



## Ludic Language Pedagogy Playground

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## Creating SPACE to play in your classroom (An LLP zine)

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### Key points

- **What is this?** A zine which helps teachers think about how they can create SPACE for their students to have gratifying experiences.
- **Why did you make it?** To give teachers something simple to use as they start to think about how they could be *ludic* teachers.
- **Who is it for?** This is an important question.
  - It is primarily for practitioners/teachers who are curious as to how they can create an environment that inspires *gratifying experiences* for their students.
  - Secondly, I hope researchers and academics see the value in this SPACE-based learning metaphor which melds together key tenets of several approaches to “good” educational practice.

### Tweet synopsis

Students need SPACE to play. You can create it. Here's how.  
#safe #participation #agency #critical #experiences

View at the LLP Playground: <https://llpjjournal.org/2023/12/20/york-creating-space-to-play-zine>



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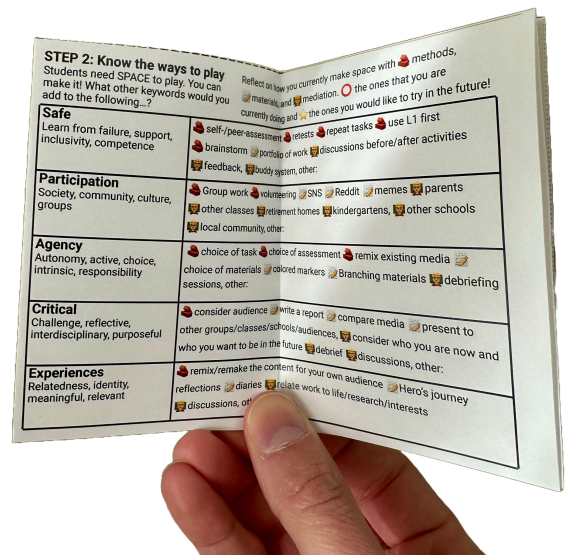


## Introduction

In this piece, I will discuss the concept of SPACE. It stands for Safe, Participation, Agency, Critical, and Experiences. These are the five key elements that are necessary for creating a classroom environment that is conducive to play, and thus the creation of gratifying experiences for teachers and students. I will first explain what a zine is, and how to use it. Then, I'll discuss what SPACE is and why I think it is a useful framing device for LLPeers. Following that, I will introduce the content of the zine, explaining the underpinning theory and background to each page, as well as how a teacher might use the content.

### The printable zine is the submission.

This document is the background to and explanation of why I made the zine.



### How to use:

1. Download the zine from here:  
<https://llpjournal.itch.io/creating-space-to-play-in-your-classroom-llp02>  
OR on the LLP website:  
<https://www.llpjournal.org/assets/publication-pdfs/SPACE-to-play-zine.pdf>
2. Print it out
3. Write, scribble, make notes, and colour it in.
4. OPTIONAL: Share your SPACE with us on Discord: <https://discord.gg/je9QZsnntf>

### Wait, what is a zine?



A zine (pronounced "zeen") is short for "magazine" and generally refers to a non-commercial, small-batch, cheap, and frugal publication. It's a creative space for individuals or small groups to share their ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Zines are typically multimodal, containing text, images, artwork, or anything else that expresses the creator's message. In sum, they are playful publications.

The zine asks teachers to think about how they can introduce these essential elements into their teaching content by first understanding and then pushing on (operating) their various constraints. Finally, a section of the zine encourages teachers to think concretely about how SPACE elements can be incorporated before and after a classroom activity in terms of methods, materials, and mediation that they incorporate in the building of their playgrounds.

This is an 8-page zine with the following content:

Page 1	Front cover
Pages 2 & 3	Consider your constraints
Pages 4 & 5	Know the “ways to play”
Pages 6 & 7	Build your playground
Page 8	Publication details

## Background to this zine

As I often write (York et al., 2021) and say (LLPx, 2023), the three words ludic, language, and pedagogy are critical to the goal of LLP (the journal and community). Each word refers to a cluster of objects and practices (examples follow).

### Ludic

Not just digital games (York et al, 2021), not even *just* games. Ludic exists in both people and objects (deHaan & York, forthcoming).

**Table 1** Examples of ludic in objects and teachers

Ludic objects (materials you use)	Ludic in you (you, being playful)
Puzzles, card games, word games, LARPs, interactive fiction, digital games, toys, roleplays, simulations, etc.	Sarcasm, poems and language play, creativity, imagination, memes, jokes... Play with methods, materials, and mediation. Pedagogy!

