

Student agency through the Lutheran lens

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What is student agency and why is it important?

While no unanimous definition for ‘student agency’ exists, and while its interpretations vary depending on culture and context, it is generally agreed that student agency as a concept in 21st-century education encompasses the notion of learners playing an active role in their education. It is a pedagogical stance that views learners as agents who are capable and willing to ‘actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning’,¹ to positively influence their own lives and sensibly affect the world around them for the better, and to become accountable for their own actions. Student agency can thus be defined as ‘the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others.’² In short, agentic learners have voice, choice and ownership for their own learning.

The growing call for student agency testifies to the continuing shift from traditional understandings of education in which learners were seen as the objects of teaching with the expectation of rote mastery and absorbing facts presented to them, to an all-encompassing and authentic learner-centred pedagogy. Based on the work of pioneers in constructivist learning theory such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, pedagogical approaches in which learners are seen as the subjects, or agents, of the teaching-learning interaction emphasise that ‘the power to learn is firmly in the hands of the learner and not the teacher.’³ This is critical, as research suggests that for something to be truly learned, passive reception and regurgitation for assessment only is ineffective. Learning happens through discovery, dialogue and self-reflection, and when individuals construct their own meaning from their experiences.⁴ Learner-centred interactions lead to an improvement of the quality of learning experiences and also academic achievement.⁵

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- 1 James P. Lantolf and Aneta Pavlenko, ‘(S)econd (L)anguage (A)ctivity theory: understanding second language learners as people,’ in *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research*, ed. Michael P. Breen (London: Longman, 2001), 145.
 - 2 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), 32, http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf.
 - 3 Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon, ‘From andragogy to heutagogy,’ in *ulti-BASE In-Site* (December 2000), 20, accessed 25 February 2021, https://epubs.scu.edu.au/gcm_pubs/99/.
 - 4 Sharan B. Merriam and Laura L. Bierema, *Adult Learning: Linking Theory and Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 36; Joel Michael, ‘Where’s the evidence that active learning works?’, *Advances in Physiology Education* 30 (Dec 2006): 160–162.
 - 5 Chin Reyes, Marc Brackett, Susan Rivers, Mark White and Peter Salovey, ‘Classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and academic achievement,’ *Journal of Educational Psychology* 104, no. 3 (August 2012): 700–712. Doi.org/10.1037/a0027268.

The willingness and capability to make responsible decisions, to engage in the world around them, to meet the challenges of tomorrow and to shape a better future, clearly depends on learners' constructing their own knowledge. However, in order to exercise one's agency, to become a life-long learner and to realise one's full potential, students need more than well-informed content knowledge and basic literacy and numeracy skills. They need core knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which are essential to them thriving in a 21st-century world, such as data and digital literacy, transformative competencies, physical and mental health, and social and emotional skills.⁶

The importance of such values, skills, and competencies, including the need to further shift our educational focus away from the teacher and the content presented towards student agency, has recently been stressed by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills:

Education is no longer about teaching students something alone; it is more important to be teaching them to develop a reliable compass and the navigation tools to find their own way in a world that is increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain. Our imagination, awareness, knowledge, skills and, most important, our common values, intellectual and moral maturity, and sense of responsibility is what will guide us for the world to become a better place.⁷

This provides the rationale for 'student agency' having been incorporated into the OECD Learning Compass 2030 as an essential concept for the future of education. Designed as an 'evolving learning framework that sets out an aspirational vision for the future of education', the OECD Learning Compass has been informed by observations from scholars and practitioners across the globe, emphasising the need to foster skills, competencies and qualities in our students which enable them to become agentic, life-long learners and to thrive personally and professionally, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, inquiring, questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions, creating and reshaping traditions, and risk-taking.

In light of this, let's turn our attention towards education in Lutheran contexts. How does student agency align with the Lutheran lens on students and learning? In what ways are we already implementing voice, choice and ownership of one's learning in our educational institutions and what can we learn from each other? These are important questions to spend some time asking.

Student agency as a 21st-century concept through the Lutheran lens

The learners and their learning

Empowering learners to become self-determined, creative, proactive, and reflective—not just reactive—depends on the underlying conviction that learning is innate to our

6 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 25.

