

Module 5: Boosting online teaching creativity and learners' engagement through artistic activities

T4T - Tools4Teaching in Digital Education Settings

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About the project

T4T - Tools4Teaching in Digital Education Settings project focuses on supporting adult educators and formal, non-formal and informal training providers to effectively shift towards digital education and to provide the same level of learners' interaction and 'human-like' experience, as in the physical environment. The overall project objective is to strengthen capacity of adult educators and training professionals to build and sustain effective group dynamics in digital education settings, so to better engage their online learners.

Development of Guidelines how to better set up effective group dynamics in online learning environment will help adult educators and training professionals improve their competences about the specifics of building and sustaining effective online group dynamics and ensuring high level of learners' experience in digital classrooms.

The 6 modules provide general methodological guidelines to adult educators how to be more effective in building and sustaining group dynamics in online learning environment:

- **what digital tools and software can use**
- **what behaviour to adopt**
- **how to engage learners in small group online activities**
- **how to use artistic exercises to boost creativity, etc.**

Module objectives

Arts and culture give trainers and tutors different options for promoting positive learning outcomes in their classrooms – as physical, as well as virtual and hybrid. Through creating, presenting and experiencing artistic activities, students could open-up to new perspectives and start conversations on different topics in an inclusive way. This encourages dialogue and cooperation as among themselves, as well as with their teacher or tutor.

This way, educators can easily create a feeling of community and nurture mutual understanding, which are particularly important when learning happens online, and students do not have human contact with their peers. These positive experiences decrease anxiety, frustration, or confusion and set a good base for future learning to happen.

In this module, e-educators will learn about the basic principles of maintaining creativity online and will gain insight on how to develop and nurture their own creative teaching by using different forms of arts. They will also receive some helpful tips on how to keep students' online engagement through creative virtual activities. Practical examples of collaborative online art, music, dance and theatre activities will be presented, thus serving as an inspiration to e-educators, tutors and training professionals, who could easily adapt them to their teaching practices and domains.

Pre-requisites

Before adult educators start with this module, they should become familiar with the concepts of online teaching and blended (hybrid) learning. It will also be useful to get to know the basics of maintaining



effective group dynamics, which will help them assess what could work well with their teaching topics and what should be refined and adjusted to the needs and specifics of their learning groups.

It is advisable to try different digital tools and software for maintaining effective online interaction with learners (proposed in the 2nd Module), as well as to go through the specifics of working in small groups in an online learning environment (described in the 3rd Module). The tips for the educator's role and successful online behaviour, explained in the 6th Module, can also be important to better understand how to apply artistic activities in the virtual classrooms and in blended settings.

Expected learning outcomes (skills and competences)

After going through this module, adult educators are expected to improve their skills and competences in the following directions:

- Learn what the basic principles of online creativity are and how to maintain it in online and blended learning environments
- Know how to apply online artistic activities for building and maintaining effective group dynamics
- Be able to develop and nurture their own artistic skills and creative teaching by using art, music, dance and theatre techniques
- Build their competences on how to keep students' online engagement through creative virtual experiences
- Become familiar with suitable practical examples of collaborative online art, music, dance and theatre activities, which afterwards can easily adapt and transfer to their own online teaching sessions and lessons.

Introduction

Nowadays, facilitating an online course, virtual session or a small group activity requires educators to be creative, innovative and to experiment with different approaches, techniques and media. Keeping learners focused, engaged and motivated in front of laptops, mobile phones and other smart devices requires creating a learning environment, which is safe, non-judgmental and stimulates creativity, experimentation and free sharing of views and perspectives. To set and keep the right floor for these attitudes, trainers and tutors could rely on artistic activities, such as drawing, sketching, music, dance, acting, poetic recitations, etc.

Topic 1. Online Creativity – Definition and Basic Principles

Usually, **creativity** is associated with artists, painters, writers, poets, actors, musicians and other individuals who create artworks on a daily basis. However, it is important in every aspect of our lives, and everybody is somehow creative in their work, especially educators who need to constantly inspire, engage and motivate their students.

Creativity can be defined as *“the use of imagination or original ideas to create something new or different”*. When teaching online or in a blended/hybrid format, educators and training professionals need to stimulate students to go through the creative process completely or partially in virtual environments, in which both sides are remote and often alone in front of different electronic devices. And this has its specifics and constraints as learners cannot easily maintain non-formal relationships and social interaction typical for physical settings.



In its essence, the creative process is **cyclical and nonlinear**. This means that it is ongoing and does not end at the ‘final’ reflection stage.

Instead, the process continues by thinking about what we have learned in the previous activity and applying that knowledge to the next one.

