

Situational Potential and Artistic Pedagogy: Rethinking Student-Centered Creative Learning

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Abstract: This article explores the figure of the student through the philosophical lens of François Jullien's "situational potential," offering an alternative approach to dominant pedagogies in arts education. It argues that, rather than being confined to a predesigned curriculum, the student is an active agent engaged in a situation. Consequently, the development of their own potentialities and learning processes is intimately linked to the potential inherent in successive situations, conceiving learning as a *silent transformation*. The article examines how this paradigm, which prioritizes "deployment efficiency" over "efficacy understood as control and planning," is intrinsically suited to address the diversity of students' styles, rhythms, and interests. Finally, the concept of "deployment islands" is proposed as a practical strategy to foster creativity, connection, and affirmation of difference, allowing students' "cognitive and bodily differences" to become a constitutive part of the learning process.

Keywords: Neuroeducation, Neurodiversity, Situational Potential, Arts Pedagogy, Diversity, Inclusion, Artistic Learning

1. Introduction: Students at the Center of Renewed Arts Pedagogy

Placing students at the center of their own learning process has been a constant in successive pedagogical renewal movements since Jean-Jacques Rousseau formulated this idea in *Emile, or On Education* (1762). However, such centrality must be reconsidered in light of how we now conceive the student—as a plural and diverse agent. This article seeks to open new pathways in arts pedagogy aimed at fostering more creative, sensitive, and collaborative students, drawing on François Jullien's concept of situational potential as a key framework for rethinking arts teaching.

To strengthen the rigor of this approach, this article delves into its methodological implications in dialogue with Artistic Teaching Methodologies (ATM). These frameworks aim to design educational experiences linked to contemporary art, prioritizing collective creation, aesthetic reflection, and meaningful learning. Complementarily, Edward De Bono's perspective is incorporated, who warns of "how inadequate traditional Western thinking habits and customs are" (1996, p. 13), based on a "rigid logic" derived from the

Aristotelian model—effective for technical progress but limiting human development (p. 14).

Although pedagogical advances in recent generations are undeniable, Rousseau’s call to place experience and student self-determination at the center remains a challenge. Within the ATM framework, this vision has gained traction, yet resistances persist, as Robinson (2017, pp. 63–64) notes, stemming from industrial logics still present in education. These tensions reveal enduring rigid structures that restrict students’ creative and relational potential (Biesta, 2017; Garcés, 2020; Manning & Bozalek, 2024; Robinson, 2021).

Three fundamental implications emerge from this problem: lack of intrapersonal development, including intrinsic motivation, critical thinking, and autonomy; limited student engagement in collaborative or cooperative interpersonal dynamics, reduced to achieving measurable outcomes and grades; and student frustration and isolation, particularly for neurodiverse learners whose unique ways of learning and creating are often invisibilized by normalization criteria (Schuck & Fung, 2024).

Although curricula appeal to “meaningful learning,” its implementation often remains limited to prescriptive planning that predefines what “should happen,” leaving little room for emergent processes. Consequently, art and learning are conceived as linear and predictable, with intuition and cognitive uniqueness treated as deviations (Schuck & Fung, 2024). This short-termist culture, which privileges uniformity and results-oriented efficacy, prevents understanding education as a vital and transformative process (Garcés, 2020; Rancière, 2014; Robinson, 2017).

This article critically examines existing literature to assess the relevance of Jullien’s concept of *situational potential* in arts pedagogy, considering both its theoretical significance and practical applicability. The study adopts a theoretical-qualitative approach, grounded in a critical and comparative review of didactic and philosophical sources, including Jullien’s work and its contrast with interpreters of both Chinese and Western traditions—such as Roger Ames, Chad Hansen, François Cheng, Tu Weiming, and Jean-François Billeter. This methodology systematically evaluates how the concept can contribute to the deployment of students’ expressive and relational potential, while providing guarantees of effectiveness in implementation.

