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From classroom walls to windows of opportunity: Flexible pedagogy in action

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ABSTRACT

The educational system is presently undergoing different kinds of changes concerning the social, cultural, and technological aspects, which influence the learning process and transform the role of the classroom. First, the classroom is viewed as a place where identity is formed through engaging in meaningful activities, particularly when working with students from linguistically and socially deprived backgrounds. The present paper analyzes the case study of Elen, who is a teacher at an elementary school. It reveals the importance of flexibility in pedagogical approaches, adaptability of learning environments, as well as creating a supportive atmosphere inside the classroom. Including students in the design process, addressing their needs, and stimulating them to inquire are some of the factors that enable teachers to provide an empowering environment for children. Consequently, the outcomes of the research demonstrate that the discussed processes represent a new approach to pedagogy and an evolution of the classroom role.

Keywords: flexible pedagogy, learning spaces, classroom culture, student belonging, social mobility

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, education institutions have faced fast changes associated with a variety of cultural, social, and technological shifts that have affected the notion of learning and transformed the role of the classroom in the twenty-first century. First, modern scholars agree that the role of the classroom has fundamentally changed. In the new twenty-first century, the classroom can hardly be perceived as an isolated space within which disciplinary knowledge is being transmitted in one-way fashion. Instead, it should be regarded as a powerful social and cultural setting that affects the formation of identity, helps learners to feel integrated into society and expands their horizons (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2018). As far as the transformation of the teaching model is concerned, it involves moving from traditional frontal instruction towards a holistic notion of learning based on the integration of social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Contemporary research suggests that high-quality learning is fostered through supportive learning environments that promote student agency, autonomy, and active engagement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Reeve & Shin, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Designing a productive learning space is one of the most important tasks that needs to be accomplished to ensure active and meaningful learning in the modern educational landscape. A variety of scientific sources show that the design of learning space, physical and pedagogical, plays a critical role in the emergence of conditions that foster active and meaningful learning among contemporary learners. Flexibility of the learning space gives learners opportunities to switch between collaborative and individual activities, explore different ideas, interact with other learners, and act on behalf of their interests (Lazareva & Tømte, 2024). Moreover, inviting learners to shape their learning environment contributes to their increased sense of ownership, strengthens their motivation and engagement, making this a necessary element of any learning process (OECD, 2018; Wentzel, 2022).

Another aspect that should be emphasized relates to student agency and choice. In fact, providing students with opportunities to make choices is not a pedagogical luxury but a necessary condition for learning. Students' participation in decisions regarding what they learn, how it is done, and how they are going to be assessed makes them take an active role in the process, enhances their engagement and increases their intrinsic motivation (Mitra, 2018). Several research papers prove that agencies enhance critical thinking and foster a sense of ownership, contributing to the process of knowledge construction (Reeve & Shin, 2020). The

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self-determination theory formulated by Deci and Ryan (2000) underlines the importance of autonomy, belonging, and competence in cognitive and motivational growth. Learning processes built on dialogue, collaboration, and collective decision-making are no longer passive processes of knowledge receiving. They become proactive activities aimed at constructing knowledge (Strating et al., 2025).

Finally, scholars pay attention to the importance of the social-emotional dimension, which is an important foundation for learning. A feeling of belonging and emotional security significantly contributes to the emergence of learners' academic engagement, persistence, and positive identities, especially among disadvantaged students or those who are non-native speakers (White et al., 2023). Productive relationships between learners and teachers or peers create conditions necessary for the formation of community and help learners engage in the process and gain deeper insights into the topics covered in class (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Li et al., 2024). Creating a positive emotional climate through emotionally supportive teacher–student interactions and mindfulness-based practices contribute to a supportive learning environment that promotes students' social and emotional development (Jennings et al., 2019). Taken together, the literature suggests that flexible learning environments, student agency and choice, and a sense of belonging and security are closely interconnected dimensions of meaningful learning. Their integration contributes to the development of a holistic educational ecosystem (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Reeve & Shin, 2020; Wentzel, 2022).