### Language

Language refers to literacy and literacy is *everything* (deHaan @ JALTCALL, 2022).

**Table 2** Language and literacy-related keywords

L1, L2, L3, Ln, pragmatics, literature, public speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, genre, discourse analysis, digital literacy, media literacy, taco literacy <sup>1</sup> , etc.
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### Pedagogy

The glue that holds everything together. Pedagogy is how teachers play and express the *ludic* in themselves (deHaan & York, forthcoming).

**Table 3** Examples of pedagogical approaches

Direct instruction; inquiry-based learning; constructionism; constructivism; puzzle-, problem-, and project-based learning; communicative language teaching; task-based language teaching; present, practice, production; total physical response; dogme; pedagogy of multiliteracies; connected learning; etc.
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<sup>1</sup> <https://tacoliteracy.com/>

## LxLxP

As the above examples show, Ludic, Language, and Pedagogy can be interpreted and implemented in many different ways. As such, it might be hard to visualise the entanglement between them. See Table 4 for some examples. Each element could be combined with any of the others in adjacent columns.

**Table 4** Combinations of Ludic, Language, and Pedagogy elements

Ludic		Language		Pedagogy
MMOs	x	Vocabulary learning	x	Project-based learning
Tic Tac Toe	x	Macbeth	x	Direct instruction
PewDiePie “let’s play” videos	x	Semiotics	x	Pedagogy of multiliteracies

Yes, LLP could be any of the above combinations, plus a million other ways that the L, L, and P elements can be mixed, matched, and combined. Therefore, I’m also always looking for simple ways to describe what LLP is, and how to *do* it.

While “good teaching with games” might capture the essence of LLP to a certain extent, it remains too vague and restricts the term “ludic” to solely encompass one form of ludic engagement: games. To address this, LLPeers have developed simple framing devices to demonstrate *ludic* teaching. I’ve contributed two playground submissions aiming to introduce LLP in a readily understandable manner.

1. A previous zine<sup>2</sup> with deHaan (2021) that asks teachers to think about the **methods, materials, and mediation** techniques they use around games and play in their classrooms.
2. A paper with other LLPeers (Spano et al., 2021) that shows **6 ways a single ludic object (Monopoly) may be implemented within different pedagogical approaches**.

The framing device presented in this paper provides yet another conceptualisation of LLP with a **focus on creating an environment conducive to play** that results in gratifying experiences for students and teachers.

### The ways to play: SPACE

The framing device here was created as a result of close readings of the literature in the following four avenues:

1. Playful approaches to pedagogy (e.g. Dearbury & Jones, 2020; Mardell et al., 2022)
2. Critical and progressive pedagogies, (e.g. hooks, 1994; brown, 2017; Freire, 1968, Human Restoration Project work)
3. Contemporary literacy teaching (e.g. Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023)
4. SLA theory and practice (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; Long, 2015; Dornyei & Ryan, 2015)

Through reading, I found the same core elements appearing in each approach<sup>3</sup>. Then, grouping those elements into five categories<sup>4</sup>, I devised the following mnemonic for remembering these important terms:

**Safe:** learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive

<sup>2</sup> <https://llpjournal.itch.io/llp-zine-01>

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed examination of the core tenets of the first three perspectives on education, see deHaan & York (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> With a bit of *language play* and creativity.



Participation: society, community, choice, self-direction, culture  
Agency: autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction, motivation, investment  
Critical: challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful, cognition  
Experiences: relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful

Thus 'good, humane teaching' as prescribed by playful, progressive, and contemporary literacy (L1 and L2) teaching practices asks us to create SPACE for students. Much like Maslow's core list of needs or Kaufman's (2021) more recent work on self-actualization which features two distinct categories: "security" and "growth" needs, the tenets of SPACE may be considered needs to be fulfilled to create an environment that fosters security and growth in our students; opening them up to new experiences and promoting a willingness to engage, communicate and play. Including more of the SPACE elements fosters increased opportunities for the development of gratifying experiences—a concept explored in the next section.

### How to make SPACE for students to *play*?

First, I will use Bogost's (2016) definition of play to help clarify what I mean by *creating SPACE to play*. I like Bogost's definition because it is short, simple, easy to understand, and has repercussions for us teachers. It is:

"...a way of operating a constrained system in a gratifying way" (2016, Ch1, para. 7)

To operate a system, we first need to know the constraints we face and where they can be pushed on, bent, and operated. That is STEP 1 to finding the freedom to play in education -- knowing your constraints as a teacher and manipulating (*playing with*) them. Some possible constraints:

- The curriculum teachers choose (or are told to) teach.
- The objects (including materials) teachers have or make or gather for use in their classrooms.
- Pedagogical choices.
- Time, and other resources.

