



June 11, 2019

To Whom It May Concern,

I write this letter of recommendation at the request of Brian Colton. I am a professor of elementary education at Rhode Island College, a consultant in the teaching of writing, and I have been a teacher of children. I also coordinate the Master of Arts in Teaching Program (MAT) at RIC. It was in that program that I met Brian, as he was a student in two courses that I taught: the teaching of reading and the teaching of writing. I observed Brian as he presented literacy lessons to small groups of students at the early part of his program, then as he taught a class of twenty-five fourth graders in an urban school during his student teaching semester. Through these varied settings I came to know Brian as enthusiastic about, and committed to working with children. On the first day of student teaching, he told me: "I know this is where I need to be."

It was clear right away, that Brian genuinely liked being around children. I watched him listen during the morning ritual he instituted, in which students could choose to share a personal mini story they carried with them into the classroom that day. I watched as he read aloud, inviting students' responses to the story itself and asking questions to that would help him better understand the knowledge and experiences that had informed students' responses. Through reading aloud, he drew on his professional knowledge about its value, his experience as a father who reads to his children, and his first-hand knowledge and experience as a reader. It was clear that his goal was to help his students become critical readers and people who *choose* to read.

Brian recognized that his cooperating teacher was artful in her craft and could teach him a lot, and he set out to learn from her. He would watch her, then afterward when they met, he might ask, "What made you say such-and-such to that student at that moment?" or "How did you decide to do such-and-such?" and "I noticed that you changed the original requirement on the spot—what influenced that decision?" He took advantage of this partnership as a chance to practice thinking like a seasoned teacher, as one who looks ahead and can anticipate various outcomes from various choices. He respectfully considered her feedback. Once, when I observed, he explained that, because of his cooperating teacher's feedback about his questioning, he had been working on asking open ended questions whose responses he might not be able to predict but could take him to a new place.

Maybe what was most powerful in my work with Brian was the moment at which he acknowledged what didn't feel right, said it out loud, and went back to the beginning and tried the lesson again. In retrospect, after this "re-do" lesson he said, "I walked through the whole thing in my mind. I was seeing the steps, specifically and systematically, not leaving anything out. It was anticipating what could happen to disrupt the plan and naming three or four options for each. I was considering what students needed to know ahead of time and making sure I addressed all of those things beforehand. At first I felt angry to have to do it over; I am glad I did it again."



Brian learned that being vulnerable is the only way to grow. And he took advantage of revealing that vulnerability in the company of professionals who supported him. It may be the most important skill he will bring into the profession with him.

Brian understands that to be a teacher involves a professionalism that goes beyond the classroom. He volunteered at the Literacy for All Conference in Providence as was required in the MAT program, then the following year chose to volunteer again, on his own, as it came with a ticket to admission. He seeks out professional development.

If I can be of any more help, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

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