The flexibility of the learning environment contributes to agency, which, in turn, fosters a feeling of belonging, allowing learners to fully embrace their opportunities. This perspective is especially relevant to schools operating in disadvantaged communities. In such contexts, the school is not only the place of learning but also a powerful instrument of social change and a means of mobility. For children living in disadvantaged communities, flexible learning environments and opportunities to exercise choice and enjoy the feeling of security represent an important turning point in the perception of themselves as competent, valuable, and influential agents of society (Mitra, 2018).

Thus, in its essence, the twenty-first century classroom serves as a holistic learning environment within which learning becomes an activity related to identity construction, belonging, and influence over reality. Principles of flexibility, choice, and emotional security become important elements of the new learning process and necessary prerequisites of holistic education. This theoretical basis provides an appropriate framework for the analysis of the following case study.

Although previous research has established the importance of flexible learning environments, student agency and choice, and supportive teacher–student relationships, these dimensions are often discussed as distinct components of effective learning. Less attention has been given to how they are brought together through the everyday pedagogical practices of an individual teacher within a specific classroom context. There is a need for context-sensitive accounts of how a teacher translates a pedagogical vision of flexibility into concrete decisions concerning the organization of the learning environment, instructional planning, and everyday teaching practices. Examining this process in a socially and linguistically diverse school context may provide a more nuanced understanding of flexible pedagogy as an enacted practice rather than solely as a set of educational principles.

METHODOLOGY

A narrative qualitative case study design was used to examine how flexible pedagogical approaches combined with supportive classroom culture could redefine the purpose of the classroom as an environment that provides individuals with numerous social and cultural opportunities. The selected methodology allowed conducting an in-depth inquiry of educational processes in a specific context through examining educational practices, intentions, interactions, and meanings.

Especially relevant in this regard is a narrative approach to conducting case study research because of the possibility to get a comprehensive picture regarding educational processes happening in a certain environment and characterized by actions, incidents, relations, and interactions having an impact on teachers and learners.

Elen was selected purposefully as an information-rich case because her teaching practice offered a particularly relevant context for examining the enactment of flexible pedagogy. She is an experienced elementary school teacher with a diverse professional and academic background, and her pedagogical practice is characterized by the deliberate creation and continuous adaptation of learning environments, flexible instructional planning, and the integration of different areas of knowledge. Her case was considered particularly informative because these practices were implemented within a socially and linguistically diverse school context, providing an opportunity to examine in depth how a teacher translates a flexible pedagogical vision into everyday classroom practice.

Participants and Context

The case study focused on Elen (pseudonym), a second-grade teacher working in an urban public elementary school serving a socially and linguistically diverse community. The school is characterized by a low socioeconomic profile, and approximately 96% of the students in Elen’s classroom speak Hebrew as a second language. These contextual characteristics are presented to situate Elen’s pedagogical practice within the educational setting in which it takes place.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine how flexible pedagogy is enacted in the everyday classroom practices of one elementary school teacher within a socially and linguistically diverse educational context.

The study was guided by the following research question: How is flexible pedagogy enacted in a teacher’s everyday classroom practice, and what pedagogical practices characterize its implementation?

Data Analysis

Data collection focused on Elen's pedagogical practice. The data set consisted of one semi-structured in-depth interview with Elen and four open, unstructured classroom observations. The interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and explored Elen's professional background, pedagogical beliefs, approaches to designing and adapting the learning environment, instructional planning, pedagogical flexibility, and the challenges she encountered in implementing these practices. Follow-up questions were used to clarify and deepen her responses. The interview guide was developed by the researcher specifically for this study and was not adapted from an existing interview protocol or instrument. The questions were formulated in relation to the study's aims and conceptual focus on pedagogical practices and learning environments. The complete semi-structured interview guide is provided in **Appendix**.

