

The purpose of this project is to seek to understand what pre-service k-12 teachers believe or know about achieving youth agency in the classroom setting. Youth agency can be defined as “the desire and ability of young people to make decisions and drive change—in their own lives, in their communities, and in their larger spheres of influence. Agency is a right that allows young people to become the architects of their own future” (Youth Agency). Within education programs, youth agency in the way it is defined above is not often a prominent discussion topic or idea commonly engaged with. That does not mean it does not have a role in child development or education. There are different forms of agency across different teachers, but it may not be something educators are consciously acknowledging or thinking about. This project works to challenge that narrative. Additionally, the degree to which teachers view fostering youth agency in their classrooms as a goal would likely shape their choices around teaching and how they interact with students. These beliefs about youth agency may inform their teaching practices and be shaped by perceived barriers to fostering agency in the classroom—each of which will be asked about through interview processes with pre-service teachers in this project. .

This project was inspired by the student researcher’s (Elaina Gross) passion for both education and sociology which combined, ask her to explore how the education system impacts those within it (both teachers and students). The student researcher has a passion for understanding structures that impact the role of education in society and the disparate outcomes and experiences youth have within the structure due to variation in school systems, teaching styles, and school resources. Combining education and sociology led the student research to consider the extent to which pre-service teachers have thought about student agency in the classroom and if it is something they consider important in their teaching identity and practices.. Thus, understanding pre-service teachers’ beliefs about youth agency allows for clearer knowledge of how theoretical ideologies shape practical applications in the classroom.