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The Real and the Not Really Real: Staging Artist-Teacher Identity and Pedagogy in the Classroom

Joseph Fuller

School of Education, Health and Science, University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester, UK

Abstract

This article explores the complexities and tensions of artist-teacher identity through a performative autoethnographic project centred on the creation and performance of a marionette self-portrait. The marionette becomes a proxy through which the identities of artist and teacher can be enacted, interrogated and held in dynamic tension. Drawing on a tradition of performative inquiry in art education, the project embraces theatricality as a method for critically engaging with the self and for staging pedagogical reflection where the performed self-portrait serves as a distancing device between me and my teaching persona. The marionette is an attempt to make the embodied knowledge and experience of these identities visible and symbolically and theatrically malleable. Grounded in contemporary discourse on artist-teacher practice, this research aligns with the view of classroom teaching as a creative, situated and reflexive act. It responds to the concept of a pedagogy of care, particularly its call for classrooms to function as open-ended studio environments that prioritise process, risk-taking and relationality. During the project, the school classroom became a shared making space between artist-teacher and students, creating a space for reflection and relational practice. In this context, the marionette becomes a reflexive object, a tangible metaphor for the ways identities are constructed, rehearsed and performed in educational spaces. In this shared space, artist-teacher and student identities are examined with sensitivity, side by side, in order to explore shared experiences of risk-taking and not knowing.

Keywords

artist-teacher identity, autoethnography, classroom as studio, marionette, reflexivity, risk

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Introduction

> I have not, until now, at the age of 37, ever made work, in written or visual form, that I have been willing to describe in simple and uncomplicated terms as being autobiographical. Looking back, from my current age of 37, to my 3 years as a student at art school, at the ages of 19, 20, 21 and 22, I reflect on what I did and didn't do. These years feel enormously powerful in their influence and my sense of being or not being an artist; things I know and love and understand, and that still inform how I see the world, even when I feel a non-artist; things I now feel far away from, sensitivities and conversations I long for, and miss, and cannot find elsewhere. These times are also then seen through a longer lens, that includes the deep inarticulate influences from childhood, and that also extends nearer to now, seeing things backwards as from adulthood. (Extract transcribed from author's sketchbook 2005)

Following a career change from working as a full-time craftsperson since graduating from a fine art degree, like many art teachers motivated by a sense of personal identity (Prentice 1995), I carried into the profession of teaching 'certain qualities of life' (Eisner 2001, 8) from my own experiences of art and artmaking that I wanted to share with my students. As described in the sketchbook extract above, these accumulated experiences are complex and still being processed. I was fortunate to find space alongside full-time teaching to explore these tensions through an MA in education with a specific focus on artist-teacher practice, which encouraged myself and others on the course to interrogate the sites of tension within our teaching identities by re-engaging with our own creative practices.

This article reflects on the complex identity of the artist teacher in the secondary school classroom through the development of a performative autoethnographic project focused on a self-portrait in the form of a marionette, a physical artifice designed to stage inherent tensions. My intention with this ongoing project is to recreate autobiographical scenes in scale-model sets in order to consider pivotal moments of latency. Through the exploration of my artist-teacher practice, the theme of latency has emerged to frame my approach to making art, where temporal layers that emerge in action may call us to 'reflect, remind us of something missed, something not yet learned' (Fels 2012, 59). Latency acknowledges the potential delays between experiences and their unfolding meanings being recognised or understood. Drawing on a tradition of performative inquiry in arts education that recognises moments in creative processes and pedagogical exchange as sites for reflection and inquiry (Fels 1998, 2012), the project adopts a quiet theatricality as a method for reflecting on the freedoms and restraints experienced in the role of the artist teacher in the secondary art classroom. Performance here operates as a mode of thinking- and reflecting-in-action (Schön 1983): a way of staging the artist teacher's self so that inherent contradictions, attachments and vulnerabilities (Hall 2010; Payne 2020) can be observed and reconfigured, and the identities of the artist teacher can be explored in situ, in a 'practice context' (Schön 1983, 68). The marionette functions as both an art object and a crafted proxy for the teacher persona, a

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performing object that can be manipulated, and whose ontological ambiguity, hovering between animate and inanimate (Jones 2009; Piris 2014), allows positions, actions and interactions to be rehearsed and staged. Through its small-scale theatre, aspects of embodied knowledge that ordinarily remain implicit in pedagogical practice are made symbolically malleable.

