,000,000**. California Postsecondary Education Commission Improving Teacher Quality grant. A culturally responsive professional development and research program for middle and high school teachers in a high-poverty district. (2010-2014)

Watson, V. **\$32,000**. Target Excellence and SAYS Partnership. (2014-2016)

Watson, V. **\$18,000**. Roberts Family Development Center and SAYS Partnership. (2014-2016).

Principal Investigator. **\$80,000**. Oakland Unified School District contract for research and evaluation of the Manhood Development Program. (2013-2016)

Watson, V. **\$750,000**. Sacramento City Unified School District contract for SAYS programming in after-school programs throughout the district. (2009-2016).

Watson, V. **\$120,000**. Twin Rivers Unified School District contract for SAYS professional development and classroom residencies. (2009-2016)

Principal Investigator. **\$40,000**. Youth Speaks, Inc. grant to launch SAYS. (2009-2010)

## LEADERSHIP AND TEACHING

---

2008–present      Director of Research and Policy for Equity  
Division of Student Affairs, UC Davis

*Job Classifications: Associate Professional Researcher, Step 3.5 in Chicana/Chicano Studies and Analyst 5, Supervisor*

- Management and oversight of SAPEP/P-20 Initiatives
- Training on culturally responsive recruitment strategies to departments campus-wide
- Secured over \$5.5 million dollars in research grants and program contracts
- Fiscal oversight of annual budget
- Supervise staff
- Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS), Founding Director. *says.ucdavis.edu*
- Regional development for equity on/off campus, Founding Director. *equity.ucdavis.edu*
- Serve on the UC Office of the President's P-20 council
- Co-Chair, African American Students into Higher Education (AASHE)
- Serve as a liaison for the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative in Sacramento
- Serve as a liaison for the Boys and Men of Color Initiative in Sacramento
- Serve as a liaison for the My Brother's Keeper Initiative in Sacramento
- Provide ongoing culturally responsive professional development to various school districts
- Advise doctoral students as part of my role within the Graduate Group in Education

### Sample of Teaching Experience

2016-present      Instructor  
University of California, Davis

- *MIC CHECK: Race, Place, and Power within and Beyond the Ivory Tower*
- *Scholar Activism: the more you know, the more you owe*

2005–2008      Faculty  
Project Pipeline, California Alternative Credential Program, Alameda, CA

- *Foundations of Teaching as a Profession*
- *Evaluation and Assessment*

- 2004–2007 Adjunct Professor  
Department of Teacher Education  
University of San Francisco School of Education, San Francisco, CA
- *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*
  - *Learning and Teaching*
- 2001–2003 Teaching Assistant for Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot  
Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA
- *Sociology of Education*
- 2001–2003 Research Assistant for Pedro Noguera  
Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA
- *Pathways to Success*, an examination of student aspirations and achievement within small schools.
- 2001–2002 Teaching Assistant for Pedro Noguera  
Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA
- *Urban Education*
- 2000–2002 Project Coordinator  
Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA
- *Youth Empowerment Project (YEP)*, a CD project in which young people used hip-hop to voice their perceptions about Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School.
- 1996–1999 Teacher  
Berkeley High School, Berkeley, CA
- *Ethnic Studies, African-American History, and World History*
- 1996–1999 Student Participatory Action Research Coordinator  
UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education, Berkeley, CA
- *The Diversity Project*, a study to examine educational equity at Berkeley High School. Findings were later published in the book, *Unfinished Business* (Noguera & Wing, 2006).

### **Previous Leadership and Administrative Experience**

- 2003–2004 Director of Environmental Prevention Training and Youth Development Programs  
Youth Leadership Institute, San Francisco, CA
- 1999–2000 Dean of Curriculum and Instruction  
Making Waves, Ross, CA
- 1992–1996 After-School Director  
Albany Kids' Corner  
UC Berkeley Family Services, Albany, CA

### **Service to Academic Journals**

- Editorial Board Member for *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research* (2013-present)
- Reviewer for *Berkeley Review of Education* (2014)
- Reviewer for *Journal of Juvenile Justice* (2014)
- Reviewer for *Equity and Excellence in Education* (2012)
- Proposal Reviewer: Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing SIG / American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (2011, 2012)

