

**“We ‘Own’ the Teachers”****Understanding Subcultures of Singapore Lower Track Science Classrooms**

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**KEY IMPLICATIONS**

- This study contributes to the understanding of subcultures of “owning” in a Singapore lower track science class.
- The understanding of subcultures is important for effective science teaching and learning in the lower track science class.

**BACKGROUND**

Subcultures (Haenfler, 2014) emerge from within dominant and mainstream cultures and exert influence on the outcomes of science teaching and learning. As compared to dominant and mainstream classroom cultures imposed and reinforced by teachers, subcultures may sometimes seem weird, childish, untamed or silly. Hence, subcultures are seldom taken seriously and deemed to disappear as the students mature. The appreciation and understanding of subcultures in science classrooms, however, is poor, possibly because schools and classrooms are traditionally places where teachers command authority in deciding the rules, regulations and routines. Subcultures (e.g., punk culture) are often stereotypically associated with deviant practices, behaviours and thinking.

**FOCUS OF STUDY**

This study focused on the subculture of “owning”, an emergent phenomenon that resonated with most (if not all) Normal Academic (NA) students. The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What is/are the subculture(s) of Singapore NA science classrooms?
2. How do(es) subculture(s) form in Singapore NA science classrooms?
3. How do(es) subcultures affect science teaching and learning in Singapore NA science classrooms?

**KEY FINDINGS**

According to the teacher and students, words similar to “own” include “got”, “burn”, “roasting”, “savage”, “wrecked”, “dissing” and “flaming”. The words differ in terms of the intensity of the “owning”. “Owning” could be about: (1) creating a situation which does not allow the person being owned to respond, (2) making fun of others, (3) humiliating or outsmarting others, and (4) retaliating or taking revenge on another person. The different sources of “owning” include media (e.g., stand-up comedy). There are many conditions for “owning” to be

successful. The person(s) at the receiving end of “owning” should be someone who can quickly talk back, respond, or retort. This person should be “kind”, “calm”, “jokes”, can be “outsmart easily by others”, and/or “not witty”. The exchange should be “rude but not rude”, is “context-dependent”, allows for “making mistakes” and evokes “retaliation”. “Owning” typically takes place with at least two parties (comprising individuals or groups of individuals) and an audience. During “owning” the audience and parties participate in evaluating the “own” that was meted out. To win an “own”, the player should be fast, is able to make a quick and good comeback, quick-witted, outgoing, bold and bubbly. To win the “own”, what is said or expressed must be understood by most if not all people involved. The person must outsmart others. In not responding, flustering, or denying the “own”, one loses. The subculture of owning illuminates the power play between the teachers and students during the science lessons. The subculture of “owning” has effect on how science teaching and learning takes place in the classroom.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

### Implications for practice

All science teachers should be aware of the games that students play and understand them. Efforts to manage owning should be handled prudently, that is, teachers should not try to be “one of the kids”.

### Implications for research

The findings offer a subcultural lens to examining mainstream classroom practices and valuing of emergent practices from within a classroom.

## PARTICIPANTS

The study involved one case study of a science class with two science teachers, 13 students, and one School Principal.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This research adopted a case study design to study subculture in-depth. Interviews and lesson videos were collected and analyzed.

## REFERENCES

Haenfler, R. (2014). *Subcultures: The basics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

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