Situated within contemporary debates on artist-teacher praxis, this research aligns with understandings of the classroom as a creative, reflexive, and relational space (Atkinson 2017, 2018) rather than a site of mere knowledge transmission. Except for one initial making session as part of the MA course, all the work on the marionette took place in my classroom and the art department of the secondary school where I was teaching. In dialogue with the notion of a pedagogy of care, the classroom in this project is reconceived as a shared studio environment that privileges process and experimentation, alongside students' own inquiry, where notions of creativity are situated in 'dynamic and dialogical' teacher and student relations (Addison 2010, 43). My self-portrait marionette is introduced into this context not as a completed artwork but as a part of an ongoing, unfolding project and a catalyst for dialogue and reflection. Working alongside students in a shared space of production, the marionette could be read as a tangible metaphor for how identities are constructed, rehearsed and performed in educational settings.

Methodology

Taking an autoethnographic approach, I will reflect on how I experience my identity as an artist teacher, the process of making the marionette, the effects of sharing the classroom as a site for risk-taking and production, and resonant meanings that have emerged through the project that relate to pedagogic practice. Where this project explores identity, I am exploring the inherent tensions that characterise interrelated identities of the artist teacher and how these are constructed in the classroom, with a reflexive lens on the influence of my pre-teaching art experiences.

I also reflect on responses from GCSE and A-level students from Years 10–13 (ages 14–18) who were asked to reflect on questions focused on the impact of having an artist teacher as their art teacher; the impact of their art teacher working alongside them in the classroom; and their understanding of and response to the marionette project. Contributions have been anonymised other than their year of study (e.g., Year 10 art student). With my role as teacher subsumed within my own engaged making, this writing is an attempt to find a suitable language to describe the experience of pedagogic adventure and risk in emerging and unfolding parallel practices in the art classroom.

Artist-teacher identities

Art teachers are often motivated by their personal experiences of art through their lifetime and are motivated to share these with students in their classroom (Eisner 2001). These pre-teaching art practices and experiences contribute to a sense of the artist aspect within artist-teacher identities being 'deemed authentic' (Payne 2024, 34). Furthermore, artist teachers typically experience a tension

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between the perceived autonomy associated with (maintaining) artistic practice and the restrictive framework of day-to-day teaching schedules (Wild 2022; Payne 2024). These contradictions complicate the edges between different identities and are irreducibly individual and thus difficult to articulate (Hall 2010). Art teachers do not always find adequate pedagogic space to share their values, experiences and practices in their teaching.

Hall (2010, 105–106) outlines 'distinct but overlapping themes' that recur in literature describing artist teachers' relationships with educational structures: 'professional identities; curriculum development; teacher development; theoretical perspectives; reflective practice'. Individually and collectively, these describe areas of tension for artist teachers negotiating their authentic identities in school cultures that 'involve particular ways of working, thinking and behaving' (Shreeve 2009, 152). In the context of received notions of teacher professionalism, artist teachers describe numerous, ongoing private battles against a sense of artistic and professional compromise (Wild 2024). Tensions persist in the subjective experience in the classroom, where perceived difference and divergence from dominant, accepted standards of teacher identity, framed by the 'pressures of measurement and audit' (Atkinson 2025, 320–321) can impact perceptions of professionalism and authority (Brown 2006).

Engaging in artist-teacher practice can be an empowering approach to resist and survive the numerous pressures within schools. Introducing authentic sensitivities and motivations into pedagogic and artistic practices in the classroom might enable artist teachers to 'replenish and extend' their agency (Wild 2024, 22). A reflective practice that engages with these tensions can form part of a strategy to reconcile and hold together the 'disparate strands of being and experience' (Hall 2010, 108) that contribute to artist-teacher hybrid identities. My self-portrait marionette is held across these lines of tension: its likeness represents my teacher identity within school: Mr Fuller; the concept and motivation, suffused with years of accumulated thinking and making, was generated by me: Joseph. This re-engagement with a latent art practice through the production of the marionette predominantly took place in my teaching classroom, the site where these identities routinely converged.

