



POWER IMBALANCE

Supervisors have more power than students in the supervisory relationship, with differing types of power evident at different stages in the dissertation process (Armitage, 2007). *Legitimate* power and *expert* power are exercised at early stages in the dissertation process with supervisors drawing on their subject and methodological expertise to guide the development of the research proposal. *Position* power is exerted when supervisors provide feedback to students. *Referent* and *position* power is present where supervisors also mark the work of the students (Armitage, 2007).

The power imbalance inherent within the supervisory relationship can vary in strength according to the supervisory style adopted. Power centred supervision focuses on task, rather than process, with the supervisor adopting a directive supervisory style. Adopting a non-directive facilitative supervisory role reduces the information power of the supervisor within the relationship (Armitage, 2007). However, whilst a mentoring approach to supervision has been posited to reduce power imbalances through removing the hierarchical structure of directive supervision, Manathunga (2007) argues that power relationships remain. Based on interviews with experienced supervisors, Manathunga identified elements of paternalism in 'moulding' students to the disciplinary research culture, particularly in the supervision of international students.

Spooner-Lane, Henderson, Price, and Hill (2007) note that there can also be power imbalances between co-supervisors. Where roles and responsibilities are not negotiated between co-supervisors, the 'junior' supervisor may find they carry the brunt of supervision and feel exploited.

References

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