The ultimate objective is to rethink learning processes in arts education, positioning students at the center of their creative and formative development, and proposing a pedagogical framework that combines creativity, collaboration, and attention to cognitive differences, in response to contemporary educational needs.

2. Unfolding Creative Potential: From Autonomous Students to Connected Groups

This section introduces the notion of *situational potential*, formulated by François Jullien based on traditional Chinese philosophy and applied here to arts education. Developing this concept involves recognizing “what is already present in the situation, albeit latently,

whose development must be carefully accompanied” (Jullien, 2015). From this perspective, the teacher’s role is not to impose knowledge or direct processes, but to support and foster the unfolding of the potential inherent in the educational situation. Artistic learning thus does not transmit knowledge: it emerges from students’ diverse intelligences and sensitivities, in unique and unrepeatable experiences (Gardner, 2001, p. 145).

Jullien proposes a fundamental shift from Western thinking: not to act on the situation from an external or instrumental logic, but to read its internal potential and accompany its development. In the art classroom, potential is not forced but captured, cultivated, and unfolded. *Deployment efficiency* (Jullien, 2015) is essential in this relational and creative conception, where teacher and students are equally engaged, albeit in different roles. In Jullienian philosophy, efficiency does not equate to efficacy: while efficacy relates to objectives, planning, and control—features of industrial teaching models—efficiency refers to a process’s capacity to generate transformations from its own dynamics (Jullien, 2015, p. 86).

This distinction clarifies how arts education can move away from the productivity-driven models criticized by Robinson (2017) and focus on process efficiency (Manning & Bozalek, 2024), where creation, relationships, and reflection are essential learning elements. The focus is not on achieving predefined goals but on how students deploy their capacities within the collective development of a situation. This connects with Robinson’s notion of the *Element*, understood as “a different way to delimit our potential” (2017, p. 27), involving processes of self-discovery and individuation: most individuals are unaware of “the scope and manner in which their natural abilities relate integrally” (2017, pp. 28–29).

The unfolding of expressive, creative, and meaningful potential refers to progressive learning with spontaneous and non-plannable advances—gradual, *imperceptible transformations* (Jullien, 2010) that are essential for students’ sensitive, cognitive, and relational development. Arts education, from this perspective, operates long-term: it does not seek immediate results but the maturation of sensitivity and empathic, creative ways of relating.

Furthermore, unfolding potential implies moving from the ideal of autonomous creativity toward connected, engaged groups, where creativity emerges relationally; the teacher, rather than explaining to students, functions as a vector of *engagement* (Jullien, 2023). Artistic pedagogy adopts an inductive approach, where such groups generate knowledge internally: students learn to face challenges for which they are unprepared (Prieto et al., 2014).

In other words, “a process is collective by its very nature; it is an ecology of practices” (Manning, 2025, p. 89). Knowledge emerges from concrete experience rather than being imposed from a pre-existing framework. This does not mean fully abandoning explanatory transmission, but when students are central, priority shifts from preplanned

content to their needs, concerns, and unique modes of engagement (Prince & Felder, 2006).

This inductive orientation enables knowledge to be co-constructed from within artistic experience, generating reflection, creation, and transformation situated in the *here and now* of the pedagogical act.

3. The Pedagogical Scenario: Connection, Diversity, and Latent Potential

In arts education, it is essential to recognize that difference, as an intrinsic condition of students, does not constitute an obstacle to learning, personal relationships, or the unfolding of creative potential. When discussing *unfolding* and *relational and expressive forces*, both students' cognitive diversity—a source of enrichment for collective dynamics—and the *counterforces* that tend to invisibilize and suppress these differences, and thus much of the group's potential, must be considered.

These tensions are particularly evident in interactions with neurodivergent students, whose talents are often underestimated—emphasizing only learning difficulties in certain areas—and whose potential remains latent: teacher expectations tend to decrease when a learning difference is diagnosed (Schuck & Fung, 2024).