Engaging in artist-teacher practice

> There's something very compelling and interesting to me about having the real, and then having the stylized. [. . .] I mean, it's not like you're pretending to be really real. (Taymor 1999, 45)

This ongoing project emerged during a module on the MA course encouraging exploration of the participant's individual artistic practices. For the duration of the marionette project, I was following the part-time MA course alongside a full-time teacher of art position in a comprehensive secondary school (ages 11–18) in England. I was both artist and teacher. Discovering that there was an established, widely recognised name for my hybrid identity as an 'artist teacher' was empowering. The invitation to make artwork required that I return to a fine art practice after many intervening years working in craft as a potter and since becoming a

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teacher 4 years previously. Among the day-to-day pressures and drifts of classroom teaching, I read the openness of the course's characterisation of artist-teacher practice as a clear and compelling invitation to 'explore long-standing preoccupations' (Hall 2010, p. 108) and engage explicitly with a number of latent and unrealised ideas in my art practice.

Payne (2024, 33) acknowledges the troublesome processes artist teachers experience when they work 'to actively alter personal and professional identities', undertaking such deeply personal reflective work amid the complex systems of teaching in schools. The self-portrait project, foregrounded in self-reflection, exposed a complex relationship with artmaking since my time as an undergraduate at art school, and allowed long-quiet, latent ideas for making work to resurface. From the semantics of theatre and puppetry, Taymor's (1999, 45) delicate construction of 'not pretending to be really real' in theatrical design and performance resonated with my experience of performing my artist-teacher identity. One student interpreted the meaning of the project along similar lines:

> How teaching can be seen as a performance, being in front of an audience who hold onto your every word. A performance and teaching can be very closely linked, putting on a character that people want you to be. (Year 12 art student)

The structure and tone of the module encouraged the work to be reflective and autobiographical and prioritised risk-taking and 'productive ambiguity' (Eisner 2005, 180). In this mode, my sketchbook (see Figure 1) shows how I moved through an initially slow-moving process of research, struggling with authentic ways to approach a self-portrait before eventually pursuing processes and forms that were new to me: the marionette. This starting point was precipitated more by the explicit encouragement to take creative risks than a pursuit of any predetermined meaning that the artwork might have. I began the making process of the marionette (see Figure 2), drawn by the opportunity to take a risk, more than to illustrate any preconceived meaning. A year 11 student had a clear response to the project, with a moving and sensitive perception of joy in the making process:

> As someone who saw this development, I believe that the meaning of this self portrait project was to show balance of being an art teacher and ensuring one is still practicing art themselves and how perhaps this balance of joys should be more integrated. (Year 11 art student)

The project marked a new, emergent practice, drawing on the longer arc of my biography, unreliant on existing skills other than the accumulated confidence to take risks. The meaning of the work would be entirely contingent on the look and quality of the outcome. With the aliveness of a puppet, and its transformation from lifelessness through its performance of life, contingent on (and potentially limited by) the skill of both the performer and the designer-maker (Jones 2009), refining its resemblance with myself was essential for meanings to emerge through the marionette's mere presence (see Figure 3).

