How to balance guidance and independence in supervision

Opening keynote, TAL conference 7 November 2024, SDU

Gitte Wichmann-Hansen · Professor, UiA · Senior Researcher, AU · Owner of Academic Supervision

Gitte Wichmann-Hansen

gwh@edu.au.dk

- **Researcher**
- Senior Researcher at Aarhus University, webpage
- Professor II at University of Agder, webpage
- Research expertise in doctoral supervision
- Supervisor of seven PhD students

- **Consultant**
- Owner of the consultancy Academic Supervision
- 15+ years of facilitating supervisor workshops
- LinkedIn profile

Outline

1. **Why** focus on this balance?
2. **How** to strike a balance?
3. **What** might displace balance?

Why

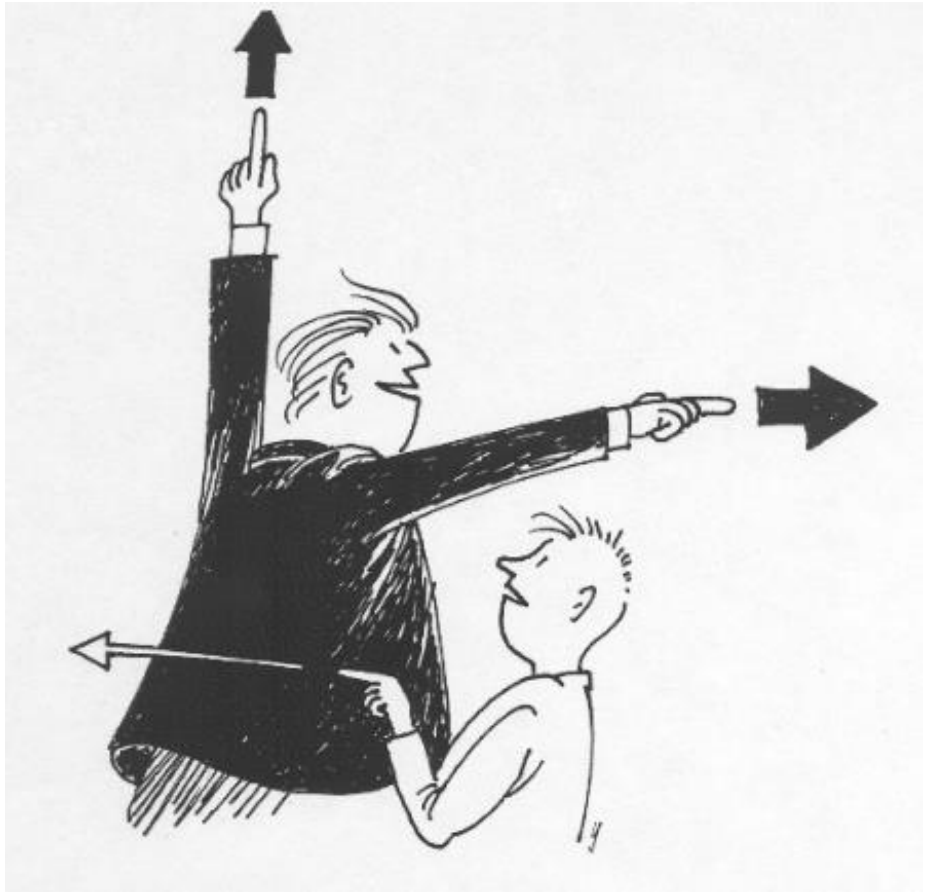
focus on this balance?

The most fundamental pedagogical paradox

Autonomy vs. Authority

The paradox is that we influence other persons when trying to educate them not to be influenced by others.

(von Oettingen, 2024)



Research shows

To balance **student independence** with **product quality and progress** is the most commonly reported challenge in supervision.

(Bastalich, 2017; Brownlow et al., 2023)

Independence is a key assessment criteria in BA & MA thesis curricula and PhD ministerial orders!

What is the purpose of the PhD?

To produce good research?

To produce a good researcher?

How

to strike a balance between independence and guidance?