The effects of this retroactive rigidity on neurodiversity cannot be overlooked, as it generates frustration, impacts mental health, and fosters masking behaviors in autistic, ADHD, or twice-exceptional students (Pfeiffer, 2015). The situation worsens when interventions for these profiles seek to adapt neurodivergent students to neurotypical patterns (Schuck & Fung, 2024), thus reproducing power dynamics in the classroom. Instead of fostering reciprocal peer relationships with diverse learning and interaction styles, a hierarchical model is often promoted in which neurotypical students assume the role of mediator or helper for divergent peers, subtly reinforcing group asymmetries.

Traditionally, special educational needs (SEN) have been approached from a deficit-centered perspective (Maldonado Esteras, 2022). However, neurodiverse configurations are not deficits but singular forms of possibility (Moreno Dulcey, 2025). Therefore, including diversity in the classroom does not mean “adapting” or “tolerating” students with autistic, ADHD, or dyslexic profiles, but recognizing and valuing multiple ways of attending, perceiving, and relating to time, body, and the world. Arts pedagogy should support their development and avoid any attempt at forced normalization.

A potential-based pedagogy—aligned with positive psychology and neuroeducation—positions difference as a driver of learning and a source of innovation in creative processes. Students—conceived as plural, diverse, and dynamic entities—constitute a field of material, affective, and social forces. In this pedagogical scenario, physical and emotional dispositions, cognitive and bodily differences, idle times, noises, or distractions are not deviations from the teaching plan but constitutive components of a transdisciplinary process.

From this perspective, “the incorporation of neuroeducational strategies provides valuable tools for optimizing learning” (Moreno Dulcey, 2025), including multisensory stimulation through specific situational deployments, as well as secondary strategies such as spatial adaptability and flexible timing in sessions. This open, nonlinear nature of the classroom aligns with Robinson’s (2017) idea that human potential expands by recognizing the dynamic interaction of capacities, interests, and relationships.

Authors such as Manning (2024) add a sensitive, bodily, and microgestural dimension to this unfolding, affecting both learning and collaboration. Similarly, Marina Garcés (2020), aligned with Deleuze, proposes an ethic of co-construction of knowledge expressed in her maxim: “don’t think like me, think with me,” highlighting the value of shared thinking and situated learning. This approach fosters *joint engagement* and *distributed creation*, essential for diverse students who bring multiple cognitive perspectives and affectivities to the classroom—as the dogma of neurotypical centrality is abandoned (Manning, 2025).

Aligned with Jullien’s potential-based pedagogy, this approach recognizes that neurodivergent profiles represent configurations of creative potential—often latent due to psychological masking or systematic invisibilization in the classroom—but which could fully unfold in suitable contexts (Fung, 2024). Fung contrasts a disability model with a strengths-based approach rooted in positive psychology (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Petersen). In arts education, these strengths are valuable resources: autism provides hyperfocus, attention to detail, and depth of knowledge; ADHD offers divergent thinking, energy, agility, and resilience; and dyslexia contributes strong visual-spatial reasoning and interconnected thought.

These cognitive forms diversify group creation and reflection, especially when considering high-ability and twice-exceptional profiles, which are prone to metacognition, generating a shared experience. Thus, a potential-based pedagogy also becomes a pedagogy of emotion, meaning, and cooperation, committed to well-being and interdependence (Seligman, 2019; Manning, 2024; Robinson, 2009).

In this context, didactics and creativity are understood as collective and relational phenomena, capable of generating community inside and outside the classroom (Hickey-Moody, 2013). Students become an evolving configuration, shaped not only by encounters with others but also with materials, bodies, and affects. This view converges with Karen Barad’s (2007) proposal, in which entities—human, material, or symbolic—do not preexist their relations but are constituted *in* and *through* them. Her notion of *intra-action* allows learning and creation to be understood as events in which meaning emerges from the relational web of forming entities.

