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Summary:

The sharing revolution may help to revolutionize a critical part of our lives that for too long has been dominated by status quo lobbies such as teachers unions and the governments they influence—education.

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“Education is critical to human progress, but for too long it has largely been provided outside the market framework that makes everything better in our world.”

TeachersPayTeachers Creates Learning Entrepreneurs

By Steve Buckstein

The debate over the [sharing economy](#) often revolves around the well-known players such as the room rental company [Airbnb](#) and the ridesharing company [Uber](#). These firms have harnessed the liberating power of technology to unleash billions of dollars of so-called [dead capital](#), while turning millions of people around the world into entrepreneurs, serving their fellow man and making a profit at the same time.

As the sharing revolution evolves and matures, it promises not only to improve the lives of countless individuals, but it may also help to revolutionize a critical part of our lives that for too long has been dominated by status quo lobbies such as teachers unions and the governments they influence—education.

Education is critical to human progress, but for too long it has largely been provided outside the market framework that makes everything better in our world.

Now, thanks to a small company called Teacher Synergy, Inc., and its online marketplace [TeachersPayTeachers.com](#), educators are beginning to directly benefit from a free market in their [intellectual property](#) (IP). On the site they can buy and sell their own original lesson plans and related educational resources that up until now have benefitted their own students, but nobody else’s.

[In the words of Jason Bedrick](#), a policy analyst at the Cato Institute’s [Center for Educational Freedom](#):

“Words like ‘market’ and ‘competition’ or—worst of all—‘profit’ are considered dirty words in some circles, particularly in education. Perhaps that’s why some people prefer the more anodyne (if less accurate) term ‘[sharing economy](#)’ to describe how online platforms and apps are enabling people to monetize resources they own by connecting them directly with potential buyers.”

TeachersPayTeachers recognizes that not all teachers are the same. Some teachers are better than others at creating lesson plans that engage students and help them learn. So, for example, a teacher who is great at teaching math may not be so great at teaching geography. Why not let the good math teacher profit by selling his or her lesson plans to other teachers while she, perhaps, buys geography lesson plans from teachers who excel in that discipline?



Since its founding in 2006 by a New York City public school teacher, TeachersPayTeachers has allowed more than 10,000 teachers to earn \$175 million from its 3.4 million active teacher members. Some teachers have earned over \$100,000 selling lesson plans for just a few dollars apiece to thousands of their colleagues all over the nation, and even in other countries.

So, if teachers buying and selling lesson plans can benefit both teachers and students, who could be opposed? Well, just like existing taxicab monopolies opposed ride sharing firms like Uber for obvious reasons, those who currently control public school districts might feel threatened by teachers acting more like entrepreneurs and realizing the benefits of markets and capitalism.

Some districts claim that any intellectual property created by their teachers belongs to the district, even if created on the teachers' own time. TeachersPayTeachers [addresses this issue](#) and concludes that teachers often do own their own IP in lesson plans. Even the nation's largest teachers union, the National Education Association, [has stated](#) that "staff should own the copyright to the materials they create for use in the classroom."

Jason Bedrick concludes that "[t]eachers tend to be [less enthusiastic](#) about market-based reforms to education, but perhaps some experience with the 'sharing economy' will show them how the best teachers stand to [benefit greatly](#) from [Uber-ized education](#)."

While the best teachers will benefit greatly from Uber-ized education, other teachers can benefit also; and many students will benefit as their teachers have access to better teaching tools. Big picture, Uber-ized education can help create a diverse marketplace of educational options that will turn not only teachers, but students, into capitalist entrepreneurs. It can't happen too soon.

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