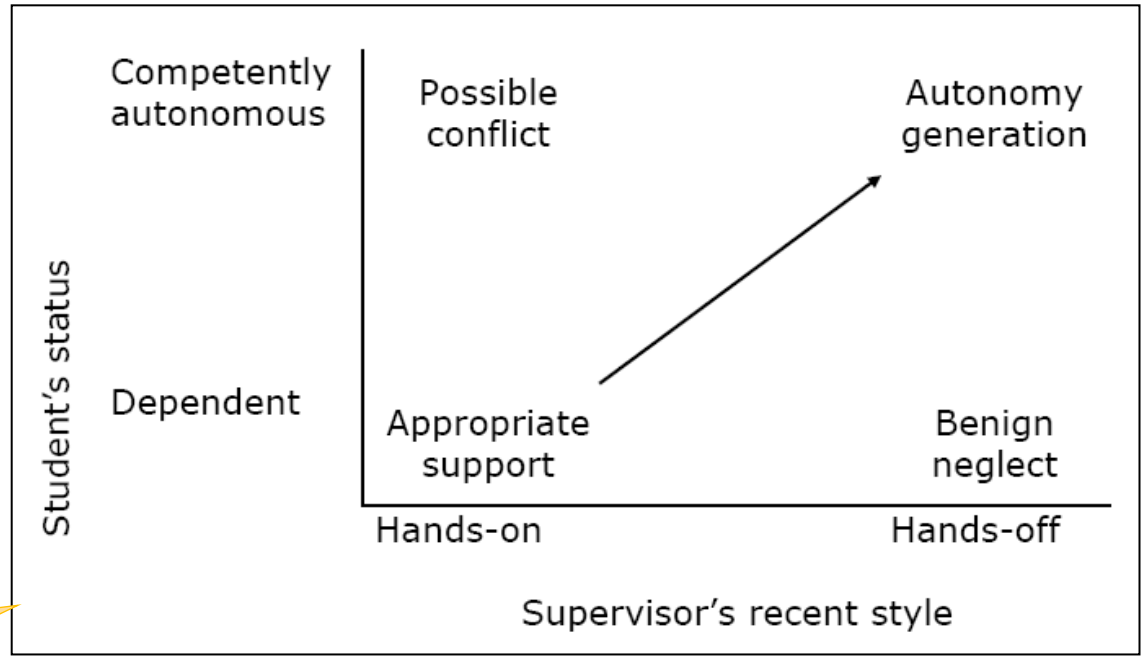
Theoretical models

The literature is rich in theoretical models designed to help supervisors reflect on the risk of over-directing students at the cost of developing independence.

(E.g., see Gatfield, 2005; Mainhard, 2009; Deuchar, 2008; Holligan, 2005; Benmore, 2016)

An assumed relation between hands-on supervision and dependence! Lacks empirical support (Bastalich, 2017)

For example, Gurr's (2001) classical model:



What is the correlation between hands-on supervision and (in)dependence?

Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csje20

Can hands-on supervision get out of hand? The correlation between directive supervision and doctoral student independence in a Danish study context.

Gitte Wichmann-Hansen & Karl-Johan Schmidt Nielsen

To cite this article: Gitte Wichmann-Hansen & Karl-Johan Schmidt Nielsen (2023): Can hands-on supervision get out of hand? The correlation between directive supervision and doctoral student independence in a Danish study context., Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2023.2204113

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2023.2204113

Published online: 25 Apr 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 222

View related articles

View Crossmark data

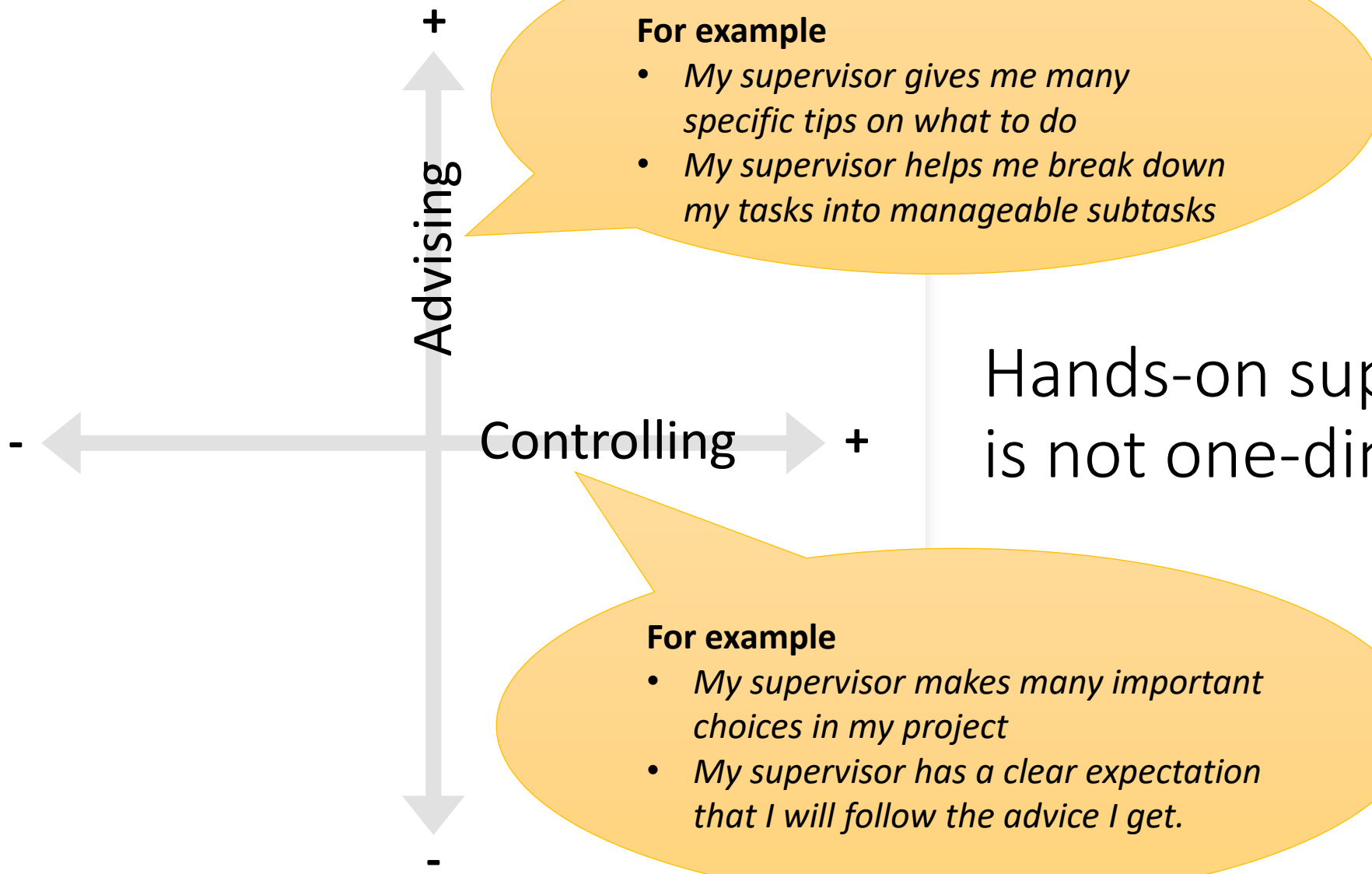
(Wichmann-Hansen & Schmidt Nielsen, 2023)

Aim

To operationalize hands-on supervision and to empirically test the assumed relation between hands-on supervision and student dependence.

