

# 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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# Unexpected turns

teaching academic writing online  
works  
quite well  
for student's sovereignty  
???



# Thank you to the reviewers!

Note on language:

- German-English mindset
- Not only here, not really there
- Translation in application
- Translation for deeper of understanding of content
- For engaged style of research: reflective distance to contexts

➤ “Third space”? “Germlish”?!

# Overview

## 1. Introduction

- Aim and research question

- On sovereignty: basic needs, authorial identity, emotional literacy

## 2. Methods

- Description of participants

- Data collection and data analysis

## 3. Preliminary Results

- Overall impression

- BPNSFS: Reflexions

- Focused freewriting samples in dialog and Emotional literacy: approximation

## 4. Discussion

# 1.1 Aim and research question

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.

# 1.2 Worst-case scenario of undergraduate writing

Academic writing can be a manageable challenge and a significant process of personal development for most students. Though for many it is too much of a crisis:

- Training on academic writing is unsatisfactory
- Students have frustrating experiences with academic writing
  - They interpret mediocre grades for their attempts on academic writing as a personal deficit
  - They perceive academic writing as a futile 'necessary evil' to get their degree
- Motivation plummets where it could actually spark through developing authorship, autonomy and competence
  - Students' text are neither fun to write nor to read
  - Potential of academic learning and personal growth is underachieved
  - Participation in the academic community is not realized
- Worst case: students' drop out of the study program believing they are incompetent

## 1.3 What is sovereignty?

- Acting on one's own authority
- Self-determination: the ability or power to make decisions for yourself
- Self-confidence: feeling secure in oneself and one's abilities
- Perceived self-efficacy: beliefs about one's capabilities to exercise control over one's own actions
- Authorship: “how much one views oneself as the author of behavior and experiences high consistency among behaviors, attitudes, and traits.” (Self-Determination Theory: 2020)

➤ How do students describe the phenomenon?

## 1.4 Self-determination theory in education

The satisfaction of three basic psychological needs - autonomy, competence and relatedness - is fundamental for every learner to actively and positively be involved in learning

- need for autonomy: learners need to be the **initiator of their actions** and feel sense of psychological freedom when engaging in a learning activity
- need for competence: learners' **feelings of effectiveness** and the need to experience confidence in achieving desired outcomes
- need for relatedness: learners' experiences of positive and mutually satisfying relationships, characterized by a **sense of closeness and trust**.

The teachers' style of engaging with the students is among the most important factors to contribute to the satisfaction of these needs. (Self-Determination Theory: 2020)



## 1.5 Authorial identity: written sovereignty?

“Authorial identity is the sense a writer has of themselves as **an author** and the textual identity they construct in their writing” (Pittam et al.: 2009, 2)

- (unintended) textual plagiarism as “students’ failure to represent themselves as writers” (Abasi et al.:2006, 114)
- “plagiarism as an issue for learning” (Pittam et al.: 2009, 2)

➤ Comparing passive voice vs. first person active voice use?

“there is a considerable scope for increasing students’ authorial identity [...; it] is a **potentially powerful focus for interventions to improve** academic writing and reduce plagiarism” (Pittam et al.: 2009, 13)

➤ ...student’s sovereignty?

## 1.6 The emotional dimension of academic writing

- **High levels of perceived distress** are a major problem in higher education (Larcombe, Finch, & Sore, 2015) that undermines learning processes
  - Emotional strain and pressure are prone to coincide with the production of academic texts
  - Students' writers' bloc is more than a cognitive problem
- 'Emotional literacy' as a required skill to address in higher education

## 1.7 A draft of emotional literacy

- The ability to “read” and “write” one’s own emotions
- To perceive, discern, “spell out” emotions vs. thoughts
- Teamwork of limbic system and neocortex
- Coordinating emotions, thoughts and actions
- Facilitate adequate individual coping with challenges
- Potential to
  - 1) alleviate students’ distress
  - 2) strengthen individual resources
  - 3) enhance the depth, motivation and creativity of learning
  - 4) facilitate individuals sovereignty

