



Teachers' Selling of Lesson Plans Sparks Debate

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"Teachers Pay Teachers is a marketplace where teachers come together to buy, sell, and share original educational materials," PBS reported in January 2018. "Today, two-thirds of teachers in the U.S. are active members of [the] platform."

The PBS report quotes a teacher who earned \$14,000 in three months through the sale of her lesson plan online, and it says some teachers have become millionaires by selling lesson plans through the online marketplace. The story also reports some education analysts are concerned about the effect on the quality of lesson plans, potential reduction of in-person teacher collaboration, the legality of the process, and whether the lesson plans legally belong to the districts or to the teachers.

'A Great Development'

Timothy Benson, a policy analyst for The Heartland Institute, which publishes *School Reform News*, says opening the classroom to the free market will benefit everyone involved.

"Teachers being empowered and incentivized to sell their lesson plans is a great development for both teachers and students," Benson said. "Those fretting about the unknowns should have nothing to fear from teachers taking the initiative to create plans they think will be of benefit to their peers. These teachers are in classrooms in the first place because there is a trust in their abilities to effectively educate students. If these administrators say we cannot trust these teachers to create lesson plans, then why should we trust these teachers to be in the classroom in the first place?"

'Competition Is the Key'

Benson says bad lessons will be weeded out, and good ones will prevail, if the market is given the opportunity to function freely.

"Competition is the key, and the feedback these teachers will receive from their customers and fellow teachers will ensure the people creating these plans will be constantly seeking to improve and perfect them," Benson said. "If you offer a weak or substandard plan, it most likely won't

find a market. The rating system from verified customers will also help to cull these plans and keep the bad ones from reaching a large audience.”

‘Empower Teachers’

Corey DeAngelis, a policy analyst at the Center for Educational Freedom at The Cato Institute and a distinguished doctoral fellow at the University of Arkansas, says teachers, left to their own devices, can determine which products are most valuable to them and their students.

“Some educational scholars suggest that selling lesson plans could incentivize teachers to buy ‘catchy’ lesson plans that are low-quality,” DeAngelis said. “However, while these same scholars may think that plans that look exactly like theirs are ‘high-quality,’ it is almost impossible to capture quality using crude metrics, especially since children’s needs are unique.

“Because it is extremely difficult to objectively define what a quality lesson looks like, it is a great idea to empower teachers to shop for the lesson plans they see are most beneficial for their own students,” DeAngelis said. “Much like we use Google and Yelp to decide which restaurants to eat at and what books to read, teachers already have an online star-rating system available to help them make the right choices.”

National Collaboration

DeAngelis says he doesn’t see a lack of teacher collaboration as a potential problem.

“Some critics argue that online lesson plan sharing would make teachers less likely to collaborate with one another,” DeAngelis said. “However, it is not clear to me that teachers in residentially assigned government schools collaborate a whole lot with one another currently. And this system would just provide various teachers with an additional incentive to create and share interesting content. Importantly, teacher collaboration is not restricted to individual schools when the sharing system is done online; the internet system allows teachers to collaborate with thousands of others around the world in seconds. Let’s let them do that.”

Learning from Other Countries

DeAngelis says the sale of lesson plans is already an established practice in academically successful countries.

“While we do not do a lot of this in the United States currently, teachers in other academically superior countries like South Korea have figured out that online exchanges can be extremely beneficial,” DeAngelis said. “For example, South Korean tutor Kim Ki-Hoon earns millions of dollars each year by providing engaging lectures to interested students online. It is also worth noting that South Korea ranked among the top 10 countries in the world for the most recent math and reading PISA scores.”

Combining with School Choice

DeAngelis says parents should always have other options if they don’t like what’s being taught in the classroom.

“Although I believe most teachers have interests in helping their students, some may indeed choose to purchase low-quality lesson plans that the students do not find engaging and that their families would not approve of,” DeAngelis said. “This is a problem that is inherent to the traditional government school system based on residential assignment. If the teacher, for whatever reason, makes a bad decision on their lesson plan purchase, their students may suffer without an exit option.

“I would be much more comfortable if this system of exchanging lesson plans were combined with a system of school choice,” DeAngelis said. “That way, lesson plan quality would be judged by the families and their children rather than [only] the teachers. Schools with teachers that poorly chose lesson plans would lose students, while schools with teachers that find the best lesson plans possible would financially reward from additional demand from families.”