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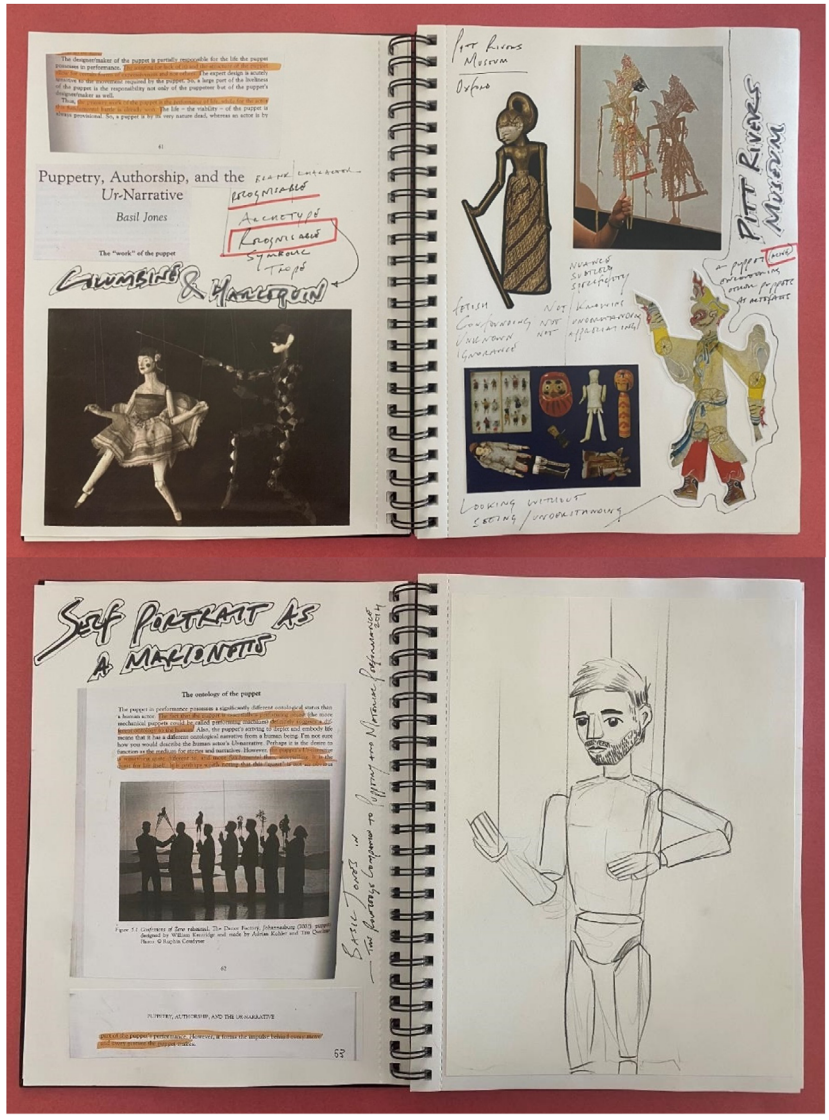


Figure 1
Sketchbook Pages Showing Initial Exploration of a Self-Portrait, Puppetry and Marionette Forms.

Performing objects

Initially, it felt problematic to 'simply' make a self-portrait, a straight likeness, without refracting my own image through symbolism or another character altogether (it felt far too near to a typical school art project and too far away from more mature art practices). Bell (2001) proposes an expansion of traditional understanding of performance by centring non-human performers such as puppets, masks and objects as integral to theatrical and cultural expression. Performing objects can be used in the construction and expression of identity. Masks and puppets enable

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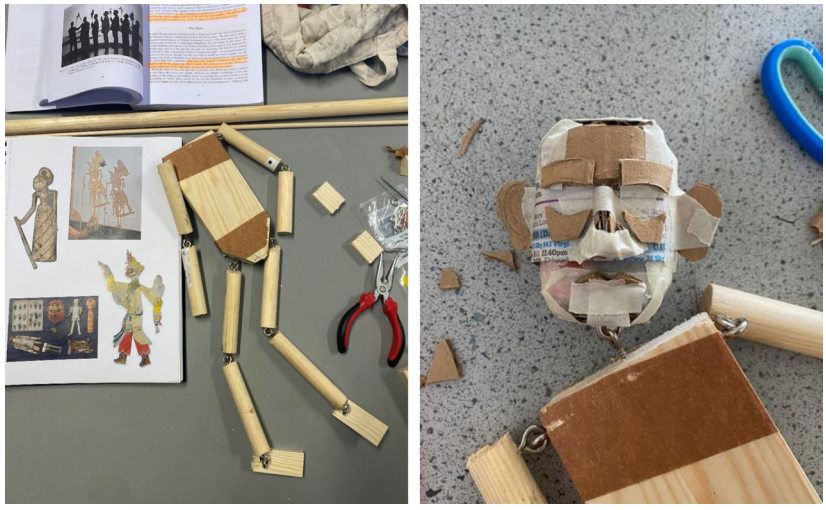


Figure 2
Early Stages of Constructing the Marionette's Body and Articulating Limbs; Making the Features of the Face From Wood, Newspaper, Cardboard and Tape.



Figure 3
Various Stages of Working Towards a Recognisable Likeness of Myself as Mr Fuller; Wood, Cardboard, ModRoc, Filler, Acrylic Paint.

both the concealment and transformation of self, and this dual function allows performers to navigate multiple selves (Bell 2001), often with subversive or liberating intent.