- Proposal Reviewer: Research Presentation Proposals, UC Davis Equity Summit (2010-present)
- Book Reviewer: McGraw-Hill, *Teaching to Change the World* (2005)
- Proposal Reviewer: Research Presentation Proposals, Harvard University Student Research Conference (2000-2002)

### **Service to Community**

- Board President, *United Playaz*, San Francisco, CA (2011-present)
- Board Member, *Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* with the National Council of Teachers of English (2016-present)
- Board Member, *Fathers and Families of San Joaquin Valley*, Stockton, CA (2013-present)
- Board Member, *The Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Project*, New Jersey City University. (2016-present)
- Board Member, *Sol Collective*, Sacramento, CA (2014-present)
- Chair, African American Students into Higher Education (AASHE), Yolo County Office of Education Task Force (2014-2016)
- Member, Social Justice Education Coalition, UC Davis Graduate and Faculty group (2013-present).
- Co-Chair, *Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing SIG* / American Educational Research Association (2011-2013)
- Education Advisor, *Youth Speaks, Inc.*, San Francisco, CA (2008-2011)
- Co-Founder and Board Member, *The Urban Root Community Center*, Berkeley, CA (1995-1999)

### **Service to Graduate Students**

- Thesis Committee Member, Kristen Coates. Title: *Quantitative study of social emotional learning practices at a high-poverty high-achieving urban middle school. (Graduated, 2014)*
- Thesis Committee Member, Michelle Seijas. Title: *The Systemic Devaluation of Latino Students in a Rural Setting. (Graduated, 2014)*
- Thesis Committee Member, Sophia Gonfiotti. Title: *An examination of the racial and ethnic identity formation of Chinese children adopted into white families. (Graduated, 2015)*
- Thesis Committee Member, Ijeoma Ononuju. Title: *Living blind, dreaming in color: social malignancy and African American male health and achievement. (Graduated, 2016)*
- Thesis Committee Member, Kenya Mitchell. Title: *Beyond the writing process: using explicit, trans-textual pedagogies to improve diverse undergraduate students' writing skills. (Graduated, 2016)*
- Thesis Committee Member, Mari Gray. Title: *The role of school resource officers in the school-to-prison pipeline. (Graduated, 2016)*
- Thesis Committee Member, Lorraine Wilkins. Title: *Counter-narratives from outside the hood: case studies of African American students' schooling experiences in suburbia.*

## **SAMPLE of PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS**

---

### **Invited presentations:**

Watson, V. (2017). Keynote Speaker. *Power and Privilege: Towards Racial Equity in Education*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Building a Resilient Yolo Summit. Woodland, CA.

Watson, V. (2017). Research Presentation. *Transforming Schooling in the P-20 Educational System*. The Aoki Center for Critical Race and Nation Studies, UC Davis School of Law. Davis, CA.

Watson, V. (2017). Keynote Speaker. *Write to Heal: Addressing Intergenerational Trauma with Critical Literacy and Social Justice*. National Parent-Teacher Conference. Sacramento, CA.

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). Research Presentation. *The Black Sunrise: Oakland Unified School District's Commitment to Address and Eliminate Institutionalized Racism*. African American & African Studies Program (AAAS) Brown Bag Lecture Series. University of California, Davis.
- 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. *Grassroots Empowerment for the Next Generation: Moving Marginalized Youth to the Center of Community Change*. UC Merced's Community Engagement Conference, Building Healthy Youth in Merced County: Community Engagement and Scholarship. UC Merced, Merced, CA
- 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. (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.
- Peer-reviewed presentations:**
- Watson, V. (2017). *Counternarratives/Testimonios/Mestizaje Epistemologies*. Chair and discussant at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, TX.
- 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*, Research Symposium at the National Council of Teachers of English, St. Louis, MO.
- Watson, V. (2017). *Deep Living: The Art, Science, and Soul of Transformative Classrooms*, Symposium at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, TX.
- Watson, V. (2017). *Strategies and Outcomes of Grassroots Organizing*. Discussant at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, TX.
- Watson, V. (2017). *Artistic Resistance: Creating a Transformative Teaching Praxis Through Hip-Hop*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, TX.
- 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. (2011). *white "supremacy" and me: the making and breaking of race(ism)*. Symposium on Abolishing Whiteness for the Public Good: A Critical Analysis of Whiteness Studies. Research Presentation. American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Watson, V. (2009). *Portraiture as a Border-Crossing Methodology*. Research Presentation. Harvard Graduate School of Education Alumni of Color Conference. Cambridge, MA.
- Watson, V. (2006). *A Critical Analysis of Rap Lyrics, Resistance, and School Reform*. Research Presentation. Harvard Graduate School of Education Alumni of Color Conference. Cambridge, MA.
- Watson, V. (2001). *A Holistic Multi-Cultural Approach to Human Rights Education*. Research Presentation. Comparative International Education Society. Washington, D.C.

