

## UC Davis Equity Summit: The Beautiful Struggle

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Warsan Shire once said, "If we're gonna heal, let it be glorious." This sentiment was supported throughout the Summit as we delved into the theme of social justice as a beautiful struggle. The Summit unified students, university professors, classroom teachers and community leaders from all over the greater Sacramento area to celebrate in the accomplishments of social justice work and collaborate on future efforts.

I expected the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Equity Summit to be intriguing and empowering, but I never imagined how meaningful of an impact it would make in how I envisioned my own future. When Dr. Vajra Watson, founder of SAYS, said, "Stand up if you are an agent of change," and everyone in the room stood up, I was overcome with a sense of belonging and unity, a sense of feeling I was at the right place, at the right time. As a sociology student at UC Davis, structural change in the world has been a main focus of my studies. I previously dismissed teaching as a potential career because I believed it to be designated to micro-level change. The Equity Summit opened my eyes to see how it is possible to make societal change through education. Not only are our children the future of this planet, but changing social institutions, like public education, can make a broader impact on the community.

I came to understand this through the testimonies of the Social Justice Award recipients and in part through hearing how Dr. Raja Kadhira and Jameel Pugh developed a teaching method to help empower the youth, through "teaching the way students want to learn" and with the ideology that "if your students are failing, you are failing." Dr. Kadhira discussed how it is important to keep pedagogy relevant to the students' lives and to meet them where they are at. As I've learned as an intern with Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS), when you speak their language, then trust can be built and when you teach to each individual's needs, then no student is left behind.

One main focal point of the Equity Summit was the Social Justice Awards: *Living Legacies of Liberation*. The presentations by the award recipients in how their life shaped their accomplishments and how their accomplishments impacted their vision spoke to how it is possible to work within the educational system to enact social change. I saw this expressed through Estella Sanchez, award recipient of the *Ubuntu Award for Inspiring Social Change* and co-founder of Sol Collective. She told her life story and how she envisioned a space to celebrate her cultural heritage and provide a safe haven for artists and activists in their work supporting the community at large.

The night ended with the Keynote speaker, Dr. Shawn Ginwright, a leading expert on African American youth, youth activism, and youth development. He discussed hope and healing in urban education and the question, *How does social toxicity shape our ability to transform society?* He expressed how it limits the way we see the world, destroying our ability to dream beyond the present situation. Yet, the absence of violence does not constitute peace, so we need to envision and create a new story. Oppression shapes what we say and our behavior and it is important to not let our struggle exist only in opposition, but also focus on what will replace what we leave behind. He reminded us of the importance of self-care, emphasizing that, "our ability to claim our well being is a radical act of justice." I left the Equity Summit contemplating how my life reflected in my values to uphold social justice and what more I could be doing. So I'll leave you with the questions Dr. Ginwright left echoing within our hearts and minds: *How are you committing to a sense of agency? What is the purpose to your day-to-day grind?*

For more information on the Equity Summit, please visit [equity.ucdavis.edu](https://equity.ucdavis.edu).