7 Andreas Schleicher, Presentation at the Forum on Transforming Education, Global Peace Convention, Seoul, South Korea, 2019, quoted in OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 5.

humanness and that every learner is capable of growing and fulfilling their potential.

At the heart of learner-centred education is the recognition that human beings have a natural propensity to learn, and that we learn from birth by exploring, inquiring, testing hypotheses we make, trialling and failing, using reason and a variety of senses, playing or working with others.⁸ In current systems that place the learner at the centre of the learning experience, education is regarded as an ongoing, life-long process based on continuous inquiry, trial-by-error and reflection, 'with a broad acceptance of failure as a critical means for learning'.⁹ Hence, approaches that advocate for student agency view every learner, by implication, as having the critical foundations to learn and grow, to solve problems and think critically, to develop a sense of responsibility for their learning and for the effective use of their voice as they aim to influence their environments in a positive way. At the same time such approaches recognise that every learner has different needs, prior knowledge, skills and talents, as well as idiosyncratic attitudes and values, and, therefore, may learn differently.¹⁰

In our Lutheran context, these presuppositions are echoed in key documents produced by Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) such as *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools: a framework for Lutheran schools*, which clearly states our beliefs about learners:

- All learners have the ability to learn and learn best when ...[t]hey take responsibility for their own learning [and they] can work both independently and collaboratively.¹¹

And in outlining the goal of Lifelong Qualities for Learners, LEA extends a vision for learners, students and adults alike, as

- self-directed, insightful investigators and learners
- discerning, resourceful problem solvers and implementers
- adept, creative producers and contributors.¹²

These beliefs not only reflect current understandings about learning and learners but also flow from the Lutheran foundational, ingrained belief that 'each person is a unique creation of God and a person loved by God'.¹³

Current learner-centred approaches differ greatly from traditional educational paradigms of conformity, standardised progression, and compliance, especially with regard to their

8 Stewart Hase, 'An introduction to self-determined learning (heutagogy),' in *Experiences in Self-Determined Learning*, ed. Lisa Marie Blaschke, Chris Kenyon and Stewart Hase (Oldenburg: Center for Open Education Research, University of Oldenburg, 2014), 15, 18–21.

9 Lisa Marie Blaschke and Stewart Hase, 'Heutagogy and digital media networks: Setting students on the path to lifelong learning,' *Pacific Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning* 1, no. 1 (June 2019): 2.

10 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 11–12.

11 Lutheran Education Australia, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), iv, www.lutheran.edu.au/teaching-and-learning/a-vision-for-learners-and-learning.

12 *Ibid.*, 2.

13 *Ibid.*, iv.

respective underlying anthropology. Whereas traditional pedagogies saw the need for discipline and control, hesitating to allow learners to explore and inquire, systems that encourage student agency recognise the potential gifts in every learner to be recognised and developed. Learner-centred approaches view learning as a life-long process and aim at allowing space for trial and error in learning, enabling learning from mistakes and approaching challenges as learning experiences.

Student agency and Lutherans' theologically informed anthropology

This understanding of humans as continuous learners aligns well with Lutherans' theologically informed anthropology. Martin Luther's understanding of the human being as *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time justified and sinful) and his view of Image of God theology provide the underpinnings that enable the facilitation of education as a dynamic activity which empowers students to become agents of change and teachers to become the facilitators in this process:

Being made in the image of God, humans are capable of cultural innovations that are good. At the same time, as fallen people, all human actions and thoughts are corrupted by sin. Humans may be entirely in need of redemption, but they are not entirely evil. Human cultures, as products of human thought and action, are both good and evil, reflecting both God's image and also human sinfulness. As such, instead of despairing about the changes happening around us, we are called to grapple with the changes [of a world shaped by globalisation] realistically and hopefully in order to facilitate better teaching and learning.¹⁴