The four classroom observations were open and unstructured and focused on Elen's pedagogical practices as enacted during everyday teaching. All four observations were conducted by the researcher during regular classroom instruction. Attention was given to the ways in which she organized and adapted the learning environment, structured learning activities, used the classroom space, and made pedagogical decisions during instruction. The observations were intended to complement the interview by providing an opportunity to examine how Elen's stated pedagogical vision was enacted in practice. No structured observation checklist, rating scale, or quantitative measure was used. The observations did not involve the collection of personal or identifying information about individual students.

All data were collected in Hebrew. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed, and the material used for analysis and reporting was translated into English.

Analyzing of Data

The data were analyzed by the researcher using reflexive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach. The analysis was guided by the research question and sought to identify how flexible pedagogy was enacted through Elen's everyday pedagogical practices and which practices characterized its implementation.

The analysis involved several iterative stages. First, the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcript and observation notes to become familiar with the data. Second, the material was coded systematically, with attention to recurring pedagogical practices, decisions, intentions, and ways in which Elen organized and adapted the learning environment. Codes were then compared and grouped into broader patterns of meaning. Through an iterative process of reviewing, refining, and interpreting these patterns in relation to the research question, broader themes were developed. The themes were subsequently reviewed against the full data set to ensure that they provided a coherent representation of Elen's pedagogical practice.

Because the study employed reflexive thematic analysis and the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, inter-rater reliability was not used. Instead, trustworthiness was supported through repeated engagement with the data, systematic and iterative coding, continuous review and refinement of the developing themes, and reflexive consideration of the researcher's interpretive role throughout the analytical process (Byrne, 2022).

Three thematic dimensions were developed through the analysis and became the basis for reporting:

1. Designing the Learning Environment as a Space of Possibility: How Elen creates and continuously adapts flexible learning spaces to support exploration, curiosity, and varied forms of learning.
2. Enabling Agency and Choice through Pedagogical Practice: How Elen incorporates opportunities for choice, participation, and autonomy into her instructional planning and everyday teaching practices.
3. Fostering Belonging and Emotional Safety through Pedagogical Relationships: How Elen intentionally builds supportive relationships and classroom routines as part of her pedagogical practice.

FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings derived from the interview and classroom observations, demonstrating how flexible pedagogy is enacted in Elen's everyday classroom practice.

Theme 1: Designing the Learning Environment as a Space of Possibility

The process of design starts right at the beginning of the academic year, when Elen decides to move away from the conventional setup of the teacher designing the learning space. Rather than going down that route, Elen begins the year by having a discussion with her students on what they desire in their learning space. *"I don't want to come into the classroom with everything already prepared and designed,"* she explains. *"I want them to be real partners. I want us to think together about what is important to have here, what will help them feel at home, and what will encourage them to learn.* "During these initial conversations, students propose ideas for learning centers, inquiry corners, or quiet areas, and Elen listens carefully and translates their suggestions into practical planning. *"They tell me what they need, and I try to see how we can make it happen. If someone says they need a quiet reading corner, we build one together. If they want a round table for discussions, we arrange it."* This process is not merely a design choice it serves as a powerful tool for empowering students from the very start of the year. *"Once they feel that the classroom belongs to them too, they behave differently. They take care of it, they are proud of it, and they feel that their voice matters."*



Figure 1. Learning spaces in Elen's classroom (Source: Field study)

The classroom space as dynamic and evolving: Continuous adaptation to learners' needs

Space is for Elen not just a task that needs to be done at the beginning of the school year, but rather a constant process. Every month or so, the class engages in a joint evaluation of space, considering both the advantages and disadvantages of different places and suggesting improvements. "*I'm not afraid to change things. The classroom doesn't have to stay the same all year. If I see that something no longer serves them, we dismantle it and rebuild."*

This way, the learning environment remains responsive to the needs of learners and the changing needs in terms of the learning process. For instance, Elen realized that her students had trouble concentrating on lengthy assignments and she decided to *"station corners"* small areas where students could complete short tasks and then move on. *"I realized they needed a quicker sense of achievement. So, we changed the environment accordingly and suddenly saw much more persistence and focus."* (**Figure 1**)