## 2. Methods

- Description of participants
- Data collection
- Data analysis

## 2.1 Description of participants

14 students preparing for their bachelor's degree

- Enrolled in the same course “Strengthening Academic Writing Skills” (Moodle)
- Selection criteria: completed all of the four exercises relevant to the data collection (8 others missed one or more)
- Presumably all female (based on first names)

## 2.2 Academic discipline and semester

- 11 Public Administration
  - 8 in 6<sup>th</sup> semester
  - 2 in 7<sup>th</sup> semester
  - 1 in 9<sup>th</sup> semester
- 3 Business Administration
  - All 8<sup>th</sup> semester

Protection of data privacy:  
ID number generated by  
participants that is completely  
anonymous while it allows  
cross-referencing of the data.  
Informed consent.


ID	Academic discipline	Semester
208	Public Administration	6.
213	Public Administration	6.
215	Public Administration	6.
217	Public Administration	6.
228	Public Administration	6.
229	Public Administration	6.
233	Public Administration	6.
237	Public Administration	6.
201	Public Administration	7.
191	Public Administration	7.
192	Public Administration	9.
240	Business Administration	8.
210	Business Administration	8.
220	Business Administration	8

 Teilnehmer/Innen


 Badges


 Bewertungen


 Allgemeines

 1. Überblick


 2. Grundlagen

 3.  
Wissensmanagement

 4. Idee ->  
Fragestellung ->  
Gliederung

 5. Von der Quelle  
zum eigenen Text

 6. Zeit- und  
Arbeitsplanung

 7. Abschluss

 8. Schreibstrategien

 Warm Up 1

 Warm up 2


 Warm up 3

## 2.3 Data collection in Moodle

**Activities were an integral part of the course program as a whole and intended to strengthen student's sovereignty**

### 1. Überblick

  LIVE

 1.1 Ankündigungen Do 19.3.; ab 12 Uhr; UNBEDINGT LESEN!!!

 1.2 FRAGEN UND ANTWORTEN


 1.3 Ihre Hintergründe und Anliegen

 1.4 Freewriting mit Fokus: Reflexion bisheriger Erfahrungen

 1.5 Fragebogen und Reflexion

 1.6 Planung

 1.7 STANDPUNKTE Mittwoch 18.3.2020 bis 14 Uhr

 1.8 CHAT: Fragen zur Aufgabenstellungen

## 2.4 Design of interventions

### 1. Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale

Three focused freewriting activities:

2. Starting off: experiences with academic writing in retrospect

3. Emotional literacy: reflecting on a challenging situation

4. Closure: self-assessment looking ahead

(Additionally: 'information sheet' from the beginning of the course and students' written evaluation of the course on the last day in multiple choice and open-ended questions)



## 2.4.1 Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS)

	Need satisfaction (12 items)	Need frustration (12 items)
<b>Autonomy (4 items)</b>	"I feel that my decisions reflect what I really want"	"I feel forced to do many things I wouldn't choose to do"
<b>Relatedness (4 items)</b>	"I feel close and connected with other people who are important to me"	"I feel excluded from the group I want to belong to"
<b>Competence (4 items)</b>	"I feel confident that I can do things well"	"I feel like a failure because of the mistakes I make"

Participants answered to 24 items by rating on a 5-point scale: "1= not true at all" to "5 = completely true"  
"self-report instrument assessing the satisfaction and frustration of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness defined by self-determination theory." (Liga et al.: 2020)  
"These scales are important because *need satisfaction* is associated with well-being whereas *need frustration* is associated with ill-being. Often being able to predict both is useful." (Self-Determination Theory: 2020)

## 2.4.2 What is focused freewriting?

An adaptation of non-stop, non-editing freewriting (Elbow 1973) with a specific focus (Somerville & Crème, 2005)

“an empowering learning tool beyond the writing class to enhance student learning in the disciplines” (Li: 2007, 41)

➤ ...and to facilitate sovereignty

Instruction: For the following 5-10 minutes write without censorship, without editing and without pausing what comes to mind regarding the question:

- How did you experience your encounters with academic writing so far?
- How do you feel about your academic writing skill regarding future writing projects?