Another paradox that relates to Luther's understanding of the human being is the idea of Christian liberty, encapsulated in a pair of statements at the beginning of Luther's *Treatise on Christian Liberty*: 'A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all.'¹⁵ Simply put, this couplet points to a notion of liberty which emphasises that the human being has 'perfect liberty to choose and act in any way he or she believes is in keeping with God's coming kingdom' as nothing can separate us from the saving grace of God.¹⁶ At the same time, the human being 'must make choices and take actions that serve others both temporally and eternally. Christian liberty, then, is the liberty both to take action and to serve.'¹⁷ This emphasises an understanding of responsible freedom that is the opposite of our modern understanding of autonomy (i.e. the freedom to do what I want, whenever I want, to pursue whatever goal best serves my own selfish needs or self-interest without any personal accountability), but one that ends where my neighbour's freedom begins and that liberates me from concerns about my own

14 Peter Vethanayagamony and F. Volker Greifenhagen, 'Introduction,' in *Lutheran Pedagogy for a Global Context*, ed. P. Vethanayagamony and F. V. Greifenhagen (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2015), 9.

15 LW 31:343.

16 Russ Moulds, 'Key reformation themes for Lutheran teaching,' in *The Pedagogy of Faith. Essays on Lutheran Education*, ed. Bernard Bull (St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 18.

17 Moulds, 'Key reformation themes for Lutheran teaching,' 19.

salvation and preoccupation with myself so that I am free to serve others.¹⁸ It highlights an idea of the human that is seen as capable to be an agent of one's own actions and decisions without having to worry about the consequences of failing, and at the same time choosing and acting in a way that serves others and cares for God's creation. Applied to an educational context, this idea can be seen as compatible with the concept of student agency as outlined in the OECD Learning Compass, which accentuates that the term student agency should not to be understood as a synonym for 'student autonomy', 'student voice' and 'student choice' but is more than that: 'Acting autonomously does not mean functioning in social isolation, nor does it mean acting solely in self-interest. Similarly, student agency does not mean that students can voice whatever they want or can choose whatever subjects they wish to learn.'¹⁹ Rather, 'student agency implies a sense of responsibility as students participate in society and aim to influence people, events and circumstances for the better.'²⁰

When learners are seen as capable, as innate life-long learners who already are agentic in their learning and doing, and when opportunities are offered for learners to grow in their beliefs as capable, this can improve learning environments built on mutual trust that enable safe and supported, inquiry-driven deep learning that acknowledges each individual's difference in background, prior knowledge and previous experiences. When learners know that their individual backgrounds and needs are recognised, that their talents, voice and choice are valued, and when they recognise that all people, including their teachers and parents, are learners, they are more likely to exercise their agency and grow to fulfil their potential.

Such beliefs about learning are consistent with the paradigms espoused in the LEA Educational Framework,²¹ particularly within the *Beliefs about learning*, built on the Lutheran ethos including its valuing of the uniqueness and worth of each person and God's gifts of knowledge and learning, which emphasise that

- Learning occurs in a context and is driven by curiosity, need and inquiry;
- Learning builds on previous knowledge, experiences and understanding.

The aforementioned principles enabling student agency also align with LEA's *Beliefs about learning communities*, particularly in relation to the convictions that 'All people are learners' and that 'Safe and supportive learning environments facilitate active learning'.²²

LEA recognises the importance of developing an authentic identity, values and basic human capacities to empathise and care for others which are derived from Lutheran

18 Jeffrey Silcock, 'Christian freedom and responsibility,' in *Introduction to Lutheran Ethics*, ed. Michael Press (Sabah, Malaysia: Lutheran Study Centre, Sabah Theological Seminary, 2014), https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1777/1/Christian_Freedom_and_Responsibility.pdf.

19 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 34.