## MEDIA COVERAGE

---

### National News Features

National Media Attention for my report, *The Black Sonrise: Oakland Unified School District's Commitment to Address and Eliminate Institutionalized Racism*:

- **New York Times**, *Courses in Manhood for African-American Boys* by Patricia Brown. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/education/edlife/in-oakland-building-boys-into-men.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/education/edlife/in-oakland-building-boys-into-men.html?_r=0)
- **Huffington Post Live Webcam** with Marc Lamont Hill: <http://huff.ly/17HxRGq>
- **Essence Magazine**: <http://m.essence.com/2015/02/17/oakland-schools-tackle-racism-get-results>
- **Huffington Post Article**: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/17/oakland-manhood-development-program\\_n\\_6665806.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/17/oakland-manhood-development-program_n_6665806.html)
- **Diverse Issues in Higher Education**: <http://diverseeducation.com/article/69243/>
- **Atlantic Black Star**: <http://atlantablackstar.com/2015/02/19/oakland-schools-taking-simple-effective-approach-helping-black-male-students-excel/>

- 2015      Featured commentator on Rachel Dolezal case for HLN: <http://www.hlnv.com/video/2015/06/17/watch-rachel-dolezal-cultural-thief>
- 2015      SAYS featured on KTVN in Reno: <http://www.ktvn.com/story/28154407/washoe-area-youth-speaks-program>
- 2014      "They Didn't Like School. School Didn't Like Them, Until Something Incredible Stepped Right In." *Upworthy* feature on SAYS. <http://www.upworthy.com/they-didnt-like-school-school-didnt-like-them-until-something-incredible-stepped-right-in?c=apstream>

## AWARDS

---

### Professional Awards

- Early Career Award, UC Davis, (2013) <http://www.ucdavis.edu/one/stories/staff/watson.html>
- Sacramento Business Journal's *40 Under 40 Award* for exemplary achievement in the region (2011)
- *Diversity and Principals of Community Soaring to New Heights Individual Achievement Award* from the UC Davis Chancellor's Office (2011)



### **Academic Awards and Distinctions**

- American Educational Research Association *Social Justice Leadership Award* (2018)
- American Educational Research Association *Social Impact Award* (2016)
- Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, Center for Regional Change at UC Davis (2008, declined)
- Harvard Graduate School of Education Recognition for "Outstanding Commitment to Students" for coordinating multicultural activities (2000–2001)
- Phi Beta Kappa, UC Berkeley (1996–1999)
- Dean's Honors List, UC Berkeley (1996–1999)
- Golden Key Honor Society, UC Berkeley (1996–1999)

### **Academic Scholarships**

- Harvard Graduate School of Education award and funding for highly-ranked doctoral student (2002–2004)
- Harvard Graduate School of Education merit-based scholarship for academic potential and achievement (2001)
- Multicultural Alliance of Teachers Education Award (2000)
- AmeriCorps Education Award and Scholarship Recipient (1999–2000)
- National Security Education Program Grant Recipient (1999)
- Alumni Scholarship for Outstanding Leadership, UC Berkeley (1998–1999)
- Fullwood Academic Scholarship, UC Berkeley (1996–1999)

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

---

- Urban Research-Based Action Network
- Imagining America
- American Educational Research Association
- National Council of Teachers of English
- National Writing Project
- Teachers for Social Justice