Beyond Robinson’s (2021) eight core competencies—curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, compassion, calm, and citizenship—a ninth educational competency can be proposed: *connection*. Defined as the capacity to engage actively with the present situation, integrating thought, emotion, and transformation in a shared dynamic (Jullien, 2015, 62; McGillbrich, 2024, pp. 51–52), connection articulates

intra-action between subjects, bodies, materials, and contexts, enabling pedagogy to manifest as an event of shared engagement and transformation.

In sum, creativity resides not in the individual but in the relational situation, in the potential interaction between bodies, materials, and affects. From this perspective, arts education activates what is latent, opening space for differences to articulate new forms of shared meaning.

4. Didactic Dynamics of Potential: Exploration, Uncertainty, and Creative Tension

This section outlines a *potential-based pedagogy*, conceiving learning as a practice of emotional, perceptive, and bodily attunement rather than instruction: “it teaches us to read the gradual and continuous inflections present in any situation” (Jullien, 2010). It focuses on students as the core of potential-based didactic dynamics, emphasizing their discrete, active, and creative role.

Students as Explorers of Potential

A pedagogical approach based on Jullien’s *situational potential* allows rethinking arts teaching from process immanence: the situation is not planned but cultivated. The classroom, or pedagogical stage, is configured as a diverse and creative space, where minimal external structure is balanced by flexible internal organization, constantly adapting to emerging phenomena.

Erin Manning argues that “creative potential is not fixed or predefined; it is activated in the situation itself—in the interaction between students, material, space, and context” (2019, prop. 26). This involves exploring *minor gestures* and subtleties that gain significance for the development of the situation—a work not on what *must be known* but on *what we long to know* (Garcés, 2020, p. 175), opening the space of *situational potential*: an uncertain arena where the new can emerge. This idea dialogues with Caeiro-Rodríguez’s (2018) “adventure” and Biesta’s (2017) “beautiful risk,” acknowledging the unpredictability and ethical dimension of education.

Despite decades of innovation, arts education remains anchored in linear, deductive logic. In contrast, the *situational potential* approach opens times and spaces for experience, allowing creation to arise from doing rather than obedience to predetermined results. This does not imply disorder but trust in the situation’s propensity, the creative process’s direction, and students’ capacity to relate, learn, and transform.

The teacher, as strategist of possibilities, guides exploration without directing it: understanding the group, context, and tensions, inspiring, suggesting paths, and sustaining movement. Free exploration of materials, cooperation, and discovery of desired knowledge form the process’s core.

Uncertainty as a Learning Engine

Understanding the art-didactics relationship through *situational potential* focuses on what things *can become* rather than what they are. This contrasts with structured models like *Discipline-Based Art Education* (DBAE), oriented toward standardized outcomes, where difference is treated as error (Robinson, 2001). In contrast, an inductive methodology based on potential requires openness and transformation, viewing error as a learning opportunity and meta-emotion (Caeiro-Rodríguez, 2017).

De Bono (1996) associates creativity with uncertainty and lateral thinking, in sharp contrast to Western efficacy logic. Uncertainty-driven processes seek not correct answers but exploratory drifts where students recognize their voice and adapt their gestures to the situation's *propensity* (Jullien, 2010). Lateral thinking involves capturing latent meaning in the unexpected and redefining the situation with one's sensitivity. This fluid logic, closer to creative thought than Aristotelian reasoning, accepts a margin of inaccuracy as part of the process.

Manning (2019), as a philosopher and arts educator, places creative thinking at the intersection of art, philosophy, and pedagogy. In her *Propositions for Research-Creation*, she states that 'to create is to exceed thought' (prop. 6), opening up new modes of existence in the uncertainty and potentiality of situations. In visual, plastic, and performative arts education, open-ended proposals without imposed phases or goals favor motivational processes and resonant experiences between doing, seeing, and thinking, particularly in diverse contexts.

Inspiration and Provocation as Didactic Resources

Both Jullien and, specifically in the field of teaching, Manning and De Bono propose a philosophy of attention and adaptability that prioritizes perception and becoming over control. Within this framework, provocation becomes a coherent teaching strategy: the teacher inspires becoming according to the propensity of the classroom situation, but also discreetly and indirectly alters the dynamics.