Method

- Survey data, 1,498 PhD students at AU, Response rate 70 %
- Developed scales for hands-on supervision and independence (freedom + competence)
- Exploratory factor analysis and regression analysis



For example

- *My supervisor gives me many specific tips on what to do*
- *My supervisor helps me break down my tasks into manageable subtasks*

For example

- *My supervisor makes many important choices in my project*
- *My supervisor has a clear expectation that I will follow the advice I get.*

Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research

Can hands-on supervision get out of hand? The correlation between directive supervision and doctoral student independence in a Danish study context.

Hands-on supervision is not one-dimensional!

I suggest that we talk about planning the coming month. What are your planned steps next week?

You need to work more structured and make weekly plans to ensure that you prioritise and don't engage in too many tasks outside the project.

Scaffolding

Authoritative

Advising

\-

Controlling

\+

Hands-off

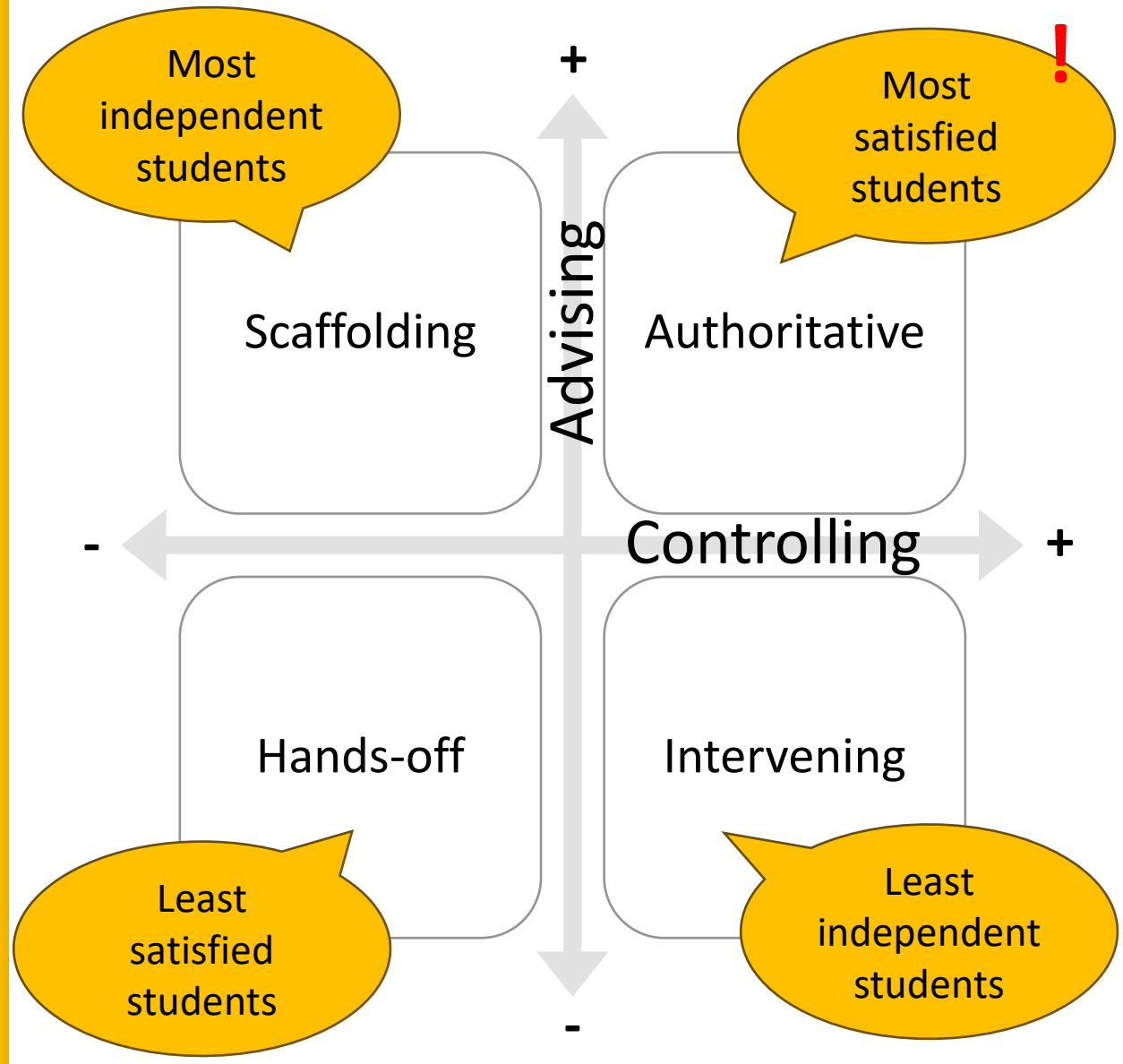
Intervening

\-

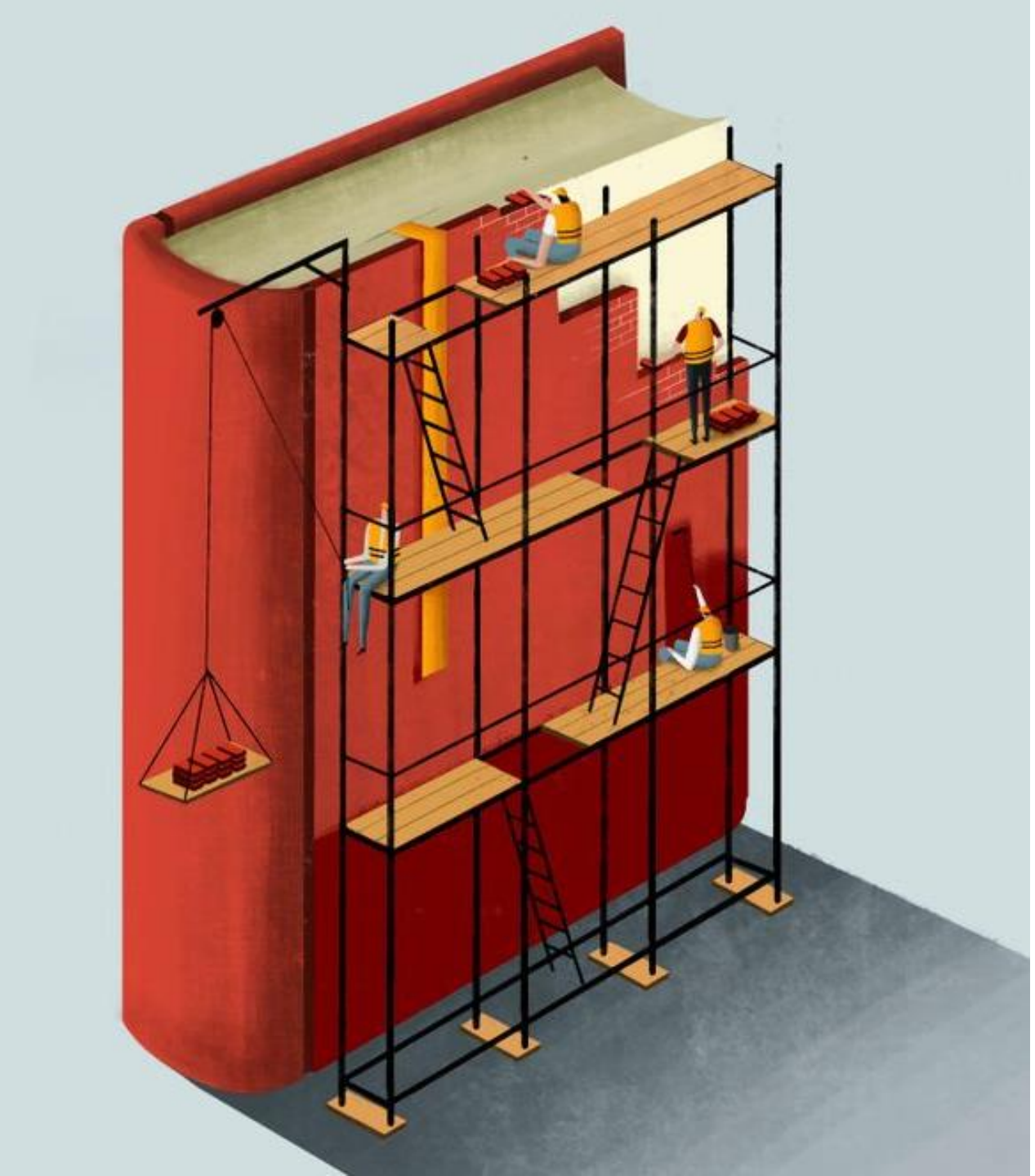
?

Next week I will need to see your first draft for the methodology section.

Directive supervision is not one-dimensional!



Scaffolding strategies correlate with student independence



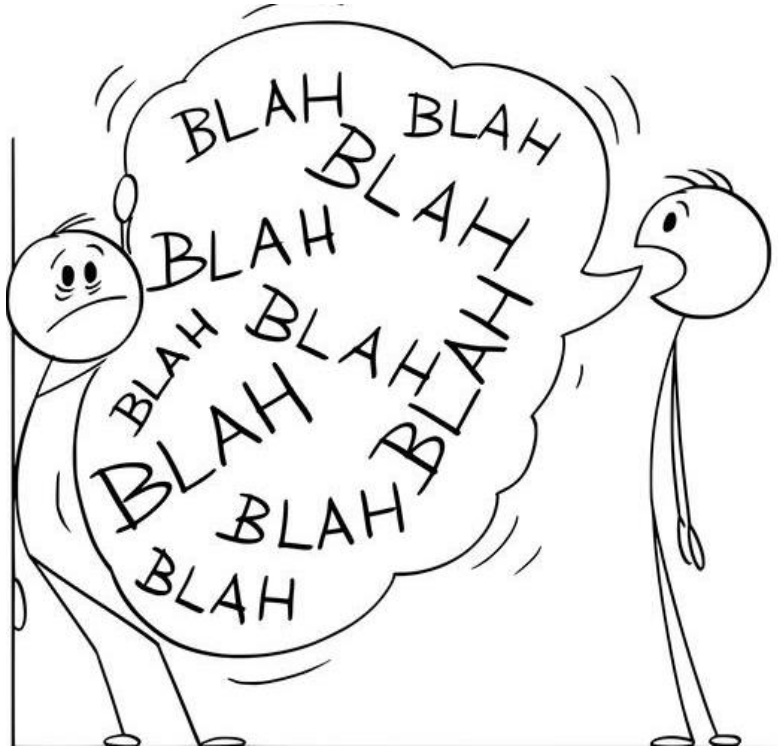
What are good scaffolding strategies to support student independence?

Use dialogues

Socratic questioning

(Zackariasson, 2020; Wichmann-Hansen, 2021)

Supervisors tend to dominate dialogues



PhD + MA Supervisors talk on average **78%** of the time

- 81 videos of individual supervision, simple time count; 68 PhD, 13 MA

Research in progress: Wichmann-Hansen, et al.