Once the constraints are known, we can operate those constraints using the *ways to play* as outlined in the SPACE metaphor above. This relates closely to the idea that ludic exists not only in objects but also in us humans<sup>5</sup>. A teacher expresses their playful (= ludic) nature by playing with pedagogy. As a concrete example, a teacher may feel like they are deeply constrained by being assigned a textbook, but the way they use that textbook can be more or less interesting/fun/creative/*ludic*. The onus is on how the teacher operates that constraint. Follow unquestionably from page to page, or introduce modifications, customizations, or other, personally-created activities which relate to the SPACE keywords? This is how we create SPACE and play as teachers.

Knowing the *ways to play* (i.e., knowing what elements exist in SPACE) is STEP 2 of finding one's freedom to play. The other steps towards finding the freedom to play and utilizing it in playground creation are provided on the cover of this zine, and here:

STEP 1: Know your constraints  
STEP 2: Know the "ways to play"  
STEP 3: Build your playground  
STEP 4: Let students play  
STEP 5: Reflect, iterate and share (← not a focus of this zine. Perhaps I will write another..!)

Examples of how various teachers created SPACE in their contexts are presented in the "Page 6 and 7" section below.

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps a topic for another zine in the future.

## Zine content

The next three pages outline the zine content, with notes where necessary, such as on how the zine may be filled in by a teacher.

### Pages 2 and 3

<b>STEP 1: Know your constraints</b> What limitations or constraints do you face in your context? <b>Curricular goals</b> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <b>Pedagogy</b> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <b>Budget/resources</b> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <b>Time</b> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <b>Other</b> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<b>How can you push on these constraints to make more freedom?</b> <div>Can you change your goals? Add other goals? 🖋️</div> <div>Can you change how you reach your goals? What pedagogical knowledge do you need? 🖋️</div> <div>Do you have enough money to make/buy materials? Can you create materials frugally? Where else can you get resources from? 🖋️</div> <div>Do you have time to do what you or the students WANT to do, to make materials, to learn more about pedagogy, teaching, learning, education, etc.? 🖋️</div> <div>Can you think of any other constraints that prevent you from playing? 🖋️</div>
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Consider constraints and consider how you might be able to push on them.

The left side features 10-point scales going from NO FREEDOM to LOTS OF FREEDOM. I chose four key constraints for the reader to think about their context: pedagogical freedom, access to a budget and other resources, faculty support, time, and a final space for “other,” personal considerations.

On the right side are questions related to the four key constraints that I wrote on the left, to start the reader thinking about how they could instigate change, and start to create SPACE.

## STEP 2: Know the ways to play

Students need SPACE to play. You can make it! What other keywords would you add to the following...?

Reflect on how you currently make space with 🧑‍🎓 methods, 📝 materials, and 🧑‍🎓 mediation. ○ the ones that you are currently doing and ★ the ones you would like to try in the future!