An environment that encourages inquiry, curiosity, and choice

A central feature of Elen's approach is the way the environment is intentionally designed to encourage active exploration and personal choice. *"I don't tell them where to sit or how to work,"* she emphasizes. *"Some choose to work alone, some in pairs, and others in small groups. Some prefer lying on the carpet with a book, while others need a tidy desk. Everything is legitimate."* This creates an environment where learning is viewed as the land of opportunities and not the land of instruction. The learners are enabled to know themselves, their learning styles, and the decisions to be made based on this knowledge. *"They learn to take responsibility for their choices,"* Elen explains, *"and to me, that is no less important than the curriculum itself."*

The classroom space as a foundation for belonging

Apart from being used to deliver instruction, Elen sees the classroom setting as an important mechanism for helping learners create connections and a sense of community. Every inch of the classroom space provides avenues for self-expression, from the display of the learners' work on the walls to their sentences posted in the learning centers.. *"I want them to feel that they are seen here,"* she explains. *"That the walls speak about them, that they are part of the story of this classroom. "This sense of belonging is also reflected in everyday interactions. Students feel comfortable making suggestions, offering feedback, and proposing changes. Sometimes a child comes up to me and says, 'Maybe we should move this corner over there so there will be more space.' And I listen. Not because it's just a comment, but because they feel this classroom belongs to them as much as it belongs to me."*

Theme 2: Student Agency and Choice as Drivers of Growth

One of the main ideas behind Elen's approach to teaching is the idea that true and productive learning occurs when it comes from within because of curiosity, a wish to investigate, and self-responsibility for what one learns. For Elen, the task of being a teacher is not just to impart knowledge but to make it happen naturally due to the students' active participation. *"I don't want them to learn because I told them to,"* she emphasizes. *"I want them to learn because they want to understand something for themselves, because they discovered that it interests them."*

The new paradigm alters the dynamics in the classroom. Instead of having a teacher that takes control and students who just accept what they say without thinking, Elen creates an environment where the learners are part of the learning process by asking questions, engaging in decision-making, and creating their path. As she says, *"When they feel they have control over what happens in the classroom, they become more curious, they want to know more. And that is when learning truly begins."*

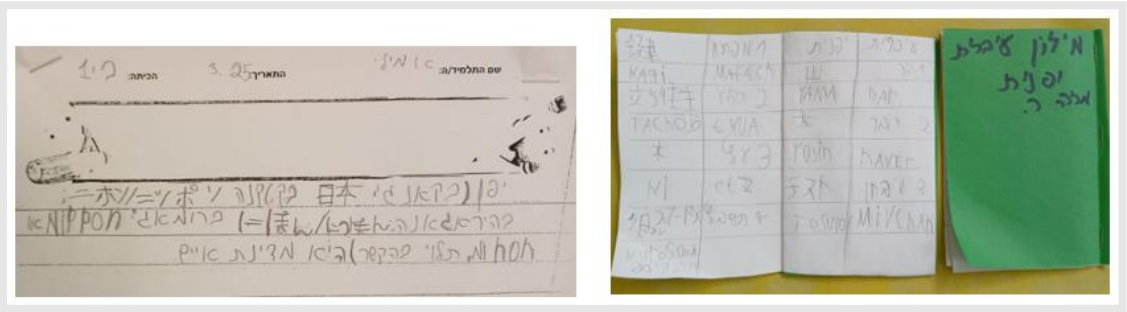


Figure 2. Learning Japanese: A Hebrew–Japanese dictionary created by students and their Japanese writing (Source: Field study)

From observation to inquiry: Curiosity as a pathway to knowledge

Many examples of this kind of philosophy can be found in everyday life in classrooms. Many times, learning starts not from the prepared lesson but from the observation of any object or phenomenon interesting enough to attract attention. For instance, there was a day in the class where Elen simply brought a pinecone to the classroom without preparing any task related to it. Soon enough, children started questioning and analyzing it by drawing and measuring it. Gradually, the question of the repeating pattern in nature led to the discovery of Fibonacci numbers (see **Figure 2**). *"I hadn't planned to teach Fibonacci that day,"* Elen admits. *"But they led me there. Once they started asking questions, I knew it was the perfect moment to use that curiosity to teach mathematics in a meaningful way."*