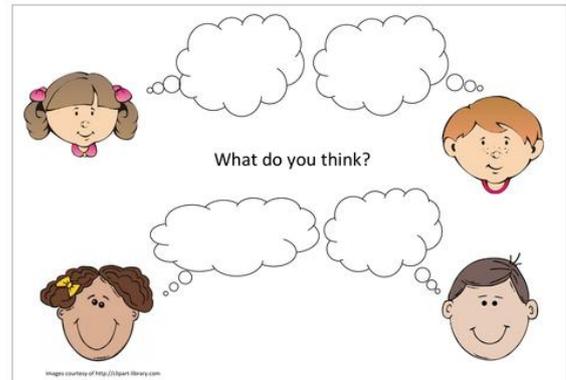
This nonlinearity is even more applicable when we use artistic forms and tools in the teaching process as it allows educators and students to explore the topic and the learning content by constantly creating, rethinking and refining outcomes and next stages.

Other features of creativity are **experimentation and self-challenges**, which need safe and supportive learning environments, in which learners can free their imagination, challenge themselves, struggle a bit, and re-imagine while completing the task.

To nurture such classroom attitudes, especially when learning happens online, e-educators can apply different creative activities for warm-ups, for summarising the outcomes, or just like quick breaks between topics. Such could be **online visual riddles** or **shared online boards**, where teachers and students can make

simple line drawings, which might have different interpretations and stimulate discussions and divergent thinking.

Another approach includes **concept cartooning** through which learners can discuss and review the studied material or can draw/sketch/design virtual visual metaphors to capture the essence of the presented information or to explore alternative ideas about a specific topic.



Practical Exercise: How to use the creative process in virtual classrooms?

1. Planning stage

Usually, artists plan their works by sketching, documenting, collecting information, doing research, thinking, listening, experimenting, etc. before starting the work itself.

So, as an e-educator, you might ask your students to document how they get ready for the artistic activity, for example through taking photos or recordings or by making initial sketches of their ideas and sharing them on a collaborative virtual board.

2. Creating stage

During it, artists take actions such as exploring, experimenting, thinking, redefining, rehearsing, playing, editing and re-editing, and even – failing. At the end of this stage, some sort of a finished product should be created.

So, as an e-educator, you might ask your students to keep a learning diary of the process and to make photos or recordings of their progress. At the end of the stage, you might ask them to share their draft products on a collaborative virtual board or run a common online session, where they can present the results from the creative activity.

3. Reflecting and refining stage

During the entire creative process, artists constantly reflect upon the product and where they want to go with their ideas and skills. Parts of the process are re-thinking and trying out, so as the end result reflects the author's ideas and the messages they want to convey.

So, as an e-educator, you might ask your students to review their diaries and progress and to think about the entire process. Some possible questions for the discussion might include:

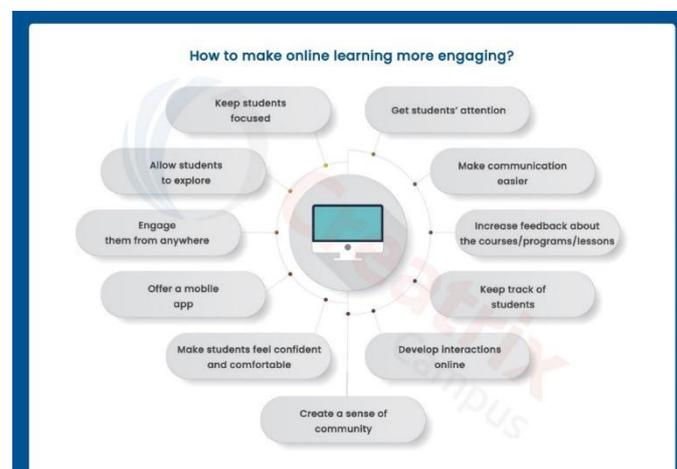
- *How does the finished product reflect your initial ideas?*
- *How has the product changed during the creation process?*
- *In what direction was the change? Why did it happen?*
- *What were the main factors behind the change?, etc.*

Topic 2. Keeping Students' Online Engagement through Creative Virtual Activities – Some Helpful Tips and Examples

Online teaching puts different restrictions and challenges in front of educators, but also affects learners. From one side, teachers need to be creative and adaptive when developing the learning content and by choosing suitable tools and approaches. From the other – students need to keep their concentration and motivation to learning, while facing multiple distractions at their homes or remote virtual classrooms.

So, how could e-educators and training professionals ensure that they engage their learners while away from the usual classrooms?