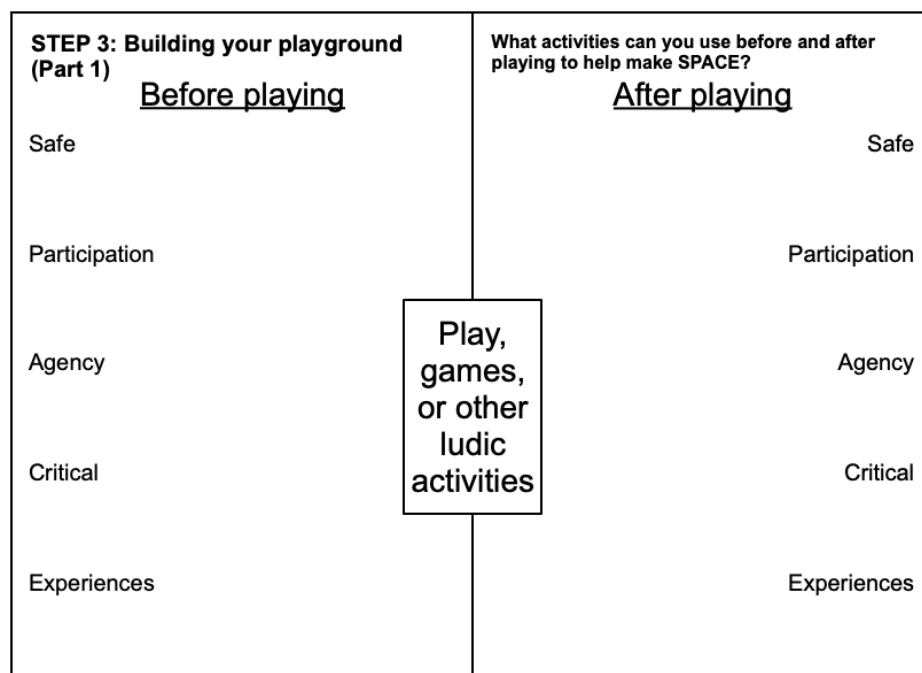
<b>Safe</b> Learn from failure, support, inclusivity, competence	🧑‍🎓 self-/peer-assessment 🧑‍🎓 retests 🧑‍🎓 repeat tasks 🧑‍🎓 use L1 first 🧑‍🎓 brainstorm 📝 portfolio of work 🧑‍🎓 discussions before/after activities 🧑‍🎓 feedback, 🧑‍🎓 buddy system, other:
<b>Participation</b> Society, community, culture, groups	🧑‍🎓 Group work 🧑‍🎓 volunteering 📝 SNS 📝 Reddit 📝 memes 🧑‍🎓 parents 🧑‍🎓 other classes 🧑‍🎓 retirement homes 🧑‍🎓 kindergartens, 🧑‍🎓 other schools 🧑‍🎓 local community, other:
<b>Agency</b> Autonomy, active, choice, intrinsic, responsibility	🧑‍🎓 choice of task 🧑‍🎓 choice of assessment 🧑‍🎓 remix existing media 📝 choice of materials 📝 colored markers 📝 Branching materials 🧑‍🎓 debriefing sessions, other:
<b>Critical</b> Challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful	🧑‍🎓 consider audience 📝 write a report 📝 compare media 📝 present to other groups/classes/schools/audiences, 🧑‍🎓 consider who you are now and who you want to be in the future 🧑‍🎓 debrief 🧑‍🎓 discussions, other:
<b>Experiences</b> Relatedness, identity, meaningful, relevant	🧑‍🎓 remix/remake the content for your own audience 📝 Hero's journey reflections 📝 diaries 🧑‍🎓 relate work to life/research/interests 🧑‍🎓 discussions, other:

The left side features the five keywords for creating SPACE to play, with related, core tenets written beneath.

On the right side are ideas to start the reader thinking about how the keywords could be instantiated within their context. The list of options is not exhaustive and is a mixture of materials, methods, and mediation techniques. This section of the zine also asks the reader to circle (○) the ones that they are currently engaging in and star (★) the ones that they would like to try, thus emphasising the dual goals of the zine – to allow teachers to reflect on their current practices and make improvements for the future.

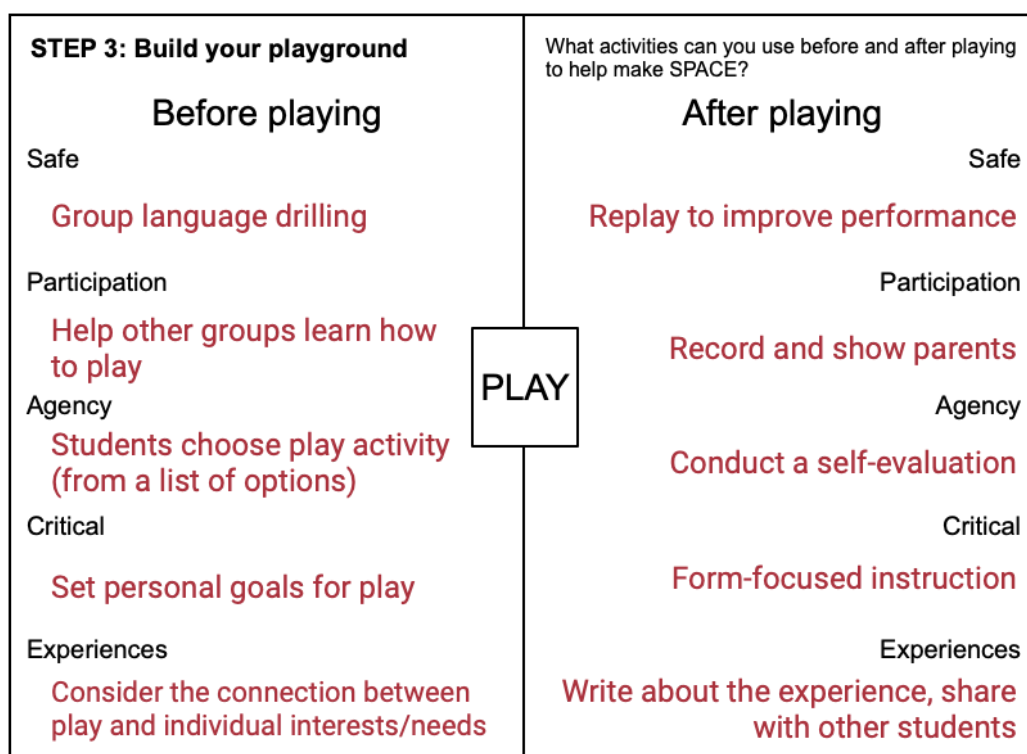
As an example then, how can we create a “Safe” classroom? By reducing the fear of failure. How? By letting them repeat tests to show their eventual mastery of content.