Through this lens, puppets and masks can become tools for demonstrating how identity is not fixed but composed, projected, and contingent: like any live theatrical performance, each iteration or performance allows for development and change. Performing objects, such as my marionette, might allow for the fragmentation or integration of identities to be articulated and performed in a visceral, visual form, splitting the presentation of identity between puppet and puppeteer. A Year 13 student observed this symbolic balance of identities:

> I asked for updates, especially on the puppet. Mr Fuller also showed me the diary that went alongside his developed [sic] of the puppet as well as the inspirations behind it. And the video too! From what I gathered, it was a pastiche of how you see yourself as a teacher. What qualities you want to

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> convey, envisioning yourself as the best teacher, but still being yourself. What qualities and quirks do you convey. (Year 13 art student)

Through its small-scale theatre, aspects of embodied knowledge that ordinarily remain implicit in pedagogical practice were now made symbolically malleable. The marionette bears my likeness, I can read it as myself, and my likeness is read by my students as Mr Fuller, the art teacher. Alongside my facial likeness, other visual elements of my teaching persona were reproduced: my patterned shirts and my refusal to wear ties. I started to reflect on the authenticity of these gestures and the construction of my persona in the classroom. The marionette's image started to reflect how performance, either unconscious or contrived, remains part of how we navigate the world day-to-day.

Risk in the secondary classroom

In schools, there remains a regulatory and managerial focus on measuring the impact of intended learning, suggesting little room for autonomy and individual, responsive changes to what is taught and how (Wild 2022, 2024; Adams 2024). One of the impacts of a seemingly immovable culture of inspection and accountability within prevailing economic logic is, among many other things, the engraining of assessment-safe school art orthodoxies (Addison 2010; Fursman *et al*. 2024; Adams 2024), which provide very poor conditions for 'enquiry, discovery, and thinking and enacting difference' (Addison 2010, 45). Wholly instrumentalist teaching, where content is simply delivered from the teacher and received by the student, results in a paucity of individual thinking and consequently more repetitive, predictable outcomes from students (Freire 2013). Art teachers feel their pedagogic instincts are compromised by pervasive school structures that monitor teacher performance (Wild 2022). In these conditions, despite the private intentions of many artist teachers, it is unlikely for risk-taking to be encouraged by classroom teachers or to naturally become a priority for students, where 'the freedom to experiment and make mistakes must be minimised or even eradicated, since they are inherently risky' (Adams 2024, 10).

Risk in pedagogical practice might be characterised as a mode of teaching and learning where the processes and outcomes are importantly unclear and adventurous (Atkinson 2018). Pedagogic adventures, departures from everyday practices as a means of 'stalling the rhythm of habitual routines' (Cocker 2013, 131), offer experiences of not knowing precisely where work or an activity is headed. Much thought in art education positions risk and risk-taking as an integral element in the many processes of making art (Atkinson 2018; Gale 2020). Fortnum (2013, 70–71) suggests that a state of 'not-knowing' is an essential driving force for artists in their process where outcomes are unexpected and not predetermined, describing the potential reward of 'bringing something previously unknown to the world'.

Risk in the classroom cannot be imposed instrumentally from the teacher, and instead is something fragile and contingent, cultivated as a collaborative and collective process (Gale 2020). This collaborative pedagogy is inherently disobedient (Atkinson 2018) and resists neo-liberal educational priorities that are

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fundamentally risk-free, centred around notions of strength and predictability (Biesta 2014). It is risky for teachers to engender risk-taking in their students' practices.

The classroom as a collaborative studio

> One might view teachers as temporarily freed from their pedagogical space, where they are constantly and altruistically feeding and supporting the creativity of others to practise their own creativity, eventually transferring the benefits back to the classroom. (Hall 2010, p. 105)