## 2.5 Data analysis considerations

### BPNSFS:

- comparing means with: other studies, previous similar courses...
- referencing with individuals
- adds explanatory power to focused freewriting?
- evaluate student's written reflexion on the scale

### Focused freewriting

- 42 pieces of focused freewriting samples (3 activities x 14 participants)
- Length ranged between 42 and 478 words; total: about 10.000 word
- Qualitative data coding: codes, categories, themes
- Noticeable, recurrent mentions of significant words

### 3. Preliminary results

- Overall impression
- BPNSFS: Reflexions
- Focused freewriting samples in dialog
- Emotional literacy: approximation

## 3.1 Overall impression

Starting off most students expressed a of low level of expertise in academic writing.

In the final focused freewriting self-awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses in writing was increased. All were able to name at least one competence.

Comparing the first day to the last students became less anxious and more self-confident.

This impression matches the results of Linda Li (2007): “Exploring the Use of Focused Freewriting in Developing Academic Writing”

## 3.2 BPNSFS: Reflexions

„What did answering to the items do to you? What do you notice? What was pleasant? What was uncomfortable?“

Noticeable mentions:

contemplation (11): nachdenken (6); denken (2); angeregt (3)

uncomfortable (4): unangenehm (4)

- Tendency: The scale prompts contemplation about oneself. The items make one think about one's traits.

### 3.3 Focused freewriting samples in dialog

<b>Noticeable mentions</b>	<b>Starting off: retrospect on experiences 2925 words</b>	<b>Closure: self-assessment of skills 1508 words</b>
Difficult (schwer)	20x difficult	1x difficult, 1x not so difficult
In/Security (Un/Sicherheit)	10x insecure	12x security, 2x insecurity decreased, 1x confident
Fear	9x fear	3x decreased fear
Authorial identity? (man)	41x	10x

## 3.4 Attempt at emotional literacy

Focused freewriting task:

1. Which CHALLENGING SITUATION related to your studies do you remember?
2. What were your FEELINGS?
3. What were your THOUGHTS?
4. What would you DO if you were in a similar situation again?



## 3.5 Preliminary codes

Challenging situation	Feeling	Thinking	Acting
exam (4) term paper (3) presentations (3) Diverse [4]	Schlecht [total: 38] (10) Zweifel (4); Druck (4) Verunsichert (4) Angst (4); Traurigkeit (3) Ärger (2); Wut (2) aufgeregt (3) Orientierungslos (2) Mischung (4) Spaß (3) Schauspielern (2) Diverse (4)	Zweifeln (10) Druck (7) Ermutigen (5) Flucht (3) Aufgeben (2) Diverse [8]	Ruhe bewahren [total: 16] (5) wiederholen ist ok (5) Weniger Druck machen (3) Das Beste draus machen (3) an mich selbst glauben [total: 12] (8) Mut machen (3); nicht aufgeben (1) Früher anfangen (4) den Mund aufmachen (3) negativen Gedanken stoppen (2) Unterstützung suchen (1)

Total: about 4000 words. Half of them used ,man' 1 to 3 times. Diverse = only once.

## 4. Discussion: How can academic writing training facilitate students' sovereignty?

Yes, it can. For example through:

- Focused freewriting, personal reflexion and contemplation
- Taking care of basic psychological need satisfaction

Preliminary results:

- Increase in self-awareness, self-confidence, feeling competent, motivation, basic need satisfaction
- Anxiety, insecurity and frustration decreased
- access to coping resources enhanced
- involvement in learning more active and positive