To provoke a critical change in the unfolding of a process, the teacher can, for example, contribute material elements, artistic references, or knowledge related to aesthetics and history, or propose sessions of self-criticism and hetero-criticism on the practice carried out. This would be done with the purpose of reconfiguring the conditions of possibility and expanding the field of experience. An example is the teacher who interrupts a theater rehearsal to reverse the stage space or eliminate words. The aim is not to teach content, but to provoke, activate attention, and encourage lateral thinking. From a conventional perspective, this would seem like a disruption; from a fluid perspective (De Bono, 1996, 2015), it constitutes a *creative disturbance* that enhances learning as a living experience.

Hickey-Moody et al. (2016) state that working in an experimental framework "involves embracing the unknown and negotiating the discomfort that comes with it." These practices generate a fruitful tension: how can I rework what I already know? What is revealed in the unexpected? At this point, De Bono's (1996) *Consider All Factors* (CAF) procedure invites us to consider all relevant factors without fragmenting the situation:

“analysis cuts things into slices; it has its merits, but it is too restrictive for flow processes” (p. 90).

Such an approach implies rigorous creative adaptability, an attentive disposition to what may happen. Jullien (2015) converges with this idea by understanding the desire for rigor and efficiency not as control over the development of the situation, but as strategic attention to its propensity and potential. Both authors shift the focus from the *is* to the *toward*: “Where is it flowing? Where is it leading?” (De Bono, 1996, p. 26).

In short, the didactic dynamics of potential promote a pedagogy of exploration and openness to what has not yet taken shape, where uncertainty, lateral thinking, and attention to the emerging configure a situated, relational, and transformative educational experience.

5. Assessment as Recognition of the Unfolding and Singularity of Diverse Students

Within a pedagogy based on *situational potential*, assessment does not represent a break from the preceding sequence of actions but is a continuous part of the same process. It maintains a situated, co-constructive, and dynamic character, aimed at accompanying the unfolding of learning in its becoming. Nonetheless, it becomes a critical moment of reflection—holistic, evaluative, and metacognitive.

Assessment does not measure the alignment of outcomes with predefined objectives; rather, primarily guided by the teacher, it continues to question the flow of the situation—its *towardness*—attending to factors shaping each educational experience, including material, emotional, and relational aspects (De Bono, 1996; Jullien, 2015). It thus becomes an ethical and relational act, recognizing the unfolding of learning as an event. This understanding requires a paradigm shift: moving from viewing assessment as performance control to conceiving it as recognition of the students’ vital and creative process.

This approach aligns with the notion of relational efficiency (Manning & Bozalek, 2024) and with the commitment to openness and unpredictability (Biesta, 2017, 162), where control over learned content is not the goal of assessment. Assessment fosters awareness of the unfolding process and transformations that have occurred. It also provides moments of personal and group introspection. By valuing diverse cognitive, emotional, and bodily modes—rather than simply “including” them—assessment becomes a didactic strategy of affirmation: difference ceases to be an obstacle to compensate for and instead becomes a generative force, contributing nuances, rhythms, and alternative ways of perception.

Uncertainty and spontaneity underpin assessment activation, as it is not prescribed in a curriculum but responds to a propensity, “to how the situation is carried by itself to lean and promote itself” (Jullien, 2023). Assessment is thus a transition toward reflection focusing on the process itself, toward the *efficiency of unfolding* (2015). Considered aspects include the potential involved in the situation, the line of propensity that nurtures

or diminishes it (2023), and students' capacity to generate transformations and openings in the situation.

Coherent techniques and tools with this vision include debate and group interviews, creative portfolios, participatory observation, and reflective journals. The teacher also observes, notes, and shares key moments of participation, interaction, experimentation, and decision-making: gestures, expressions, and nonverbal forms of emotional and artistic expression are recorded. These procedures make the implicit visible, value processes, and build a more comprehensive view of learning singularity—without judgment. Assessment is redefined as sustained attention, care, and recognition of the other as a creative becoming, where *situational potential* continues unfolding.

