

Alumni Spotlight: Abbas Manjee (NYC '09), Chief Academic Officer at Kiddom



What inspired you to join the corps?

I moved to NYC to pursue a career in investment banking. I was a straight-A student and I grew up poor in a broken home, so my decision (sadly) shouldn't be so surprising. As it turns out, I was Leo DiCaprio on his first day in the office in *The Wolf of Wall Street* - innocent and ignorant. Wall Street's culture didn't resonate with me. I'd already spent too much time doing things I didn't like or care about to get ahead. And I wasn't about to commit the rest of my life living like that. After two years, I declined a promotion offer during the 2009 collapse and applied to Teach for America. I'd seen a rerun of *The Colbert Report* with Wendy Kopp as a guest and was inspired to do pursue something more fulfilling. Investment banking was tough, but I got the feeling this was going to be tougher (it was).

How long did you teach? Where did you teach?

I taught math for six years across two schools - both alternative high schools serving youth who were over-age and under-credited. I was a founding math teacher at both schools.

What advice would you give to current corps members?

In my third year, I thought I was finally hitting my stride. In my fourth year, I further modified my technique, style, and upped the rigor. By the time I was in my sixth year, I realized I was foolish to think I "had it down" in any of my previous years. Great teaching comes from constant learning, so have some fun changing things up. If you're not having fun, your students aren't having fun. School should be fun.

How did your experience teaching influence what you are doing now?

Everything I'm doing now is influenced by my teaching experience. By design, alternative high schools suffer from chronic absenteeism. I had no idea if the students I taught yesterday would show up the day after. I taught classes that culminated in Regents, and while I don't believe in standardized testing, our system is set up to work against students who can't pass these tests. So, I had to think about how to prevent truancy from interrupting their learning process.

I initially made all of my lessons and resources available online and supplemented them by curating third-party content on my Google site. This helped, but required a lot of upkeep. None of the tools I used communicated with each other, nor my gradebook. I kept at it, because I actually got students to pass, but I realized I was back to working

investment banking hours. Add the emotional toll of teaching at-risk youth, and you can begin to understand why there's high teacher burnout. It shouldn't be like that.

Tell us about Kiddom. Why did you develop this tool?

Kiddom is a free, standards-based platform for teachers to curate personalized learning experiences for students. That sounds like edtech nonsense, so let me to elaborate: With Kiddom, teachers can access an endless resource of third-party content from resources like Khan Academy and CK-12. When students complete this work, Kiddom automatically pulls the achievement data generated from the integrated platforms. We overlay all of this data with beautiful, actionable reports that don't look anything like a spreadsheet.

Kiddom was born a few years back, out of a conversation with my best friend and college roommate, Ahsan Rizvi, Kiddom's CEO. He was bootstrapping a start-up that developed math games for the iPad and I was still teaching, and expressing my frustrations. We talked about how teachers working with students most in need are constrained by archaic workflows and tools that are ineffective or redundant. He got to work and I consulted as I taught. We believe our educator-entrepreneur duo will create an indispensable tool to meet the demands of 21st century education and help all teachers and learners unlock their full potential.

What was your biggest challenge in creating Kiddom?

Our biggest challenge is the industry, at-large. The technology procurement process is broken. Many teachers are left out the key decision-making conversations involving technology. A significant portion of our userbase is effectively using Kiddom in tandem with another (mandated) gradebook! That's completely antithetical to Kiddom's goal, which is to unburden teachers from this kind of work so that they're empowered to create and facilitate authentic learning experiences.

We're in the process of building a teacher-driven movement for Kiddom, from the bottom up. We believe teachers know their students best, and because of this, they should be the ones putting forth the tools most appropriate for school-wide adoption.

Where can corps members and alumni learn more about the platform?

Anyone can learn more by visiting [our website](#). If you sign up, but still want a walk-through, you can also book a free, one-on-one [demo](#). Pick a time that works best for you. Don't expect a sales pitch, we're free.