MA supervisors talk on average **71%** of the time (Jensen, 2010)

- Based on 10 videos of individual supervision, simple time count

The Dialogue Wheel

(Wichmann-Hansen & Jensen, 2015)

Ask for reasons and assumptions

Open questions

Exploring questions

Challenging questions

2 3

Past

Future

1 4

Clarifying questions

Concluding questions

Closed questions

Ask for new perspectives and opportunities

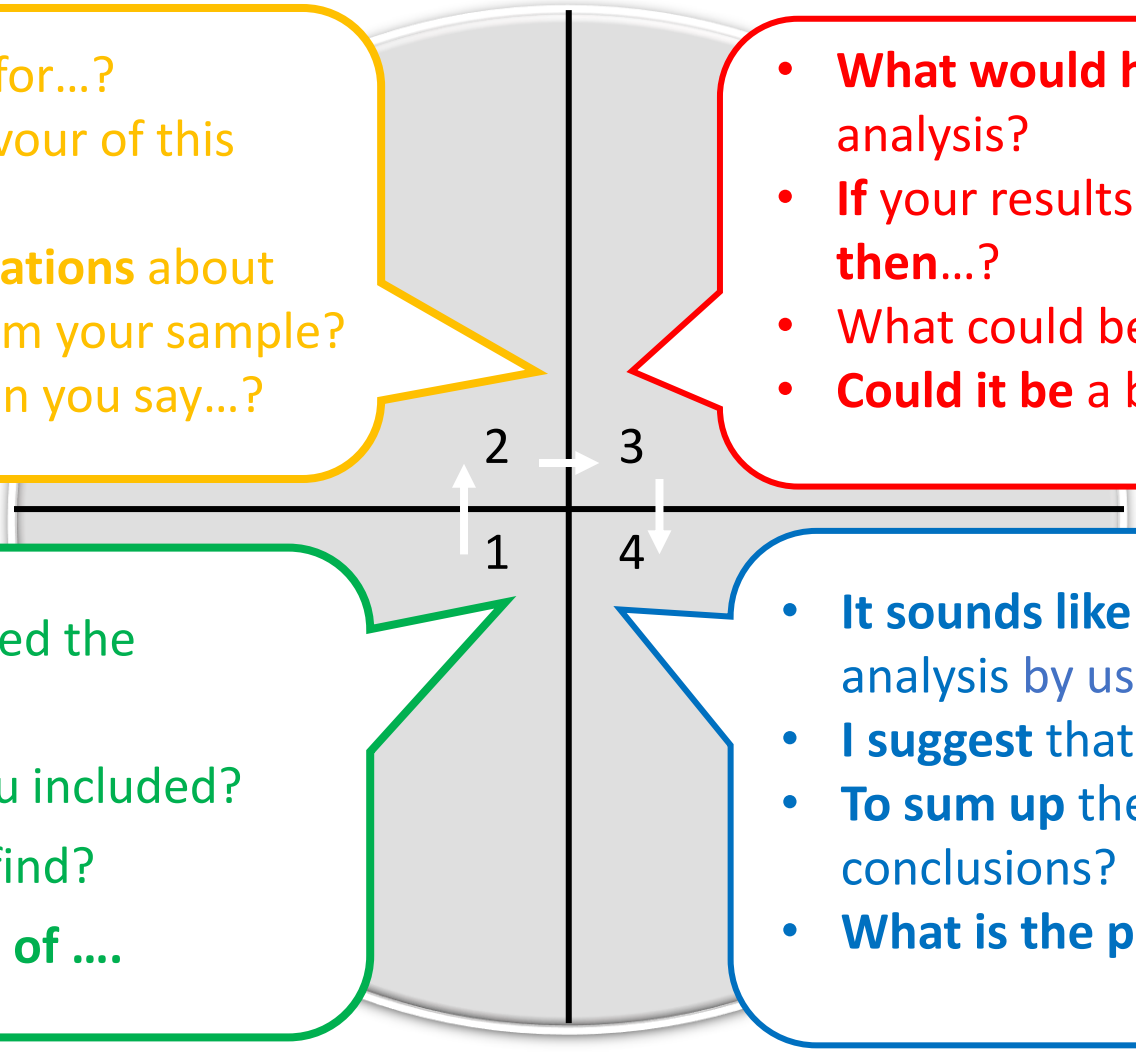
Ask for facts

Ask for choices and conclusions

Illustration

- What are **your reasons** for…?
- **How do you argue** in favour of this strategy of analysis?
- **What are your considerations** about excluding these data from your sample?
- What do you **mean** when you say…?

- **What would happen** if you change […] in the analysis?
- **If** your results show that […], **how** would you **then**…?
- What could be a **counterargument** for…?
- **Could it be** a better idea to […] instead?



- **How have you** approached the problem so far?
- **Which** variables have you included?
- **What** literature did you find?
- Do you have **an example of ….**

- **It sounds like** you could strengthen your analysis by using […]. **Is this correct?**
- **I suggest** that you …
- **To sum up** the meeting, what are the main conclusions?
- **What is the plan** until we meet next week?

Pixi

Why do you hypothesize that?

