

“The one who is out of the ordinary shall win”: Research supervision toward publication in a Chinese hospital

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In many non-Anglophone countries, with the drive toward “world-class universities” in the higher education sector leading to a heavy emphasis upon publication metrics (Hazelkorn, 2015), research students are increasingly expected to publish in ISI-ranked international journals. We are beginning to gain insights into supervisory communication in university-based milieux (e.g., Huang, 2010; Li, 2015); but what is going on in a professional environment such as a medical hospital, where much of the learning of medical students takes place, remains largely unknown. The study to be reported aimed to address this gap in our knowledge. The study is part of a larger project that I conducted at the Orthopedics Department of a major hospital in east China. In the department, the director, or “the big boss” (in the students’ reference), through his daily verbal communication, inspired and pushed the students to dedicate themselves to academic research and publication. The purpose of my study was to characterize the director’s verbal communication strategies through the theoretical lens provided by cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (e.g., Engeström, 1999, 2001). The study utilized data gathered through questionnaire, interviews, and observations at research meetings. The analysis of the dataset revealed that a range of neighboring activity systems provided resources of *rules* that the supervisor drew upon to feed into the *tools* that he employed in the research supervision activity; and that different types of rhetorical actions worked in sequences in the supervisor’s commentaries on student presentations at research meetings—with all such presentations focusing on paper publication plans in the pipeline. The study will have implications for understanding research supervision in different cultures and in particular, in non-Anglophone academic environments where English publication has become a high priority. The study can also inform programs that train supervisors to mentor their students for successful research publication.

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Biodata

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