20 Ibid.

21 LEA, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools*, iv.

22 Ibid.

beliefs. They are clearly discernible in the *Lifelong Qualities for Learners*, where it is stated that ‘Lutheran schools seek to nurture individuals who are aware of their humanity... while [l]iving in community and reflecting characteristics of God through core values, especially love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, service, humility, courage, hope, quality and appreciation’.²³

‘Having compassion is being loving and attending to people’s innermost needs. It is exercising the ability to reach out, to walk in another’s shoes, to be open and responsive to the needs and concerns of others and being active in caring for others (Philippians 2:1, Hosea 11:4, Matthew 5:44, John 15:17, Romans 12:9-13, Colossians 3:12-15).’²⁴ The emphasis on care and compassion together with the focus on education for agentic ‘citizenship’ is consistent with Lutheran tradition and theology, specifically the Lutheran doctrine of vocation. According to Martin Luther, vocation is much more than a job; it is a calling from God to serve those around us through our God-given abilities which are developed through education and applies to the work and duties of *every* person. We are, because of our special gifts, called to care for God’s creation, to be stewards of the world around us, as we are part of a larger community of creatures. ‘Thinking, inquiry, the pursuit of truth have always been linked, for Lutherans, to service and transformation of the larger society and culture.’²⁵

What does this mean in practice?

1. In order to build a strong sense of agency, learners need to first and foremost learn how to learn and how to think. That is, not only content needs to be part of the curriculum but also methods on how to learn as a skill to be employed throughout life, including the understanding and ability to utilise meta language surrounding learning, and the interdependent aspects at play in the learning process, such as cognitions, volitions, emotions and personal character traits.
2. Students need to be aware of their leaders’ and teachers’ belief in them to be capable learners who can grow to reach their individual potential. They need to know that their agency is valued, that is their voice, choice, and input, and that those around them are willing to listen attentively. As facilitators in their learning process, we encourage self-determined learning when we provide learners with opportunities to be curious and inquisitive, devise and solve problems, give reasons for choices, argue logically, learn from evaluative assessments and provide constructive feedback to their peers and teachers. Learners also need to know that risking failure is ok, that ‘I don’t know’ is an acceptable answer, and that the use of trial and error can make for effective learning experiences. Student agency occurs when our classrooms and schools cater for opportunities that enable participation and the enactment of democratic values. Choosing individual pathways of how to learn and in what ways to demonstrate knowledge, skills and competencies, learning circles, teamwork and collaborative

23 LEA, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools*, 2.

24 Ibid., 14.

25 Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 34.

inquiry-driven projects can also communicate our beliefs in our students' capability as change agents and foster a well-developed sense of student agency.

3. As agency can be exercised in nearly every context (moral, social, economic, creative),²⁶ Lutheran education strengthens student agency when it develops learning experiences for students to think critically and to trial their decision-making skills in relevant contexts. Christian Studies in particular lend themselves to opportunities where moral agency can be tested and developed, as this learning area appears especially apt for questions such as 'What should I do? Was I right to do that?',²⁷ and for providing the space to solve ethical dilemmas to enhance personal qualities connected to moral agency, such as critical and lateral thinking, problem solving, making life choices and becoming responsible for their actions. Research also suggests that modelling moral agency is important for encouraging others to engage their own moral agency in the best interests of all.²⁸ The *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework* accommodates for the development of moral agency, for example when it stresses the importance of '[o]pportunities for reflection and refinement of personal beliefs, values and life choices, and application of knowledge and understanding to the breadth of life—intellectual, emotional, personal, relational, spiritual' which 'challenge students to consider the role and contribution they can make towards creating a more just, harmonious and compassionate world.'²⁹
4. Within all curriculum areas in general but also within Christian Studies in particular, content needs to be connected to our learners' interests, passions, and burning life-questions, as articulated within the *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, particularly in *The Pedagogy of Christian Studies* section.³⁰ Voice, choice and ownership of one's learning is promoted, for instance, when students work in small groups, possibly even across schools, to research real-life problems and propose solutions in pitches before a panel of experts. Some schools foster self-directed learning by beginning the school year with student-teacher symposia in which the students and teachers explore their learning needs, set realistic goals that can be achieved and co-create units in line with the specific curriculum framework that connect key ideas to the learner's world.
5. Martin Luther himself rejected the model of cloistered and detached learning that was common at his time. He saw the need for universal education that even extended into

26 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 36; see also Leadbeater, *The Problem Solvers*, 6–7.