6. Main Challenges

Sustaining this pedagogy of potential requires profound transformation in teacher subjectivity and educational institutions. It is not about introducing new methodologies but reconfiguring *ethical and affective* dispositions to inhabit uncertainty, accompany non-linear processes, and embrace the unpredictable. Training teachers to read context, think laterally, and activate collaborative processes is key to creating inclusive learning communities sensitive to diverse contributions.

Among the main challenges of this approach are:

1. Lack of initial structure, which may generate disorientation; *gentle scaffolding* and reflective guidance are recommended.
2. Institutional rigidity and teacher workload, requiring specific training in active methodologies and qualitative assessment.
3. High temporal demand, which can be addressed through phased projects or interdisciplinary approaches.
4. Risk of superficiality, if the aesthetic and historical dimensions of the process are not thoroughly explored.
5. The difficulty of objectifying assessment, which suggests the use of *flexible assessment tools* and narratives focused on the process.

These challenges are not mere obstacles but thresholds of transformation. Facing them implies assuming that arts education does not seek closed answers but activation of modes of existence (Manning, 2019). If this approach loses its critical focus and its emphasis on both intrapersonal and interpersonal development, it runs the risk of trivialising artistic practice, reducing it to mere spontaneous expression. Sustained from an ethic of attention and difference, however, it constitutes a political resistance against educational homogenization.

7. Conclusion and Future Directions

A pedagogical approach based on *situational potential*, with the teacher as a strategist of possibilities, proposes a flexible, open, and transformative vision, where attention focuses not on what must be taught but on *how to accompany the unfolding of what already exists in the situation*. Fluid logic and creative engagement become engines of learning, allowing the educational process to be shaped by emergent phenomena rather than pre-planned outcomes.

In this pedagogy, knowledge is *co-constructed* through relationships among subjects, materials, affects, and contexts. Following Barad's (2007) notion of *intra-action*, learning and creation are understood as events in which meaning arises within the interplay of entities in transformation. Arts education thus becomes a relational and situated space, where each experience is singular and irreproducible, and uncertainty is embraced as an opportunity for sensitive and critical exploration.

While valuing disciplinary models, this pedagogy reverses their logic: instead of segmenting areas (history, critique, aesthetics, production), they are integrated as dimensions of a single process guided by situational unfolding. Artistic production does not aim for a predefined result but for the manifestation of process development and its aesthetic resonance. Correspondingly, assessment shifts from standardized measurement to qualitative evaluation, attentive to individual and collective potential unfolding.

A central aspect of this approach is the positive valuation of latent potential profiles among students—rather than the vague and normalising claim of inclusion policies—especially neurodivergent profiles. From a strengths-based perspective, difference is not an obstacle but a condition of learning. Hyperfocus, visual thinking, attention to detail, or rapid response capacity characterizing certain profiles are understood as creative potentials enriching group dynamics. The classroom is thus conceived as a field of forces, where cognitive, affective, and bodily diversity nourishes collective and creative processes.

Inclusion, in this sense, should not be limited to adapting norms but involves affirming diversity as a source of possibility. Art education thus becomes a political space for equity and emancipation, fostering interconnection between peers, co-creation and subjective transformation. Sustaining this pedagogy requires ethical and attitudinal renewal among teachers, capable of inhabiting uncertainty, reading emergence, and activating collaborative processes.

In sum, thinking about arts education from the perspective of *situational potential* first and foremost affirms the centrality of students in their learning process. It also implies a creative, committed, and openness-oriented approach to difference. As Manning (2019) notes, “the political is the orientation of the process that activates new modes of existence.” Maintaining this openness—among subjects, materials, and worlds—affirms that true education occurs when art becomes an event, a shared unfolding of the possible.

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