

## Holding Space for Undergraduate English Pedagogy Students

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Giving and receiving feedback tends to be a complex and challenging process for both students and teachers. The nuances in the knowledge and skills needed to lead feedback effectively with student teachers take time, experience and vast practice to fully develop. Even when feedback for these strategies have been developed, guiding a feedback session involves emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication skills that are essential in creating a safe, non-judgmental, and nurturing environment focused on human experiences and learning. For this classroom reflection, the exploration comes from the perspective of a facilitator leading a feedback session on the design of task-based lesson plans created by EFL student teachers from a private university in the Los Lagos Region, Chile. The focus of this reflection is a relational practice and skill popularized by Heather Plett: *holding space*.

Holding space can be described as "being willing to walk alongside another person in whatever journey they are on, without judging them, making them feel inadequate, trying to fix them, or trying to impact the outcome" (Plett, 2015). You can also understand holding space as making space for somebody else's experience and allowing for them to be centered during the interaction. In order to practice holding space it is essential to be fully present and to create a relational environment in which everyone feels safe. Other key practices that are deeply interconnected with holding space are active listening and empathizing (Epstein, 2023).

As I worked with my undergraduate student teachers in a practicum course, I was able to implement the practice of holding space while leading feedback sessions with a group of 12 students. Holding space in this context took the form of small group sessions in which students shared how they felt and what they were thinking about regarding the process of designing their lesson plans. I intentionally practiced listening to each one and followed their train of thought no matter what direction it was going in. The moment I perceived a judgmental thought crossing my mind, I put effort into noticing it and quickly moved away from the thought to allow myself to continue staying with my students in their processes, thoughts and emotions. I resorted to nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, nodding, and body language to convey interest and care while students guided me through their experiences. I also found myself offering reflective responses, such as echoing back their key ideas and thoughts to validate their experiences.

What I learned by holding space for my students during this feedback session was that they were more willing to be vulnerable and share authentic ideas and emotions they were experiencing. These students had a plethora of thoughts and feelings flooding their minds and hearts. For instance, one student opened up about how designing and teaching a student-centered task-based lesson was nerve-wracking since she feared losing control of the class and having administrators and parents think she was not doing her job as a student teacher. She felt that she needed to lecture more to demonstrate authority and gain respect from students and administrators. I believe genuine responses like this one were a result of holding space for them during the feedback session.

By holding space for my students, I gained a deeper understanding of their experiences and built stronger relationships with them. This process fostered greater empathy for them as individuals and as they navigate their journey to becoming professional teachers.

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## References

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