The same was true when there was a debate going on between Alice in Wonderland. The debate which started with some imaginary topics ended up being a study of logic, realism, and imagination. This turned out to be an interdisciplinary research project covering literature, philosophy, and math. *"They were so fascinated by the question of whether what happens to Alice is real or not,"* Elen recalls. *"We explored what logic means, how we know that something is true, and how to distinguish between fact and interpretation."*

Empowering choice: From participant to leader

One of the things that make Elen's teaching unique is her provision of chances for her learners to take charge of their learning journey. This freedom of choice is manifest at many different levels, from choosing the topic of study all the way through to managing the speed at which they learn. *"I don't decide in advance who will work together or how fast they will work,"* she explains. *"I give them the tools to manage their time, to choose partners they feel will help them learn best, and to decide how they want to present what they have learned."*

This autonomy leads to a significant increase in motivation and engagement. When students realize that they are not simply completing an assignment but actively shaping it, they develop a deeper sense of ownership over their learning.

Elen sees this process not only to deepen students' understanding of content but also as an opportunity to build essential life skills. *"When they make choices, they also take responsibility. They learn to manage their time, to solve problems, and sometimes to compromise by letting go of their own ideas for the sake of the group. These are skills they will carry with them far beyond a second-grade classroom."*

Learning without boundaries: The Japanese example

Another strong case where choice became influential in learning was observed when the students grew interested in Japanese due to their exploration of Japanese culture in a separate project. They were not satisfied with having the conversation theoretical; hence, they requested that they be taught some basic Japanese vocabularies. *"I had no knowledge of Japanese,"* she admits with a smile. *"But I told them that if it interests them, we will learn together."* What started as a social studies activity became an interdisciplinary project that integrated language, culture, geography, and mathematics. For Elen, this is the essence of authentic learning. *"I want them to understand that there is no limit to what they can learn. If something interests them, they can investigate it. That is the most genuine way to develop a love of knowledge."*

Choice as a foundation for emotional and social growth

Choices have a bigger impact on students' learning experiences than students' own experiences of learning. They play an important part in students' psychological and social growth. Once students know that they are valued and listened to, they will feel confident about themselves. *"A child who did not speak at all at the beginning of the year,"* Elen shares, *"started leading entire projects simply because I gave him the chance to choose a topic that interested him."* These experiences foster a deeper sense of community in the classroom. Choice is not always individual; it is often collective and requires dialogue, listening, and shared decision-making. *"They learn to persuade, to listen, and to compromise. It is not just learning knowledge. It is learning life,"* she concludes.

The methodology used by Elen proves that student autonomy and choice are critical prerequisites for learning. The process moves away from being an exercise in imparting knowledge to becoming an interactive process involving the co-creation of knowledge through curiosity and questioning (Mitra, 2018; Reeve & Shin, 2020).

Theme 3: Belonging and Emotional Safety as Foundations for Learning

The findings from the classroom observation and interview suggest that the process of significant learning in Elen's classroom is not possible without considering emotions. According to Elen, learning takes place based on the feeling of being safe “from knowing that somebody sees you, listens to you, and believes in you.” Elen believes that “if a child does not feel safe, he cannot learn.” Before engaging her students in learning the basic subjects such as reading and mathematics, she makes sure that they feel like they belong.

Relationships as the foundation for learning

Right from the very beginning of the new academic year, Elen puts emphasis on establishing good relations with her pupils. The first weeks of studying are filled with talks, cooperative games, and various activities which will enable every child to become a part of this classroom community. "The first thing I'd like them to experience is that they are a part of our community," she says. "No one is left alone here. We are one team." Her work with children does not end there. During the whole year Elen talks to each of them individually, starts personal talks and creates connections based on trust. "All they need sometimes is hearing words like 'I am proud of you,' and a miracle occurs," Elen claims. "It is very important for a child to feel that I believe in him more than he believes in himself." However, these relationships are not just emotional ties; they are also educational instruments which allow a deeper study process.