27 Questions such as these have been proposed by student agency advocate and pioneer in the 'Dynamic Learning Movement' Charles Leadbeater to exercise moral agency, see Charles Leadbeater, 'Student Agency' section of *Education 2030—Conceptual learning framework: Background papers* (Paris: OECD, 2017), http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Conceptual_learning_framework_Conceptual_papers.pdf.

28 Sabre Lynn Cherkowski, Keith D Walker and Benjamin Kutsyuruba, 'Principals' moral agency and ethical decision-making: Towards transformational ethics,' *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership* 10, no. 5 (September 2015): 1–17.

29 Lutheran Education Australia, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2015), <https://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/cscf-2015/>.

30 LEA, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, esp. 7.

the households, as can be discerned from his statement above each major section of the *Small Catechism* ‘as the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household’. Martin Luther also aimed at applying theology to practice. He used the question ‘What does this mean?’ throughout his *Catechism* to explain the meaning of the fundamental teachings of the evangelical Christian faith and to connect it to the lives of his contemporaries. While the original intention of rote learning doesn’t necessarily align with our modern understanding of how to inform young people about the Lutheran faith, Christian Studies facilitates student agency when adopting the principles of relevancy to the learners’ daily lives and provision of examples, as ways to enable deep learning of relevant content.

Learning communities

We know that learning and growing doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Rather, everyone learns, develops and exercises their agency in social contexts. Peers, parents, teachers, leaders, and the school as a whole shape the individual’s learning environment, influencing a learner’s sense of agency and enabling everyone to learn how to learn and to become a responsible citizen of the world. Hence, an effective learning environment is built on ‘collaborative agency’ or ‘co-agency’, i.e. where students, teachers, parents and the community work together,³¹ pooling their knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as providing mutual support to achieve what they cannot accomplish on their own:

People’s shared beliefs in their joint capabilities to bring about desired changes in their lives are the foundation of collective agency. Perceived collective efficacy raises people’s vision of what they wish to achieve, enhances motivational commitment to their endeavors, strengthens resilience to adversity, and enhances group accomplishments.³²

When learners have agency, the teacher and the student become partners, or co-creators, in the teaching-learning interaction. This means moving away from traditional hierarchical understandings of the teacher-student relationship with its focus on instruction and one-sided control towards an educational model where learning is enabled rather than delivered. The quality of teacher-student interactions as well as the quality of learning for both parties involved improves when mutual feedback is valued and acted upon.³³ John Hattie’s research into which factors influence learning success in schools, highlights this interaction: ‘What is most important is that teaching is visible to the students, and that the learning is visible to the teacher. The more the student becomes the teacher and the more

31 Charles Leadbeater, ‘Student Agency’ section of Education 2030—Conceptual learning framework: Background papers (Paris: OECD, 2017), http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Conceptual_learning_framework_Conceptual_papers.pdf.

32 Albert Bandura, ‘Adolescent development from an agentic perspective,’ in *Self-efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents*, ed. F. Pajares and T. Urdan, vol. 5 (Greenwich, CT: IAP - Information Age Publishing, 2006), 5.

33 State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), *Amplify. Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership* (2019), 11, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Amplify.pdf>.

the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful are the outcomes.³⁴

In a system that encourages student agency, peers, parents and the wider community also play key roles as co-agents of students' learning. Especially at an age where peers increasingly become the most important influence, young people seek support and guidance from their friends and schoolmates. Hence, peers influence each other's agency. Students also learn from and with their parents. They benefit from their parents' or caregivers' active involvement in their education, not the least in relation to their academic achievement, social skills and pro-social behaviour.³⁵ As school is not the only place where learning occurs, the wider community shares in the responsibility to educate each other, and this has mutual benefits: 'When the community is also involved in children's education, children can learn about the opportunities for their future and also how to be engaged, responsible citizens, while the community can learn about the needs, concerns and views of its younger members.'³⁶

What does this mean in practice?

