Trade School launches a new open source web platform.

Trade School is excited to announce the launch of an international, open-source web platform.

Now in operation for four years running, Trade School is a learning space and community that runs on barter. Students barter with teachers in exchange for instruction rather than paying for an expensive education. For example, students have given teachers artwork, advice, and transportation for classes on nutrition, web design, and communication. After an initial pilot in New York in 2010, local Trade School chapters have opened in 50 cities around the world. This effort is organized entirely by volunteer collectives who share skills while creating spaces of hope and reciprocity amidst rising tuition and unemployment.

The Trade School learning platform, which coordinates classes for over 10,000 teachers and students in 20 dialects, was built by artist and Trade School New York organizer Or Zubalsky. Taking a year and a half to perfect this open-source project, Zubalsky took the initiative to rebuild the entire web platform so that it embodies principles of cooperation: shared information and member participation. This project will help all 50 Trade School chapters stay open, operate smoothly, and practice the Trade School ethic of mutual aid.

In preparation for this launch Zubalsky spent a year and a half teaching and working with other Trade School organizers to write the code. Rather than waiting to pay for a developer, or seeking venture capital, Zubalsky donated his time to creating software and teaching other organizers, fulfilling Trade School's horizontal mission to share information and distribute responsibility.

Here at Trade School, we feel that cooperation must permeate our software as well as our classrooms. To this end, we are committed not only to building a well-functioning website, but also to nurturing and sustaining the site along with the community it supports. In Zubalsky's words:

It's easy to get carried away with technology and try to keep up with the insane speed in which new products are developed. A community is something that is built very very slowly. By taking our time we were able to get a sense of the direction we want to move towards and incorporate these ideas into the foundation of the technology that we use. Now that the platform is ready, we can spend our energy by maintaining what we have.

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