A safe space for all learners

The importance of a safe learning environment is especially evident in Elen’s class because 96 percent of the students are non-native speakers of Hebrew who often have difficulties not only with language but also socially. Belonging for such children is never easy to obtain. “Some of them come to us feeling inferior,” Elen reveals. “My first task is to break that and help them feel that they can.”

One of Elen’s most effective strategies is daily emotional dialogue. Each morning begins with a “morning circle,” where students share feelings, experiences, and personal moments. “Sometimes there’s a child who doesn’t speak much,” she notes, “but after two weeks in the circle, they suddenly share something about themselves. That moment is magical, because it shows they feel they belong.”

Rituals, meditation, and emotional routines

Elen also establishes emotional rituals every day to create a sense of security and belonging among her children. The most important ritual is a meditation session that lasts for five minutes, which she performs with all the students. “We close our eyes, breathe together, and remember that every day is a chance for us to start fresh,” she says. “It soothes them, but it also brings us together as a collective.” Meditation is only one of many rituals created by Elen that make up a larger emotional culture. During the school day, she constantly engages in positive emotional discourse, takes a break during emotionally charged moments to talk about their emotions, and spends time making decisions as a group.

Creating a sense of home

Elen’s class does not happen to create a feeling of belonging; it has been deliberately planned by her for her students. The setting of the classroom itself bears witness to the same fact: classroom walls have photographs and artwork of the students; there are cozy corners for chats and relaxation. “The classroom should be a place they want to be,” Elen explains. “If they don’t want to come here, then I have missed something.”

This meticulous creation of a "second home" allows all students to thrive. Socially anxious students become active participants, those who were initially unwilling to speak in Hebrew attempt to do so, and the entire class evolves into a classroom of learners where everyone’s voice counts.

The relationship between Elen and her students exemplifies the fact that being emotionally aware and creating a strong community is what makes learning happen; they are not add-ons to the experience – they are the very core of it. It is crucial that Elen's classroom belongs before anything else happens.

The three dimensions of theme that have been revealed through data analysis demonstrate the way in which pedagogical decisions made during everyday lessons can create a learning environment that becomes a place for personal empowerment and development. Through the purposeful construction of the environment, Elen makes the actual classroom into a changing and constantly developing one that corresponds with the needs of children and their identity. By making learning an explorative process rather than a mere acquisition of knowledge, she creates an environment of possibilities for each of her pupils. Emotional security, personal relations between teacher and children, and community – all these components are necessary for real learning to take place.

DISCUSSION

The insights gained from the case analysis shed light on the changing function of the classroom within the context of the twenty-first century. The classroom today is much more than a place where discipline-specific knowledge is imparted. Rather, it becomes a social and cultural environment that builds personality, expands horizons, and creates new opportunities in life. The case study presented offers an insightful perspective on how classical education may be developed into a broader socio-cultural practice that enables people to take an active role in the shaping of their own future.

The data collected during the analysis indicates that one of the primary mechanisms through which the above-mentioned transformation occurs is the creation of an open, flexible, and dynamic learning environment. This goes far beyond the mere aesthetic dimension of education and represents a profound pedagogical approach based on treating the physical and psychological environment of the classroom as an active tool for developing learning processes. Starting from the first week of the school year, Elen actively involves her pupils in the development of the classroom environment, thus creating an atmosphere of shared responsibility. “They understand that they are involved in the process. They are not just recipients of my plan, but co-authors with me,” she notes. Research confirms the importance of such involvement, suggesting that it is a crucial component of motivation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2018).

Student motivation and agency do not arise only as motivational tools but rather as part of the very essence of the learning experience. In Elen’s class, teaching does not happen unilaterally; knowledge is created through dialogue and collaboration. *“Sometimes a topic is born from a question a child asks. We stop the original plan and embark on an exploration together,”* she describes. For instance, the students studied the Fibonacci numbers using a pinecone, learned logic and math using Alice in Wonderland, and some decided to learn Japanese as well in their cultural study project. All these activities stemmed from the students’ true curiosities, which eventually turned out to be productive learning paths. As studies reveal, when students feel true ownership over their actions, they think deeply, become responsible for their own learning process, and build significant knowledge structures (Mitra, 2018; Reeve & Shin, 2020).