1. Since learning doesn't only happen in classroom settings and since one of the most powerful ways of learning is by observing others,³⁷ parents and teachers who are effective models of the behaviour they want to see in their children/students, can foster students' agency. Self-determined learning and doing is aided when we, the facilitators of learning, model agency and continuously ask ourselves:
 - Do I display self-efficacy in my own learning and purposeful implementation of my skills and talents?
 - How do I foster independent decision-making?
 - Do I model how to cope with failure and impasses, demonstrating the way to recognise errors, reflect on them and how to overcome these?
 - Do I provide a safe learning environment where there is space for attentive listening and where learners are allowed to find and express their voice?
2. Martin Luther might also serve as a model for many of the qualities and characteristics nowadays associated with student agency: He was agile and passionate, informed and visionary, critical and questioning yet firm in his beliefs and grounded in his conscience. He was set on changing the world around him for the better, rather than accepting the status quo. He actively reshaped his environment and connected theology to real life. He valued education as such and advocated for citizenship. Other Lutheran forebears

34 John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 25.

35 Pamela Davis-Keen, 'The influence of parent education and family income on child achievement: The indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment,' *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (July 2005): 294–304.

36 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 38.

37 Cf. Albert Bandura, 'The power of observational learning through social modeling,' in *Scientists Making a Difference: One Hundred Eminent Behavioral and Brain Scientists Talk about their Most Important Contributions*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg, Susan T. Fiske and Donald J. Foss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 235–239.

might equally provide for models of agency that could be explored by learners. How did Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Dorothee Soelle, for example, participate in society, commit themselves to a posture of *semper reformanda* (always reforming) and enact social transformation?³⁸

3. Student agency is promoted when teachers become facilitators in the learning process who encourage learner action and experience in a supportive environment, when they learn to 'let go' and view themselves as co-learners and co-constructors in the teaching-and-learning process. This can be achieved when meaningful support structures are established, 'including in initial teacher education and through professional development, in designing learning environments that support student agency.'³⁹ In order to gradually release responsibility, i.e. to equip learners with what they need to be engaged, self-determined and self-directed, collaborative practices such as peer support, observation, feedback and sharing with others can be beneficial.⁴⁰
4. With regard to the learning area of Christian Studies, and in light of the growing diversity of students' knowledge, faith backgrounds and worldviews within Lutheran schools, teachers empower their students when they not only respect and value this wide range of faith, life and spiritual understandings and experiences present in their classrooms, but also when they encourage learners to express their diverse views and beliefs and to inquire about Lutheran theology as well as each other's experiences and spirituality. This is facilitated in a learning environment built on mutual trust and open for reflection. These principles, consistent with theories of student agency and dynamic learning, are outlined in the *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, particularly in *The Pedagogy of Christian Studies* section,⁴¹ for example when highlighting that both teaching and learning
 - are inclusive of the diverse needs, backgrounds and worldviews of students and teachers,
 - create quality relationships between all learners—teachers and students, and
 - invite, challenge, support and empower students to construct meaning, grow in spiritual maturity and be transformed in their relationships with self, others, the environment and God.
5. As a recent Capstone Project on 'Creative agency for dynamic learning in the Christian Studies classroom in a Lutheran school' suggests, Christian Studies teachers can view student questioning and agency as a threat due to their own lack of knowledge in the curriculum area and due to fears of allowing students to be active inquirers.⁴² If

38 Cf. Jason A. Mahn, ed., *Radical Lutherans / Lutheran Radicals* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

39 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 38.

40 State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), *Amplify. Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership* (2019), 20.

41 LEA, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, 7.

42 Stephanie Falcon-Harvie, 'Creative agency for dynamic learning in the Christian Studies classroom in a Lutheran school,' Australian Lutheran College, Capstone Project student paper (2019).

present, this lack of teacher confidence can be addressed and countered by providing educators with opportunities to learn more about the Lutheran faith, the pedagogy underlying Christian Studies, and how student agency can be implemented within this learning area. Reminding educators of the changed expectations in relation to their role might also prove helpful: authentic and self-directed learning is facilitated when teachers view themselves less as top-down instructors in Lutheran faith principles and more as co-learners and co-agents in the teaching-learning process who are open to the influence of the Holy Spirit and who go on a journey of discovery together with their students, exploring 'a range of religious and non-religious perspectives they encounter in an increasingly pluralistic...society, determin[ing] the source of their own beliefs and values and understand the role religion plays in society.'⁴³

