

Elisabeth Stock of PowerMyLearning by Sarah Morgan

PowerMyLearning takes a three-pronged approach to help every kid reach their potential.

Elisabeth Stock has always been driven to work toward a more just world. It was what led her to volunteer as a teacher for the Peace Corps in West Africa in her early 20s, and it's what ultimately motivated her to found PowerMyLearning, an educational technology nonprofit, in 1999. "I wanted to join the Peace Corps because I felt like there was this deep unfairness in society," she says. "Is it just and fair that where you are born predicts whether you can reach your human potential?"

The key to providing equal opportunity for everyone, says Stock, is through education. To that end, PowerMyLearning uses technology to improve the relationships that are crucial to the learning process — namely, the impact that teachers and parents have on a student's promise to excel. "What we're really about is empowering all of them — the kids and the adults — to learn together," she says. That empowerment is translating to real, measurable results. There is at least one teacher, parent or student registered with PowerMyLearning in 40 percent of the nation's schools, and since 2012, partner schools have seen an impressive 6.9 percent increase in math proficiency.

Technology is a crucial part of this process, but the company approaches it in a decidedly different way than most ed-tech outfits do. A lot of people in the field try to essentially replace educators with fancy apps and platforms, says Stock. "They think, 'Oh my goodness, I can build the most amazing code to do what the teacher does!' But we've realized that that's a mistake, that what you really need to do with technology is focus on the learning relationships."

PowerMyLearning uses a combination of services and tools to reach everyone involved in a child's education. The organization's online platform, called PowerMyLearning Connect, curates the best available videos, interactive games and other online resources to help students master complex topics. PowerMyLearning also provides coaching to teachers, especially those who are early in their careers, and conducts workshops where families can learn about what their kids are doing.

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Teachers rely on PowerMyLearning Connect for its "playlists" of materials to use in the classroom. They can also customize these playlists for different groups of students or even for just one student at a time. "Imagine that you're a teacher and you are in a classroom, and you have a couple of students who are really behind," Stock says. "How do you help them practice without their peers noticing that they're so far behind, and

teasing them?” But if a student is playing a fun game that enables him to catch up at the same time, his classmates will focus on the game, not the fact that the student might have a deficit of knowledge.

The platform is also used to engage families in the learning process and will soon roll out a texting feature that lets parents know what their kids are learning. After a student works through a particular playlist, they'll be prompted to teach the material to an adult family member. The adult can then text back to the teacher to share how well the child understands the concepts. “So many families want to be helping their students and continuing to improve their learning, but a lot of people just don't know where to begin,” Stock says. “PowerMyLearning Connect really gives them that starting point.” The platform, along with the workshops, further collaborative relationships between students, teachers and parents.

Azlynn Cornish, a special education math teacher at South Bronx Preparatory school in New York City, uses the platform in her classroom, and she has also received coaching. “Self-motivation is a huge thing with PowerMyLearning Connect,” Cornish says. “It brings students so much choice, and they're able to really create their own learning environment, both inside and outside of the classroom.” Involving families also helps give kids the feeling that they're in control of their own education, she adds. “It just creates that kind of cycle of learning that continues daily, and creates genuine lifelong learners.”

For parents, PowerMyLearning provides a window into what their kids are up to at school. Lisnel Rivera, a parent from The Young Women's Leadership School of the Bronx, recently attended a Saturday workshop to learn more about the program. “I think it's very important for schools to include parents in their child's education, because while they go to school to learn, the majority of their time is spent at home,” Rivera says. “If I'm up to date on the assignments, and the essence of what my daughter is learning at school, I can help her at home.” It's facilitating those learning relationships that is exactly what Elisabeth Stock — and PowerMyLearning — has been about from the beginning.