It is worth examining the specific terrain of the art classroom as a site for collaborative and parallel exchange between teacher and student. My ability and confidence to produce my own artwork in the classroom is specific to my context; the head of department at the school had completed the same MA some years before and actively encouraged my artist-teacher practice. Artist teachers will experience a variety of implicit and explicit permissions or restrictions on how they are able to enact their artist-teacher identities while in schools (Wild 2022; Adams 2024; Payne 2024). A simplistic perception of educational spaces sees classrooms as neutral, passive spaces, with interchangeable subjects, objects and content (Wild 2022), however they are 'active, complex and entangled' places (Wild 2024, 14) where relations shift and flow. Tensions between being an artist and being a teacher in the same space contribute to this complexity and entanglement and bringing my own artistic practice into the classroom altered perceptions of instrumentalism and pedagogical hierarchies. Counter to well-established traditional visions of an artist's studio as a privileged and detached ivory tower (Buren 1979) and a site for self-imposed exile (Baldessari & Craig-Martin 2009), separated from other aspects of life, the classroom-as-studio presents an opportunity to erase hierarchical structures and separations and resist simplistic myths around the production of art as a solitary, individualistic practice.

My making took place alongside students in optional exam groups (Years 10 and 11, GCSE, ages 14–16; Years 12 and 13, A-level, ages 16–18). During these lessons, amid the pressures of performativity on both teacher and students, when I deemed students were settled in their own work, I began working on my marionette for short periods of time during lessons, allowing periods of parallel practice to arise. Year 12 and 13 students would also work in the department during their study periods, creating another site for parallel practice. Between discussions about technique, next steps in their projects, and reflections on their work, the students and I worked simultaneously for protracted periods. At times, we were all making art; in the present tense, I was working at the intersection of artist and teacher and exchanges and transmissions of teaching and learning often occurred through a near wordless dialogue.

This working, pivoting between and blurring the edges of the artist and the teacher, might describe a pedagogical third space (Wilson 2008) where power structures and instrumentalist hierarchies can be disrupted and new room for collaboration, negotiation and dialogue emerges (Hooks 1994). The artist Michael Craig-Martin (Baldessari & Craig-Martin 2009, 43) describes the value of

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communal spaces during his time studying at Goldsmiths, such as the library, studios and canteen, spaces 'where everybody was rubbing up against everybody else. And that seemed to generate a kind of companionability'. I propose that my working alongside students created equivalent in-between spaces (within the classroom) and in-between times (within the lesson) that served as third spaces, where interactions and connections of otherness 'might challenge established understandings and practices' (Atkinson 2024, 171). In these third spaces within timetabled lessons, my practice modelled otherness through artistic processes that would otherwise remain hidden to students.

The marionette as a distancing device

My work on the marionette project in a shared space, with my artistic uncertainty and risk-taking on view, gently recomposed the dynamics in the classroom and prioritised dialogue, exchange and parallel working over hierarchical delivery. The self-portrait marionette served as a distancing device between me and my teaching persona, making my own experience of performance in my teaching identity explicit to students. This theatrical distancing reshaped the space between orthodox, instrumental teacher–student relations. With the role and responsibilities of their teacher now approachable topics of inquiry, students felt safe to renegotiate roles in the classroom. Students would ask me about *my* processes and use of materials, *my* thinking on its emerging meaning as it developed (while offering me their own thoughts), and they would enquire where *my* work would go next and what *my* next steps were. The positions of the interlocutors in teacher–student conversations were flipped.

> It has really helped me to develop a creative mindset, in terms of taking risks and experimenting with different styles and materials after having seen my teacher push the boundaries with typical art materials you would see in a standard classroom. (Year 10 art student)

> Creating work alongside students models the way the students should approach art. Although this may not fit with the student's style of work, there is always knowledge to gain and perspective to undertake in order to help you grow as an artist. (Year 13 art student)

In these recurrent third spaces of parallel practice, there was a 'drawing alongside of what mattered' to each of us in our practices (Atkinson 2017), a form of pedagogical caring that seemed to soften instrumentalist structures. The marionette enters this space as a signifier for an endlessly patient, non-judgmental and receptive co-teaching presence. Modelling vulnerability through my making processes, and the presence of my unfinished, materially vulnerable work in the classroom (see Figure 4) can be read as gestures towards a reordering of pedagogical structures that signal my care. In this space, the complex, delicate recognition of otherness as a gift (Atkinson 2024) operates in both directions, between teacher and student. This aligns with Freire's (2017) vision for a continuum of exchange between teacher–student and student–teacher, where instrumental hierarchies can dissolve to make space for a collaborative process of exchange with shared

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Figure 4
The Unfinished Marionette Sitting in the Classroom; The Marionette Kept Safe Alongside Student Work.

responsibility between everyone in the classroom. The marionette's distancing effect drew the instrumental authority of the teacher into question, at a theatrical remove from myself, implicitly suggesting alternative modes of exchange in the classroom.