6. Schools support agency and foster self-efficacy when they include the whole learning community in their endeavour. As student agency theories suggest, co-agency can be enacted when the goals of education are broadened to include education for citizenship, that is, to foster learning to care for the well-being of the learning communities and the planet itself.⁴⁴ By embedding values like service, love and compassion that underpin such an education within the vision and mission of Lutheran schools, and by actively communicating and realising these inside as well as beyond the classroom, school communities are enacting the purposes of LEA's *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* which views everyone as a leader empowered to lead in their sphere of influence.⁴⁵ Consequently, everyone is given a voice: students, principals, educators and parents alike. This is facilitated when principals, leaders and teachers model such values. Some schools create co-administrative bodies that actively encourage input and agency from students and parents, such as committees formed by those in care of the well-being of students that are given a voice in decisions surrounding relevant teaching-learning interactions. Other examples include bodies of student representatives at a year or school level that enact democratic values. Such members of student councils act as spokespeople for their peers, having a say in how the school as a whole could work together in creating opportunities to choose pathways towards learning for citizenship, and to form initiatives to foster co-agency. Opportunities for increased participation by all members of a school community also include strategic planning based on mutual feedback at the beginning of the school year, or cooperative involvement in the process of teacher employment, in budget spending, or in planning school functions—measures many schools are already

43 LEA, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, 6. For the connection between student agency, inquiry and authenticity see Kath Murdoch, 'Keeping it real: inquiry and authenticity,' (blog June 2, 2019), accessed 1 March 2021, <https://www.kathmurdoch.com.au/blog/2019/6/2/keeping-it-real-inquiry-and-authenticity>.

44 Cf. Ingrid Schoon, 'Section 1: Conceptualising student agency: a socio-ecological developmental approach,' in *Education and Skills 2030: Conceptual learning framework. Draft Papers supporting the OECD Learning Framework 2030*, 7th Informal Working Group (IWG) Meeting 14–16 May 2018, Paris, France, esp. 13, https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Draft_Papers_supporting_the_OECD_Learning_Framework_2030.pdf.

45 Lutheran Education Australia, *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), <http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/>.

successfully implementing.

7. In order to foster passion-led, deep learning and a sense of efficacy to change their environments for the better, schools, including Lutheran educational institutions, enact co-agency when they enable learning about serving and learning through serving. LEA emphasises the rationale behind this concept, known as service learning, as such:

Service is faith active in love. Service involves the selfless giving and loving of others, making a difference in their lives by responding to their needs, and acting without expecting recognition or reward. A Lutheran school challenges students to grow in their understanding that service is not only a personal response to God's love but a broader response as part of one's humanity for the sake of justice for all.⁴⁶

Many Lutheran schools already implement 'first-hand' service learning experiences⁴⁷ and understand that service is a way of living and learning rather than an activity that is in isolation from the rest of their lives.

Conclusion

While student agency has many more aspects that could be analysed in relation to their alignment with the Lutheran lens on learners and learning, the focal points together with their practical implications chosen for this article might be sufficient to demonstrate that Lutheran education and theology support the notion of student agency. Informed by the Lutheran faith, educators at Lutheran schools continue to aim at empowering students to use their voice and enact their freedom to choose whenever possible, to educate for wholeness, humanness and citizenship, to facilitate deep learning that links in with our students' world and to co-create learning experiences that enable students to find their vocation and to fulfil their potential. In addition, facilitators of life-long and self-determined learning in Lutheran educational contexts persist in asking what education should be like to ensure that learners emerge from schooling as confident, able, responsible agents of change. Authentic Lutheran education remains a 'gift' and a 'task'⁴⁸ that can only benefit from further exploration into the concept of student agency for a successful and holistic education now and in the future.

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46 LEA, 'Service learning in Lutheran schools. Rationale, vision and guiding principles,' retrieved from <http://www.lutheran.edu.au/service-learning-introduction/>, accessed 28 April 2021.

47 Cf. example stories of service learning at <http://www.lutheran.edu.au/some-stories-of-service-learning/>, accessed 28 April 2021.

48 Cf. Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*.