

## **How can academic writing training facilitate students' sovereignty?**

Tentative findings on the three basic psychological needs and emotional literacy (using focused freewriting and BPNSFS)

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I am researching the relationship of academic writing training and students' sovereignty in higher education to find out how academic writing training can facilitate students' sovereignty because I want to improve learning processes and outcomes: students' sovereignty as higher goal of higher education.

The worst-case scenario of undergraduate writing: Academic writing can be a manageable challenge and process of personal development. Or too much of a crisis: Unsatisfactory training and frustrating experiences; Then motivation plummets... In the worst-case students' drop out (unrealistically) believing they are incompetent.

Self-determination theory in education points out that the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs is fundamental for every learner: students want to be initiator of their actions, feel their effectiveness and have sense of closeness and trust.

The emotional dimension of academic writing has to be considered: there are high levels of perceived distress (Larcombe, Finch, & Sore, 2015) in higher education. Emotional strain often coincides with academic writing tasks. Yet, the writers' bloc is more than a solely cognitive problem. The research project investigates 'emotional literacy' as a required skill: The ability to "read" and "write" one's own emotions and to coordinate emotions, thoughts and actions. The potential of emotional literacy will be considered to: 1) alleviate students' distress, 2) strengthen individual resources, 3) enhance depth, motivation and creativity of learning and ultimately 4) to facilitate individuals' sovereignty

Data is collected from a four-day online-only course "Strengthening Academic Writing Skills" Participants are 14 students (out of 22) preparing for their bachelor's degree who completed all of the four of the relevant activities. ID numbers generated by participants are completely anonymous while allowing for cross-referencing of the data. The four researched interventions are integral part of the course program: the 'Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale' and three focused freewriting activities reflecting students' experiences with academic writing (and academic life). Focused freewriting is considered as "an empowering learning tool beyond the writing class to enhance student learning in the disciplines" (Li: 2007, 41) that may also facilitate sovereignty. 42 pieces of focused freewriting samples were gathered. Length ranged between 42 and 478 words. Data analysis is in process. There is an overall impression that most students expressed a (unrealistically) low level of expertise in academic writing when starting off. In the final focused freewriting self-awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in writing was increased. All were able to name at least one competence.

First results tend towards the ability of academic writing training to facilitate students' sovereignty through focused freewriting, personal reflexion and contemplation and generally taking care of basic psychological need satisfaction. There seems to be an increase in self-awareness, self-confidence, feeling competent, motivation and basic need satisfaction. Anxiety, insecurity and frustration appear decreased. Access to coping resources seemed enhanced and involvement in learning more active and positive.