## Pages 6 and 7



The final double-page spread asks the reader to visualize their SPACE-based classroom practice. An interactive experience is centred and there is room around the activity, divided into pre- and post-play areas, where the reader can jot down activities which inspire or create SPACE.

Here is an example of how a teacher might complete the zine. Examples from pervious LLP papers follow.



## Examples of teachers making SPACE

This section introduces several papers, published in the Ludic Language Pedagogy journal, highlighting how teachers have created SPACE for their students around gameplay.

Element	Examples
<b>Safe</b> Learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Al-Khanfar (2023) gave her students the <b>chance to complete practice runs</b> of their tests to familiarise them with the process.</li> <li>York (2023) uses a <b>portfolio assessment</b>, allowing students to choose their best performances rather than have to take a one-shot, high-stakes test.</li> </ul>
<b>Participation</b> Society, community, choice, self-direction, culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reed (2022) and Johnson (2021) created a community of learners around roleplaying games in an <b>extracurricular gaming club</b>.</li> <li>Al-Khanfar (2023) created a <b>community</b> of learners in her classroom by asking them to roleplay being game localizers.</li> <li>deHaan (2019, 2023) uses games as an initial experience to <b>catalyze students' social participation projects</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Agency</b> Autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction, motivation, investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Johnson (2021) utilized a tabletop roleplaying game (TRPG) to give students a great deal of agency over their learning. One way this was instantiated was through the <b>narrative choices they made</b> during play.</li> <li>Bradford et al. (2021) utilized escape room games to encourage students to <b>collaborate</b> and <b>cooperate</b>.</li> <li>York (2019, 2020) uses a teaching cycle which is repeated four times over a year. The first two cycles are heavily scaffolded to familiarise students with the cycle and its activities, however, the <b>scaffolding is reduced during the final two cycles, giving students much more agency and responsibility in carrying out activities</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Critical</b> Challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful, cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>deHaan, (2023) asks students to think critically about <b>who they are</b> and <b>who they want to be</b>. Students also <b>debrief</b> and <b>discuss gameplay</b>, linking their experiences to a participatory project.</li> <li>McFadyen (2020) asked students to engage in a <b>critical reflective examination</b> of gameplay sessions.</li> </ul>
<b>Experiences</b> Relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MacFadyen (2020) used video games as a source material in his class as a recognition that this media was related to students' <b>prior experiences</b> and <b>interests</b>.</li> <li>Bacalja (2023) also argues that video games should be considered as teaching materials based on students' <b>social</b> and <b>cultural capital</b> developed in out-of-school contexts.</li> </ul>



## Conclusion

**This 8-page zine** is a short introduction to how a teacher can create SPACE for their students to gain gratifying experiences in the classroom. The concept of SPACE is connected explicitly to 1) teachers knowing of, and pushing back on their various constraints and 2) pre- and post-game activities with a focus on methods, materials, and mediation techniques.

**This paper** provides background and further details as to the content of the zine. The background to the concept of SPACE is introduced in brief but mentions the connections to several pedagogical approaches and philosophies including playful pedagogy, contemporary literacy teaching, progressive education, and second language acquisition theory. A lengthier piece will be available in deHaan and York (forthcoming). Concrete examples of how other teachers are creating SPACE in their contexts are also provided, with links to their work available in the references list.

Much as the “methods, materials and mediation” concept helps frame teachers’ pedagogical choices, I hope that the SPACE framework acts as an equally important and easy-to-understand guiding principle.

If you, dear reader, get anything out of this or my previous zine (York & deHaan, 2021), please let me know at my contact email address or on the LLP Discord<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://discord.gg/je9QZsnntf>

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