

**Critical Listening for Social Change:  
The Possibility of “Playback” in English Language Arts**

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**Abstract**

In the last two decades, there has been an expansion of the literacies that are part of adolescents’ lives. Although sound proliferates the lives of youth, little attention has been given to understanding the possibilities of sonic education and the capacity of listening as a space for literacy activism in school. With the recognition that more teachers are embracing critical literacy, this article pays attention to the affordances of sound for supporting civic imagination. Drawing on data from adolescents’ sound-based compositions, this article offers listening as critical practice. We found three elements that characterized listening as a critical practice: (1) listening to participate, (2) becoming audience to one’s own voices and own knowledge, and (3) spontaneous revision. Within the context of a sonic pedagogy, this inquiry illustrates the power of listening to our own voices and the potential of becoming audience/listener/spectator to our own individual and collective knowledge.

*Keywords:* Arts-based literacies, critical literacy, adolescents, sound, sonic pedagogy, English language arts, secondary school, multimodal composition.

*Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts, Research Strand*, Vol. 6 No. 1,  
Spring/Summer 2019