



# Learning to Liberate: Community-Based Solutions to the Crisis in Urban Education (Critical Social Thought)

*Vajra Watson*

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Few problems in education are as pressing as the severe crisis in urban schools. Though educators have tried a wide range of remedies, dismal results persist. This is especially true for low-income youth of color, who drop out of school—and into incarceration—at extremely high rates. The dual calamity of underachievement in schools and violence in many communities across the country is often met with blame and cynicism, and with a host of hurtful and unproductive quick fixes: blaming educators, pitting schools against each other, turning solely to the private sector, and ratcheting up the pressure on teachers and students. But real change will not be possible until we shift our focus from finding fault to developing partnerships, from documenting problems to discovering solutions. *Learning to Liberate* does just that by presenting true and compelling community-based approaches to school reform.

Drawing on over three years of ethnographic research, Vajra Watson explores the complicated process of reaching and teaching today's students. She reveals how four nontraditional educators successfully empower young people who have repeatedly been left behind. Using portraiture, a methodology rooted in vivid storytelling, Watson analyzes each educator's specific teaching tactics. Uncovering four distinct pedagogies—of communication, community, compassion, and commitment—she then pulls together their key strategies to create a theoretically grounded framework that is both useful and effective. A poignant, insightful, and practical analysis, *Learning to Liberate* is a timely resource for all educators and youth-serving practitioners who are committed to transforming "at-risk" youth into "at-promise" individuals who put their agency and potential into action in their schools and neighborhoods.

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