

November 30, 2018

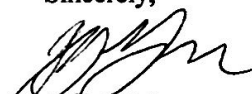
To whom it may concern,

My name is Jeffrey Mayer and I have known Richard de Meij for more than three years. I met him while attending a graduate program for curriculum and instruction at the University of Connecticut. He was a guest speaker in a language content area class, designed to help with instruction, classroom management, and lesson planning. The very first thing I remember was how passionate he was about teaching language and helping kids achieve their goals. He explained how over the years he had become a polyglot and had learned several languages to the level of proficiency. I was incredibly impressed, and in hearing his story, inspired. I wanted to finally seriously pursue my own goals of becoming a Spanish teacher and perhaps learning a third language to fluency. Needless to say, we became fast friends and kindred spirits. I feel that the best way to tell you about Richard is to tell you our story.

While attending my master's program, the board of education changed the certification requirements to obtain a teaching credential. Based on this change, I was required to obtain a level of advanced low on the ACTFL OPI test (where my score was intermediate high) which I was unable to achieve while in the program. I ended up graduating without the teaching certification but began to study for this exam. In the meantime, Richard helped me get a position at an urban high school where he believed I could make the most impact helping kids. I got the job with the understanding that I would work directly with Richard to pass my test. Working fulltime and studying for this exam proved to be very difficult, but Richard never lost his faith in me. He spent countless hours working one on one with me to help improve my teaching and to prepare me for the test. I ended up teaching alongside him for two years at Hartford Public High School while studying for this exam. Then in June 2018, I took the exam one last time and still came up short. This put me in a very tough situation because I knew that I would not be rehired in the fall without certification and I really loved my job at that High School. Working in an urban setting really made me feel like I was making a difference in the lives of my students. As expected, my position was filled by a certified candidate about a month later. I felt heartbroken and dejected. I had tried so hard and failed again and again to get the required proficiency. It was at this time that I considered leaving teaching as a career altogether. However, Richard would not allow me to give up. He pleaded with me not to leave the profession and asked me to give him one more chance to work with me.

By mid-July my wife suggested that I go to Guatemala to complete a three week immersion program designed to build up and get back my confidence for the OPI test. She was pregnant at the time and I did not want to leave her, but she insisted I go. I needed advice and Richard was there to provide it. He was overjoyed with my wife's idea and convinced me to go. He guaranteed I would get the advanced level once I came back. After much coaxing I conceded to my wife and my dear friend, and set up the trip. They were both completely correct. My confidence exploded from day one and when I got back, Richard and I worked for a few days to prepare for the test. He was very excited and said my conversational skills and confidence were off the charts compared to before. I took my test the same day and passed it easily. A week later I obtained a position teaching middle school Spanish and my life has gotten better and better each day. I can honestly say I would not be a teacher if it were not for Richard's influence on me. When it comes to inspiration and the willingness to help others achieve their goals, no one stands out better than Richard. I hope our story sheds some light on the type of man Richard is: he puts others before himself and he has given so much to both me and his students without expecting anything in return. There is no one else I would recommend for this prestigious award.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Mayer