What might be transmitted and received during these episodes of parallel practice is indeed difficult to pin down and articulate (Fels 2012) which aligns with Green's (2009) characterisation of a 'primacy of practice', that prioritises the somewhat unconscious exchange and interaction of dialogue, bodies and voices, that is 'physically situated and responsive' (Mitchell 2016, 263). In these horizontal exchanges, teachers might share embodied, long-developed, tacit knowledge that is hard to articulate (Polanyi 1958) through their own authentic working, with their expertise embedded in their actions (Schön 1983). Importantly, Wild (2024, 21) observes that exchanges between artist teachers and their students in the flows of an attentive classroom will not necessarily be pronounced, 'they are as likely to be quiet, apparently insignificant sharings of practice and responsive connection with individual students and small groups'. This osmotic, parallel practice, with teacher and students busy attending to multiple, discrete tasks (me attaching cardboard shards to create my marionette's hair; a student stretching paper to prepare a background for a painting; another student intricately cutting between the veins of sycamore leaves; another student editing their digital animation of a tiger drinking from a pool), with meanings and outcomes as yet unclear, might be described as a 'collective adventure' (Atkinson 2024, 66).

Through this sharing of practices, the layered identities of artist teacher and student are explored side by side. The vulnerabilities of risk-taking, uncertainty and not knowing that are inherent in mature art practices are foregrounded. By challenging instrumental notions of teacher professionalism and hierarchical structures of authority, the project proposes vulnerability as a pivotal component in both

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artistic and pedagogical work. In staging the artist teacher self through a marionette proxy, the vulnerabilities of my teacher persona were made explicit, and through parallel practice, students were able to acknowledge and share the vulnerabilities of their practice. The project suggests the value of embodied, practice-led collective adventure as a means of cultivating educational spaces suffused with care.

The project centres around overlapping identities, being an artist, being a teacher and how their performance shifts in prominence and priority on an almost daily basis. The marionette can prompt thinking about performance and performativity in teaching (see Figure 5), alongside some perhaps obvious metaphors about control, manipulation and conforming to someone else's ideas, policy or curriculum. Jones' (2009, 61) connection between performance and aliveness feels particularly pertinent here: 'The object which we call a puppet lives and breathes only because the puppeteer takes great care, for however long the performance lasts and at every moment during that performance, to make the puppet appear to be alive'. My performance with the marionette theatricalises my daily performance of Mr Fuller. The work carries the visual power of a double event (Taymor 1999), of seeing the puppet and the puppeteer together, where the conceit, construction and the performance are all visible at once and 'it's not just the story that's being told.



Figure 5
Exploring and Practising the Marionette's Movements.

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Figure 6
Staging the Role of the Teacher, Performing with my Marionette in Front of the 'Double' Classroom.

It's *how* it's being told' (Taymor 1999, 33). What I saw clearly in the image of me and the marionette in the double classroom (*my* classroom) (Figure 6) was the specificity of my teaching space as an authored, staged space: The posters; current and previous student artwork; accidentally beautiful, failed photocopies; found images. We see a set within a set, as both real space and small-scale theatre reflect on their construction: a superficial, photographic reproduction on cardboard of a personal and iterative accumulation of curated choices that created the appearance of my classroom. We see at once the 'real and the not really real' (Taymor 1999, 45), and the students see the teacher in the classroom, as well as how the performance is constructed.

Reflections on latency and risk

> I do think that it is important to have an Art teacher who is also a practising artist. In my opinion, it's valuable to see, as a student, how your present learning can develop into a future career. It's important to see how creating a piece of artwork is a process that requires time and effort to produce and emphasises how important taking risks is in your work. (Year 10 art student)

Making my marionette provided an opportunity to reflect on my identities in the classroom from a staged distance. Meaning emerged both during and after the

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making process and is still unfolding as my own roles and identities continue to shift and occupy different pedagogical spaces. Sharing artist teacher practices in the classroom can demonstrate 'other ways of being' (Wild 2024, 22) to students, that resist compliance to orthodoxies. Though the expectations of performativity in schools might currently place answers such as *I do not know* out of reach for students in relation to their own work, when asked about the meanings of my work or what I might do next, I modelled a potential future state that embraced not knowing.

