



# SUPPORTING LEARNER AUTONOMY FOR WORK READINESS

## Research group

Timo Halttunen, University of Turku (UTU), Finland  
Anders Karkov, Erhvervs Akademi Sydvest (EASV), Denmark  
Christian Ribeiro Maagard Dragin-Jensen, Erhvervs Akademi Sydvest (EASV), Denmark

Leena Erälinna, University of Turku (UTU), Finland  
Céline Kylänpää, University of Turku (UTU), Finland  
Ellinoora Havaste, University of Turku (UTU), Finland  
Tiina Anttila, University of Turku (UTU), Finland

## Framing

Meaningful learning is often viewed as working-life oriented or industry-relevant learning. Based on a concern of graduate employability, teachers, educational institutions and students alike are called for work-life ready, autonomous and self-directed learning. But how do teachers script engaging learning processes that support development of agency? What constitutes an industry-relevant learning process?

By learner agency it is usually understood how learners are able to shape and manage their learning without over-reliance on the direction and control of other learners or teachers. In short, learner agency can be described as individual's capacity to act.

## Research questions

Based on cases from Finland and Denmark, researchers study teacher and learner strategies in creative problem solving. In specific, the study aims at exploring:

- how teachers, professionals and learners determine the right problem to solve, and
- how they attempt to solve it.

Inspired by a design thinking process, the focus is on learner autonomy in collaborative problem solving: what is learned and how it is learned when solving authentic real-world problems. Teacher and student interaction is studied when they explore how to reduce food waste in a hotel working environment.

Research questions are the following:

- What conceptions teachers have when designing project-based learning?
- What contextual factors and personal characteristics can be identified between teachers?
- What strategies teachers identify and use in teaching project-based learning?

## Hypothesis

- Learners who experience co-creation and involvement in planning a learning process are likely to reach deep learning and to be motivated in their learning.
- Teachers who engage in solving working-life oriented problems with their students are likely to develop better understanding of expectations of the labour market and to develop collaboration between stakeholders outside the educational institution.

## Methods

By an action research approach, we observe and interview teachers and learners on their process of meaning making in finding their strategies. The study comprises of data collected with mixed methods, such as questionnaires and interviews addressed to teachers and students. We also seek to identify contextual factors and personal characteristics associated with teachers' conceptions on soft skills development via project-based learning approach.

## Expected Outcomes

It is suggested that in order to gain cultural and social capital to enter the labour market after graduation, students need to engage in learning in professional contexts.

## Keywords

Beliefs and conceptions of learning  
Collaborative learning  
Innovations in education  
Problem-based learning