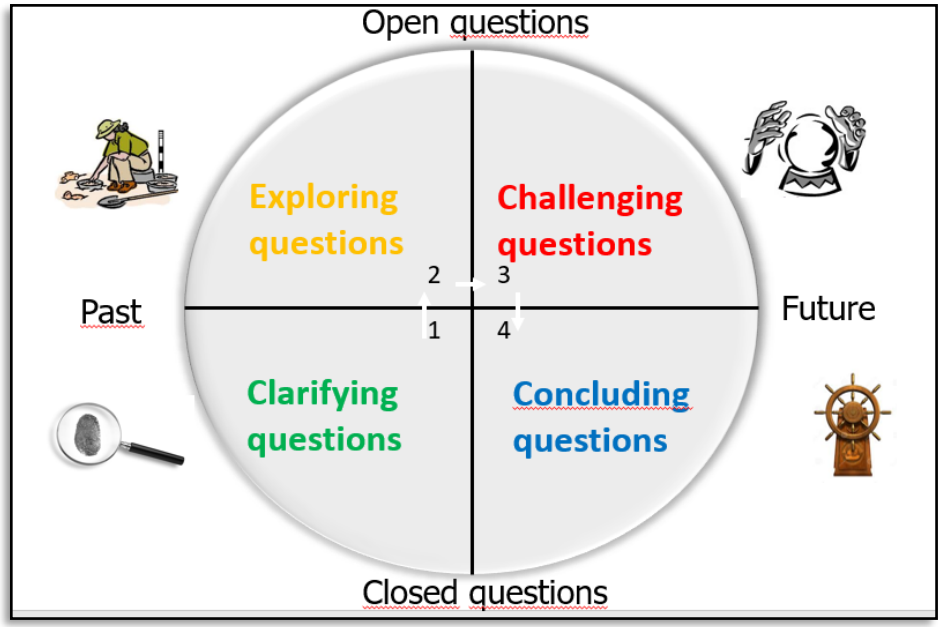
What happens if you change […] in the hypothesis?

What is your hypothesis?

How will you now phrase your hypothesis?

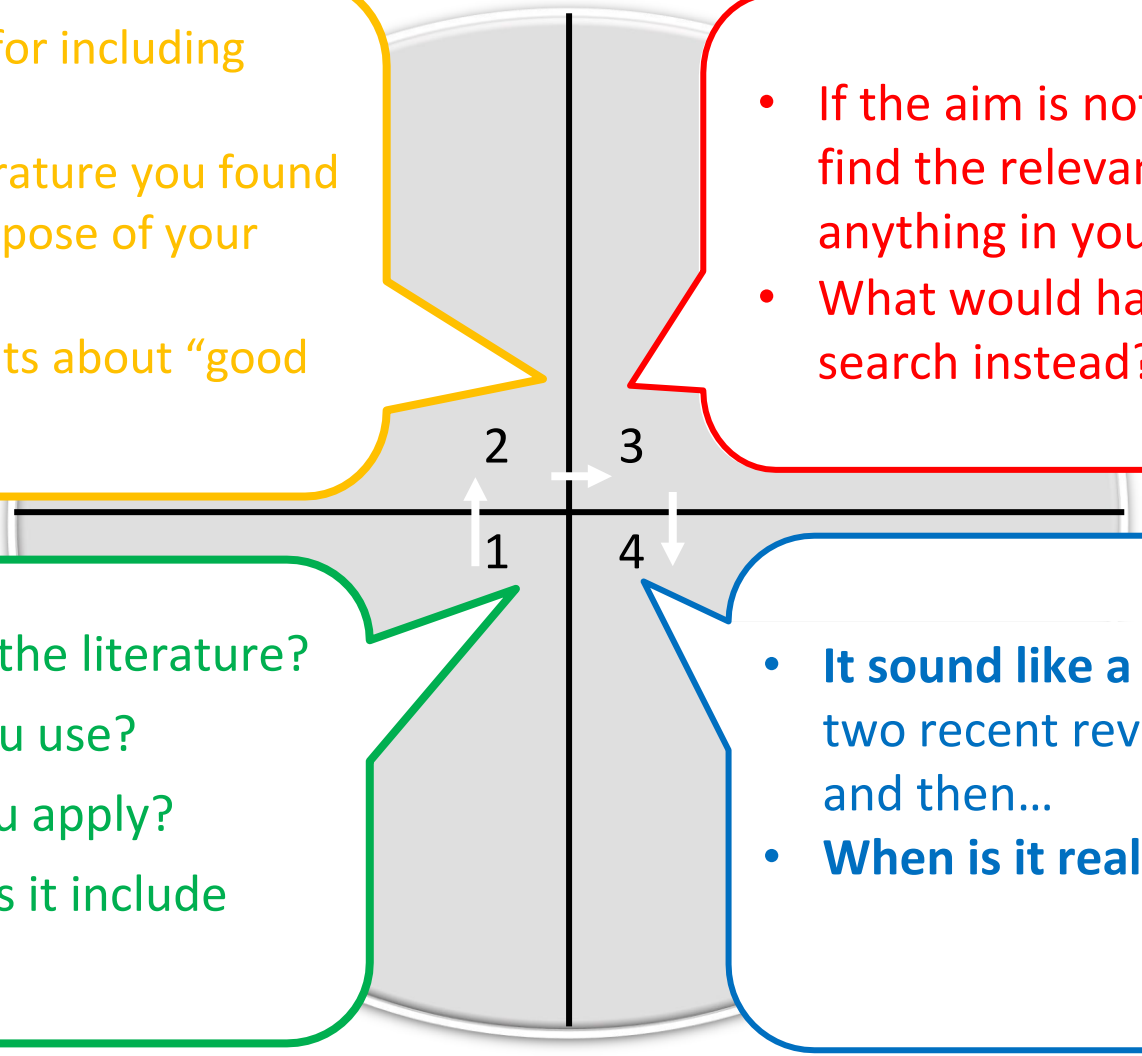
Example

Student: *How do I know that my literature search is good enough? I mean, how do I know that I have included all articles?*



Illustration

- What are your arguments for including these keywords?
- How do you assess the literature you found so far in relation to the purpose of your search?
- What are your own thoughts about “good enough”?