Moreover, the findings reveal the significance of social and emotional aspects as critical prerequisites for effective learning. According to Elen, the absence of belonging and emotional safety prevents any kind of learning. "If a kid doesn't feel like belonging, then nothing else will work," she says. Therefore, she invests a lot of effort into creating interpersonal, community, and emotional bonds within the learning environment through activities such as her "morning circle" where children express their feelings and experiences, as well as daily meditation held every morning. The strategy employed by Elen is fully aligned with existing research findings, which prove the correlation between the positive relationship between a teacher and a student and the sense of belonging and learner resilience (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Wentzel, 2022).

Furthermore, Elen’s classroom shows how important it is to relate the learning process to students’ personal lives. For Elen’s students, there is no gap between what they learn at school and their lives. Everything taught at school has some connection to their lives. *“They bring their world into the classroom, and I see it as raw material for learning,”* Elen states. In such a learning environment, education is no longer an abstract process, but something connected to students' experiences and opportunities. For many disadvantaged children who come from poor families, schools provide the only chance for change and improvement in life. Thus, such a class structure is essential for helping them feel more comfortable.

By conducting a holistic analysis, one may notice that all three dimensions considered flexible classroom design, promotion of student autonomy and choice, and construction of an emotionally supportive community are interrelated and complement each other. In turn, they form a complex system that includes all the aspects of the learning process, such as cognitive, emotional, motivational, and social ones. Therefore, they ensure a balanced development of students within a holistic educational framework. Moreover, it allows transforming the traditional learning environment into an evolving socio-cultural entity. As a result, children become more competent and self-confident, as they gain the skills to learn independently and make informed decisions.

The findings suggest that the significance of flexible pedagogy lies not in any single practice but in the interaction among spatial flexibility, student agency and choice, and emotional safety. In Elen’s classroom, these dimensions appear to operate as mutually reinforcing components of an integrated pedagogical system. The flexible organization of the classroom creates opportunities for students to make meaningful choices regarding where, how, and with whom they learn. Such opportunities position students as active participants rather than passive recipients of instruction and may strengthen their sense of ownership and recognition within the classroom community. At the same time, the supportive relationships, emotional routines, and sense of belonging cultivated in the classroom appear to provide the psychological conditions that enable students to exercise choice, express curiosity, and participate more confidently in learning. Flexibility, therefore, extends beyond the physical arrangement of the learning environment: it becomes a relational and pedagogical process in which space, agency, and emotional safety continuously support one another. This interpretation may help explain why the practices observed in Elen’s classroom function as a coherent pedagogical approach rather than as a collection of independent teaching strategies.

As a result, the presented case study has broader implications that can be useful for teachers who seek to create new opportunities for learners within the classroom setting. The first recommendation is to introduce flexible learning strategies that encourage students to engage in learning processes. The second one concerns the necessity to include social and emotional aspects in lesson planning. In addition, it means that educators must recognize the need to promote these aspects within their classes. Finally, the third direction refers to connecting learning materials to the personal, cultural, and community context of students.

From all the above, it is clear that Elen's case study has proved that a single teacher can contribute to creating a favorable environment within the classroom through her own strategy of flexibility within the classroom environment, allowing for autonomy within the students, developing good relationships with the students, and adopting a holistic approach towards the classroom environment. This means that the children get different chances in which they can develop their own identities.