My work involved a process of responding to ideas that occurred and emerged over the course of the MA module, as well as ideas long-quiet and latent, from over a decade ago at art school. It is powerful to consider risk from both artist teacher and student perspectives. Students are usually asked to begin at the beginning in their projects. Students experience pressure to be productive, *to have done something* within the metrics of timetabled art lessons. Teaching orthodoxy suggests that a state of not knowing needs to be moved on from quickly, where mind maps or mood boards are proposed for students to generate ideas and be productive. This is not how I started my project; I realise I spent considerable time at the start of my marionette project in a space of not knowing. In my own making process, unlike my students, I acknowledge the amorphous extra space the MA course afforded me in my working. My ideas and work could emerge and unfold in and around my other commitments both in work and at home. Through various stages of production, my marionette occupied classroom space alongside students' work, with protracted periods of not-making and not-producing. My experience of risk and not knowing extended over and through timetabled lessons and the measurable time when I was expected to be working, and I acknowledge this as a privilege in the classroom. Unlike my students, I was allowed to begin my project somewhere nearer the middle.

The experience of not knowing in art practices can be paralysing for artists and students alike. Not knowing can be a difficult state to negotiate and practitioners need to have time to experience and learn the habits of risk-taking and not knowing, as an act of preparedness for 'the germinal conditions within which something unanticipated might arise' (Cocker 2013, 127). My approach to risk in this project is informed by many intervening years since my time at secondary school. A moment of resonance occurs, a realisation-recognition (Fels 1998) of latent, accumulated knowledge converging to embody and articulate my artist-teacher identity in the classroom. Translated through an artist-teacher's lens, I can now understand risk as a vital process in meaningful artmaking, with a potency drawing from its non-compliance and departure from professional norms. However, it would be uncaring to ignore that for many students the risk of equivalent departures from art student norms, at *their* stage of making, might easily be translated into failure. The students are currently working within the system, flawed as it may be. My modelling and sharing of risk must acknowledge all the positions in the system of the school, perhaps hinting quietly towards a possible future way of working.

Cocker (2013, 131) alludes to the qualities needed to work through periods of not knowing, navigating slowed and interrupted practice, as well as the latent knowledge that allows artists 'to respond with unexpected speed and intensity when the time is right'. I think of Dewey's (1976, 48) often-quoted observation of the fallacy that 'a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time'. I can attest that my learning experiences in all educational contexts include lessons that emerged in the hinterland surrounding what was being taught. This collateral

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learning (Dewey 1976) or implicit curriculum (Eisner 1985) thrives in the third spaces found between received hierarchies in the classroom, carried by companionability and care. Having experienced the insight of numerous quiet exchanges during the parallel practice of working alongside students in a classroom as studio, I would adapt Dewey's formulation to suggest that it is also fallacy that a person learns only a particular thing *when* they are studying it. By bringing the making of my marionette project into my secondary classroom, I introduced and modelled adventurous, risk-taking practices that are not a natural part of students' learning experience. My marionette's implicit invitation to renegotiate teacher–student positions and my working practice in the classroom might contribute to latent 'germinal conditions' (Cocker 2013) in my students' art practices that may not fully come into any sort of focus until years from now. As I continue to engage with my own emergent practice, I know I am still learning lessons from those quiet exchanges with my students.

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My data (the email questionnaire and students' responses to questions sent via email) can be made available on request.

Ethics approval statement

Participants were informed of the purpose of the questionnaire and informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

Joseph Fuller is a lecturer in secondary education and subject lead for Art & Design on the Secondary PGCE at the University of Gloucestershire. Joseph maintains a teaching practice in secondary schools in Gloucestershire and a professional craft practice as a potter. Joseph is studying towards the MA Education (Artist Teacher Practice) at Oxford Brookes

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University. Contact address: University of Gloucestershire, School of Education, Health and Science, City Campus, Kings Square, Gloucester, GL1 1BD, UK. Email: jfuller1@glos.ac.uk

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