- If the aim is not to find all articles, but to find the relevant articles, would that change anything in your search strategy?
- What would happen if you used a full text search instead?

- How did you search for the literature?
- Which databases did you use?
- Which key terms did you apply?
- What did you find? Does it include any review studies?

- **It sound like a good next step** to read the two recent reviews study that you found and then…
- **When is it realistic** for you to do that?

It’s not forbidden to give advice ☺

But you can always accompany your advice with questions, e.g.:

- How have you approached the problem so far?
- What are your own thoughts about how to solve the problem?
- What other ideas could you imagine?
- Okay, then I suggest that you […]. Would that be doable?

Encourage students to pro-actively manage meetings

- schedule regular meetings for the coming semester
- outline meeting agendas
- write a brief cover letter when sending text drafts
- take notes (write down feedback)
- write a brief summary – and share it with you!

1. What kind of text have you sent?
2. How finished is it?
3. What challenges have you faced when writing the text?
4. What would you like feedback on?

What

might displace balance?

Current political agendas in Higher Education

External research funding

- PhD supervisors report an increased pressure to deliver ‘fast’ supervision: to control and monitor projects more
  (Deuchar, 2008; Franke and Arcidsson, 2010; Green and Usher, 2003; McCallin and Nayar, 2012; Neumann 2007; Sampson and Comer 2010).
- PhD students perceive their supervisors to be more directive in case of external funding
  (Wichmann-Hansen & Herrmann, 2017)

Current political agendas in Higher Education (I)

The study progress reform

A survey among **MA thesis supervisors** at Aarhus BSS (n=254/379) (Wichmann-Hansen et al., 2018)

Compared to the time before the reform:

- 56% to a higher degree advise students not to do a risky project.
- 54% to a higher degree control that students have a solid problem statement early in the process.
- 36% to a higher degree set milestones and tell students what to do.

New/other agendas?

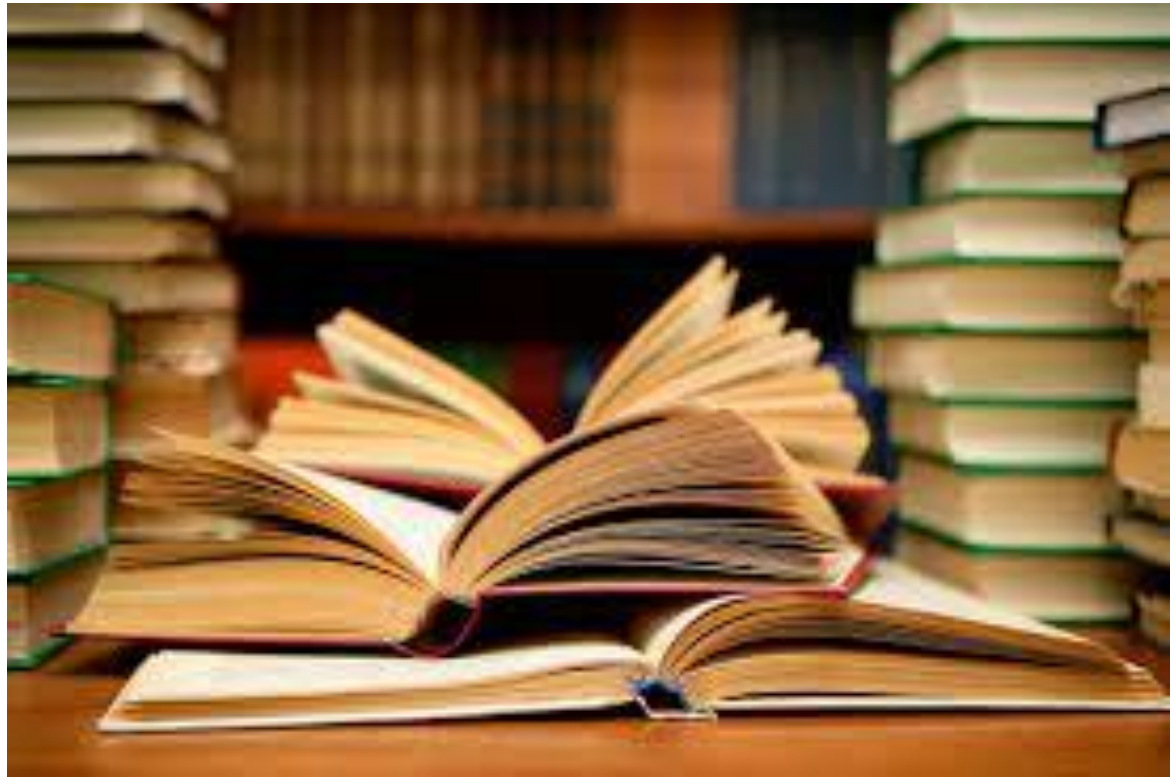
- **The coming masters' degree reform?** More fast supervision and less independence?
- **AI?** Does it call for developing student independence even more? Or does it outdate independence?

Thanks for listening

Questions?