CONCLUSION

The present study contributes to the understanding of flexible pedagogy by showing how it can be enacted as an integrated pedagogical system rather than as a set of isolated classroom practices. The case of Elen suggests that spatial flexibility, student agency and choice, and emotional safety are mutually reinforcing dimensions of everyday pedagogical practice. Flexible learning environments create opportunities for participation and choice; opportunities for choice can strengthen students' ownership and involvement in classroom life; and supportive relationships and emotional safety provide conditions in which students can participate, inquire, and exercise agency with greater confidence. The contribution of the study therefore lies not in identifying flexibility, choice, or emotional support as independently important educational principles, but in illustrating how their interaction can shape the everyday organization of teaching and learning within a socially and linguistically diverse elementary-school classroom. In this sense, flexible pedagogy can be understood as an ongoing relational and adaptive process through which teachers organize space, instructional decisions, student participation, and classroom relationships in response to learners and their evolving needs.

The case study of Elen shows that purposeful pedagogical strategies help transform the perception of students' roles and their own place in the educational space from passive receivers to active participants. It means that the pedagogical change is not associated with additional financial costs or resources but rather with an approach where the student is regarded as an active agent of educational processes.

In complex social and linguistically diverse environments, such pedagogical strategies open new possibilities for engagement, inclusion, and recognition. Hence, building an inclusive and flexible classroom should be considered one of the primary prerequisites for meaningful education and personal and social growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results obtained by conducting this research imply several practical implications. Firstly, it is suggested to develop classroom settings which offer flexibility and adaptability based on learners' evolving needs. In addition, movement from one type of activity to another will be facilitated. Secondly, it is important to offer learners opportunities to participate in decision-making and have some freedom to make choices, thereby increasing their engagement and accountability. Finally, it would be advisable to foster a socially and emotionally supportive environment which will encourage a sense of connection within the classroom community**.**

In addition, teacher training programs need to give special attention to flexible approaches, learner agency and social-emotional skills as integral parts of teaching. Future research should examine whether and how the relationships identified in this case are manifested across different educational contexts, grade levels, and student populations. Comparative and longitudinal studies may be particularly useful for examining how flexible pedagogical practices develop over time and how students themselves experience the interaction between spatial flexibility, agency, and emotional safety. Future studies may therefore address the following questions: How does the interaction between spatial flexibility, student agency and choice, and emotional safety vary across different socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural contexts? How do students perceive the relationship between opportunities for choice and their sense of belonging and participation in the classroom? How do flexible pedagogical practices evolve over time within the same classroom? Which pedagogical practices are particularly significant for supporting agency and participation among multilingual learners? Addressing these questions could extend the insights generated by the present case study and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of flexible pedagogy across diverse educational settings.

LIMITATIONS

The current investigation has been carried out in just one class by one teacher; thus, the results obtained are may not be fully generalizable to other educational contexts. Moreover, the current investigation is based on a certain situation and teaching methodology.

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The interview was designed to explore the teacher's professional background, pedagogical beliefs, and everyday teaching practices, with particular attention to the creation and adaptation of learning environments, pedagogical flexibility, and instructional decision-making. As a semi-structured interview, the questions served as guiding prompts, and follow-up questions were asked when clarification or elaboration was needed.

Interview Questions

1. Could you describe your professional background and experience as a teacher?
2. What is your academic and professional training?
3. What led you to choose teaching as a profession?
4. How would you describe your pedagogical approach and the kind of educational experience you seek to create in your classroom?
5. What do pedagogical freedom and flexibility mean to you, and how is it reflected in your teaching practice?
6. How do you create and develop the learning environment in your classroom?
7. How do you decide which topics and content to incorporate into the learning environment?
8. How do you integrate students' emerging interests with curricular requirements?
9. How is choice incorporated into your teaching practices and the learning environment you create?
10. How do your teaching practices address heterogeneity and differences in learning needs within the classroom?
11. Are there recurring routines, patterns, or principles that characterize the learning environments you create? If so, could you describe them?
12. How is language teaching integrated into the learning environment and your broader pedagogical approach?
13. What challenges do you encounter in implementing these teaching practices?
14. What characteristics of the school context enable or support you in teaching in this way?
15. What recommendations would you offer to teachers or schools interested in developing flexible, supportive, and enriching learning environments?
16. Is there anything else about your pedagogical approach or teaching practices that you consider important and that we have not discussed?