➤ students' sovereignty facilitated

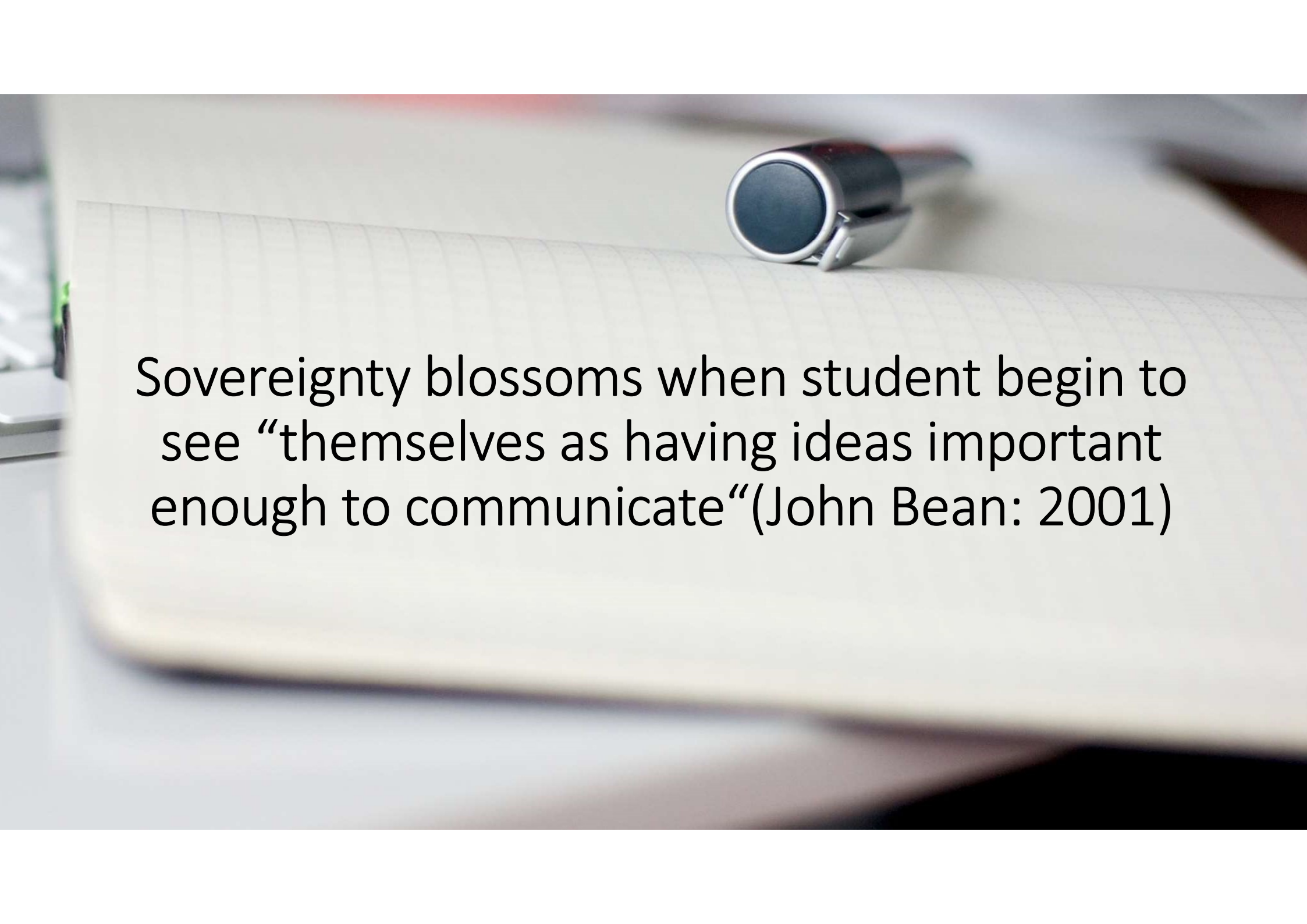
# Questions for discussion

- Influence of the online learning platform?
- Suggestions for data analysis?
- Comments on preliminary results?
- Recommendations of literature, studies, methods...

.....

# Literature

- Li, L. Y. (2007): Exploring the Use of Focused Freewriting in Developing Academic Writing, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 4(1).
- Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Self-Determination Theory (2020): <https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/>
- Somerville, E. M and Creme, P. (2005): '*Asking Pompeii questions': a co-operative approach to Writing in the Disciplines*. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10 (1). pp. 17-28. ISSN 1356-2517.
- ...



Sovereignty blossoms when student begin to see “themselves as having ideas important enough to communicate”(John Bean: 2001)