

Ms. Jones and Joyfully Teaching Art

All my life, even as a very young child, I found myself scanning the world for something that felt rare: truly happy adults. Not adults who *acted* happy, but those who radiated real contentment—who seemed at peace with themselves. Even then, I could tell the difference. I saw it in their eyes, heard it in their tone of voice. And for me, happiness wasn't about being cheerful all the time—it was a deep sense of joy, of feeling safe and loved just for being who you are. That was how I first knew God—as a sense of inner peace and belonging.

When I started school, I looked for those same qualities in my teachers. Sadly, I didn't see them often. Most seemed tired, stressed, or caught in the act of “being grown up,” while ignoring the emotional world around them. Then one day, I met Ms. Jones—the art teacher who changed everything for me.

Ms. Jones was different. She wasn't pretending. She was **being**. She laughed easily, wore flowing, colorful clothes, and somehow made joy seem like part of the curriculum. Everyone loved her because she loved what she was doing. And when she taught art, you could feel it: she was in her element, and she invited us into that creative space with her.

If we finished cleaning up in time, she'd reward us not with prizes, but with something far better—connection. She'd pull out her guitar, rest her foot on one of our tiny chairs, and sing. Songs like “*Feelin' Groovy*” filled the room, and we'd sing along with printed lyric sheets. Those songs weren't about music class—they were about community, creativity, and celebrating the moment we were in.

What I didn't realize at the time—but see now through the lens of this course—is that **Ms. Jones was modeling intrinsic motivation**. She wasn't just teaching art; she was **living it**. She wasn't driven by reward systems or behavior charts. Her energy was fueled by the *joy* of teaching, of connecting, of creating with others. She was also deeply present with her students. I know this because I spent many lunch hours in her office, just talking about dreams, life, and the ways I saw the world. She'd doodle as I spoke, and somehow I knew she was listening deeply. Her drawing helped her focus, and eventually, it helped me feel comfortable drawing too. One day, she said something that would stay with me forever:

“You are an artist. That’s why you’re so sensitive. Pour all that sensitivity into your art—that’s why you have it. So you can share it with others and inspire them.”

That was a defining moment for me—not only in my self-understanding but also in the way I now view education and motivation. I've carried those words into everything I do as an artist and educator. Looking back through the lens of what I've learned in this course, I realize how powerfully that experience with Ms. Jones aligns with the ideas of meaningful learning, autonomy, and purpose.

This journal reflection has helped me make sense of a theme I hadn't fully articulated until now: that my longing to find happy, authentic adults as a child is the same longing that shapes how I want to show up as a teacher today. I want to create spaces where joy is real, where students feel safe enough to be themselves, and where learning flows naturally from curiosity and connection.

As I continue this learning journey, I can now recognize that **Ms. Jones didn't teach with reward or punishment—she taught with presence.** And presence is powerful. It's not about controlling behavior; it's about inspiring engagement.

In future classrooms, I want to be that kind of teacher—the one who inspires by *being*, not by bribing. I want to build environments that are rich in creativity, emotional safety, and authenticity. I now see how important it is to keep reassessing my values as I grow in my career. And every new experience, every theory I am learning, gives me more tools to shape the kind of educator I'm becoming with even more to offer my students, because of all I am adding now.

Sharing this story with classmates or other educators reminds me of how powerful stories are in helping us understand one another—and ourselves. I hope that in telling mine, someone else might reflect on the person who first inspired *them* to learn or be themselves. That's the beauty of this kind of reflection: it connects us. As I write out the impact that Ms. Jones had on my life, it is so healing. She was the kind of teacher who changed many lives. I wrote about her on my FB Elementary school page and many agreed about how she had touched their lives too and thanked me for reminding them about her. I feel like I am blessed with her light that I may be able to continue as an art teacher. My path into art education feels like a full-circle moment—rooted in joy, creativity, and deep human connection. So much of what I've read in this course has confirmed what I've always intuitively felt: that joy, love, and authenticity are not *extras* in education—they're essentials. And Ms. Jones embodied that truth long before I had the words to describe it. This is what has led me to earn my Masters in Art Education and I think of her now more than ever. She is my North Star - always shining.