ENJOY THE CONFERENCE

References



References (I)

- Barnard, R. A., & Shultz, G.V. (2020). 'Most Important Is That They Figure out How to Solve the Problem': How Do Advisors Conceptualize and Develop Research Autonomy in Chemistry Doctoral Students? *Higher Education ,79*, 981–999.
- Bastalich, W. (2017). Content and Context in Knowledge Production: A Critical Review of Doctoral Supervision Literature. *Studies in Higher Education*, *42*(7), 1145–57.
- Blanchard, C., & Haccoun, R. R. (2020). Investigating the impact of advisor support on the perceptions of graduate students. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 25(8), 1010–1027.
- Benmore, A. (2016). Boundary Management in Doctoral Supervision: How Supervisors Negotiate Roles and Role Transitions throughout the Supervisory Journey. *Studies in Higher Education, 41*(7), 1251–64
- Brownlow, C., Eacersall, D.C., Martin, N., & Parsons-Smith, R. (2023). The higher degree research student experience in Australian universities: a systematic literature review. *Higher Education Research & Development*, DOI:10.1080/07294360.2023.2183939
- Deuchar, R. (2008). Facilitator, Director or Critical Friend?: Contradiction and Congruence in Doctoral Supervision Styles. *Teaching in Higher Education, 13*(4), 489–500..
- Devos, C., Van der Linden, N., Boudrenghien, G., Azzi, A., Frenay, M., Galand, B., & Klein, O. (2015). Doctoral Supervision in the Light of the Three Types of Support Promoted in Self-Determination Theory. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 10*, 439–64.
- Franke, A., & Arcidsson, B. (2010). Research supervisors' different ways of experiencing supervision of doctoral students. *Studies in Higher Education, 36*(1), 7-19.

References (I)

- Gardner, S.K. (2007). 'I Heard It through the Grapevine': Doctoral Student Socialization in Chemistry and History. *Higher Education, 54*(5), 723–40.
- Gatfield, T. (2005). An Investigation into PhD Supervisory Management Styles: Development of a Dynamic Conceptual Model and Its Managerial Implications. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 27*(3), 311–25.
- Green, P., & Usher, R. (2003) Fast Supervision: Changing supervisory practice in changing times. *Studies in Continuing Education, 25(1*), 37-50.
- Handal & Lauvås (2006) *Forskningsveilederen*. Cappelen Akademisk Forlag
- Holligan, C. (2005). Fact and fiction: a case history of doctoral supervision. *Educational Research,* 47(3), 267-278.
- Jensen, H. N. (2010). »Det lukkede rum« – en dør på klem til specialevejledning. *Dansk Universitetspædagogisk Tidsskrift,* 5(8), 17–22.
- Kumar, V., & Kaur, A. (2019). Supervisory Practices for Intrinsic Motivation of Doctoral Students: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 14*, 581–95.
- Lee, A. (2020). *Successful Research Supervision: Advising Students Doing Research* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Mainhard, T., van der Rijst, R., van Tartwijk, J., & Wubbels, T. (2009). A Model for the Supervisor–Doctoral Student Relationship. *Higher Education, 58*(3), 359–73.
- Manathunga, C., & Goozée, J. (2007). Challenging the Dual Assumption of the 'Always/Already' Autonomous Student and Effective Supervisor. *Teaching in Higher Education, 12*(3), 309–22.

References (III)

- McCallin, A., & Nayar, S. (2012). Postgraduate research supervision: a critical review of current practice. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *17*(1), 63-74.
- Murphy, N., Bain, J.D., & Conrad, L. (2007). Orientations to Research Higher Degree Supervision. *Higher Education, 53*(2), 209–34..
- Neumann, R. (2007). Policy and practice in doctoral education. *Studies in Higher Education, 32*(4), 459-473.
- von Oettingen, A. (2024) *Det pædagogiske paradoks (rev.) – et grundstudie i almen pædagogik*. Forlaget Klim
- Overall, N.C., Deane, K.L., & Peterson, E.R. (2011). Promoting Doctoral Students' Research Self-Efficacy: Combining Academic Guidance with Autonomy Support. *Higher Education Research & Development, 30*(6), 791–805.
- Sampson, K. A., & Comer, K. (2010). When the governmental tail wags the disciplinary dog: some consequences of national funding policy on doctoral research in New Zealand. *Higher Education Research & Development, 29*(3), 275-289.
- Sinclair, M. (2004). *The pedagogy of 'good' Ph.D. supervision: A national cross-disciplinary investigation of Ph.D. supervision*. Australia: Central Queensland University, Faculty of Education and Creative Arts.
- Wichmann-Hansen, G., Herrmann, K. J., Bager-Elsborg, A., & Andersen, P. (2018). Hvad er konsekvensen af Fremdriftsreformen for specialevejledning?. Abstract fra DUN Konference 2018, Bredsten, Danmark. https://dun-net.dk/media/489845/pa13-hvad-er-konsekvensen-af-fremdriftsreformen-for-specialevejledning.pdf
- Wichmann-Hansen, G. (2021). DUT Guide on Supervision. *Dansk Universitetspædagogisk Tidsskrift, 16*(31), 94-105 https://doi.org/10.7146/dut.v16i31.127292

References (IV)

- Wichmann-Hansen, G., Herrmann, K.J. (2017) Does external funding push doctoral supervisors to be more directive? A large-scale Danish study. *High Educ 74*, 357–376.
- Wichmann-Hansen, G., & Wirenfeldt-Jensen, T. (2015) Supervision: Process management and communication. In: Lotte Rienecker, et a.l (Eds.) *University teaching and learning*. Samfundslitteratur, pp. 327-49.
- Wichmann-Hansen, G., & Schmidt Nielsen, K.J. (2023). Can hands-on supervision get out of hand? The correlation between directive supervision and doctoral student independence in a Danish study context*., Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 68*(6), 1121–1136
- Zackariasson, M. (2020). Encouraging Student Independence: Perspectives on scaffolding in higher education supervision. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education, 12*(3), 495–505
- Zackariasson, M., & Magnusson, J. (2024). Supervising Student Independence. A Research-based Approach to Academic Supervision in Practice. Palgrave MacMillan.