Why are some subjects less popular than others? Extending the debate

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

School subjects are not equally popular. Various accounts have been proposed to explain this phenomenon. These are typically theoretical, portraying the subject hierarchy as a derivative of a perennial tendency in society to attach different importance to different types of knowledge. This paper will put forward an alternative explanation that emerged from empirical work on an increasingly unpopular A level subject (Design and Technology). At the core of the proposed explanation lies the observation that the mechanisms that drive the popularity of school subjects are similar to the mechanisms that, according to the marketing literature, drive the popularity of brands. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the subject hierarchy, this paper will argue that one route to addressing this enduring educational issue is that of 'rebranding' unpopular subjects.

Full paper