The diagram below shows some approaches how to make online learning more engaging:



Source: [Student Engagement in the Online Learning - What Works and Why \(creatrixcampus.com\)](https://creatrixcampus.com)

Another approach is educators to encourage online creativity of their students and to plan **online creative boosts** into their curricula and programmes. Usually, these are *quick one-off exercises based on artistic activities that engage students in fun experiences as part of the session content or in between lessons*. They are also based on the principles of experimentation, exploration and self-challenge and allow creative use of unconventional art media.

What should e-educators keep in mind when organising creative boosts for engaging their online students?

- If the boost involves drawing and is not part of an art subject, e-educators should not expect a 'professional' drawing or painting. **The outcome could be some sort of an amateurish sketch on a loose-leaf piece of paper or just a few lines on the shared online board.** The aim here is not to teach students how to 'technically' draw, but to provoke them to experiment and go 'out-of-the-box'. So, encourage improvisation as much as possible.
- **Discovering suitable materials at home or adjusting to a shared online collaborative tool might take longer than in the face-to-face learning settings.** In physical classrooms, educators provide a range of materials, with which students experiment and complete the task. At home, learners have to first identify these materials and after that – think how they could use them and what they could create out of them. And this takes time.

- **Give freedom to online students to choose the materials they will use and to approach the creative task as they prefer.** When learners are at home settings, e-educators will never know what they might have around them. So, instead of saying ‘Visualise your idea by using cardboard and tape’, allow for options. Ask learners to first identify the materials at their disposal and only limit them to how much of one material they can use to do the task.
- **Allow enough time for your students to shift their moods from the serious learning content to the creative exercise.** As they will be alone in front of their digital devices, this might take longer than in the physical settings. If necessary, be the first to take the challenge and do the creative boost.
- **And last but not least – make it all fun!** We are creative only when we enjoy what we do!

Some easy examples of online creative boosts suitable for different cohorts of e-learners

- **Creating comic strips:** They will add humour to your online classroom and are a good way to visualise parts of the learning content, provoke discussions between students or assess progress. You can ask learners to create comic strips and then post them on the shared digital collaborative board or send them in the chat channel. Allow freedom of the approaches – some students might prefer to sketch their comic drawings on paper and scan and post them, while others might prefer to use an app or free animation software and share the results. Observe the flow of creativity and collaboration.
Helpful Resource: *Synfig* ([link is available in the “Tips for further reading” section](#)) is a free, open source 2D animation software, which is a good choice for beginners, who want to animate their comic strips.
- **Telling stories with storyboards:** They are suitable for summarising the content of the online lesson or session or to simplify complex theoretical information and present it in an easy and understandable way. Storyboards allow to visually highlight the key aspects of the content by using illustrations and pictures with notes. They are also a good tool for increasing students’ engagement as with them, it is possible to create simple comic strips which nowadays’ online learners really enjoy.
Helpful Resource: *Creately storyboards* ([link is available in the “Tips for further reading” section](#)) is an easy-to-use software, which also offers ready-made templates, which e-educators can use in their classrooms. They allow to import additional graphics directly from the Internet or from the educator’s laptop.
- **Writing or performing a poem or singing a song:** These types of creative boosts are suitable not only for music or literature lessons, but can also be used for foreign language teaching, history or geography subjects, or even as an energiser between other sessions. When using them, e-educators can assign their learners to write and perform a poem or song on any topic, as options are unlimited. The results are always fun and a refreshment from the ‘screen fatigue’, which might appear after long hours in front of digital devices.
Helpful Resource: *Soundcloud* ([link is available in the “Tips for further reading” section](#)) is an online platform which offers a variety of free background music, which can be used for helping students with their musical experiments.
- **Creating a soundboard:** With that type of creative boosts, e-educators could provoke learners’ experimentation and challenge them to mix different artistic forms and media. You could ask students to go outside or around their homes and record all the sounds and voices they hear. After that, they could make a sensory journal and describe their senses

Usually, **artistic skills** are referred to professional artists and include abilities that enable someone to operate in the fine-arts world. However, they are essential for every creative person, including educators, teachers, tutors and training professionals. The **Online Career Expert Zippia** (www.zippia.com) defines the following **9 artistic skills** that everybody needs to develop:

Type of artistic skills	Definition
Drawing skills	Drawing is a visual art form that focuses on creating images by using two-dimensional surfaces.
Painting skills	Painting is the process of applying colour, paint, or other mediums onto flat surfaces. These mediums are usually applied by using a paintbrush.
Sculpting skills	Sculpture usually is a three-dimensional work of art. Some are created for purely aesthetic reasons, while others might have functional value too.
Printmaking skills	Printmaking is an artistic process related to transferring an image or another pattern from a matrix to a secondary surface.
Music composition skills	Music composition is part of the performing arts category. It includes the process of creating a vocal or instrumental work of music.
Dancing skills	Dancing is also part of the performing arts category. It involves rhythmical movements of the human body following a music composition.
Acting skills	Acting is the process of enactment of a story by adopting a character. It can be done in multiple mediums, such as radio, movie, television show, theatre or another performance.
Writing skills	Writing involves the ability to communicate by using symbols and text. Usually, it is used to evoke emotions, to entertain, to pass information on, and for purely aesthetic purposes.
Filmmaking skills	Filmmaking is part of the visual arts category. It is associated with the process of making moving pictures.

Source: [Artistic Skills For Your Resume \(With Examples\) – Zippia](#)

Some ideas how e-educators could nurture their own creativity and artistic skills when teaching online:

- ✓ *Keep your curiosity and make your online lesson planning a creative experience:* Teaching itself is a creative profession, irrespectively if it is practiced off- or online. Thus, educators can become role models for their students in creative ways of presenting the learning content, expressing and visualising their ideas, engaging with playful prompts and exercises. This way, they will further nurture creativity among their online learners, irrespectively from the taught subject.
- ✓ *Experiment with new teaching approaches and creativity boosting tools, including mobile applications and collaborative software solutions:* The recent developments in different educational and collaborative software and applications make working with them far more easier than a couple of years ago. So, why don't you try a new drawing application or a music making software for your online lesson? Or making a photo collage with your students on a shared digital board? The options are endless and can be limited only by the e-educator's imagination.
- ✓ *Express your creative side:* Many psychological studies suggest that regular engagement with a creative activity, like singing, playing a musical instrument, drawing, making sculptures or pottery,

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dancing, and even knitting and embroidery, can lead to a far more positive state of mind and is an inspiration for new ideas and approaches. Those attitudes might be easily applied into teaching and spread to learners, thus engaging them in the educational process and stimulating their creativity and motivation as well.

- ✓ *Develop your artistic skills but also embrace the limits you have:* As usually educators are not professional artists, nor musicians, dancers or actors, it would be understandable to feel uncertain about drawing, singing, playing, dancing or acting in front of screens or in public, even if it is virtually. However, in teaching you encourage your learners to take risks, to experiment, to make errors and to learn from failures. Why don't you look at your efforts in this direction as an extension of the same process?

Online creative insight - Drawing as a thinking process



In this video, Manuel Herrera, innovation coordinator at Affton School District in Missouri, USA, shows how to easily use doodles and simple shapes (squares, circles, triangles, lines, slashes, arches, and dots) to visualise your ideas.

The main message is that when using drawings in the thinking and educational process, it is not about art, but about thinking and showing your ideas to others! And that this is something which every educator can easily do in their virtual or hybrid classroom.

Source: [Drawing as a thinking process - YouTube](#) (link is available in the “Tips for further reading” section)

Topic 4. Collaborative Online Artistic Activities – Practical Examples which E-educators Can Directly Apply into Their Virtual or Blended Classrooms

Engagement with artistic activities nurtures communication and self-expression of learners and evokes a sense of solidarity among them. It also gives form to their invisible feelings, ideas and emotions, and helps them define themselves as individuals. Thus, collaboration on an art-related project can help teachers and trainers work on building students' motivation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, which is particularly important in online learning environments where all parties are in dispersed locations and the group cohesion is rather vague, compared to the face-to-face settings.

Benefits of Collaborative artistic experiences:



Collaborative art

Collaborative art nurtures the creative flow of participants and teaches them to appreciate each other's similarities and differences in a supportive atmosphere of teamwork. It focuses on cooperation rather than competition and balances individual talents of each learner with the common goal of the entire group.

In collaborative artistic experiences learners work together as equals, share their ideas and perspectives, better understand their own inner feelings and gain similar insights with other participants. All these facilitates building social connections and relationships in virtual classrooms and fuels reflexivity and positive interactions between online students.

What collaborative online artistic activities could e-educators offer to their learners?

Below you could find links and examples of different music, drawing, dance and theatre activities which could be done online and in a collaborative way. They are suitable for different age groups and cohorts of learners and could be easily adapted to different teaching topics and subjects.



Music Memory – The game tests not only participants' memory but also their music talents. It can be played on a mobile phone, tablet or computer. **Helpful Resource:** [Music Memory | Play Free Online Games on PrimaryGames](#)

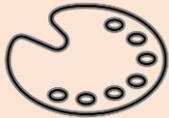
BBC Instrument Matchup – In this fun educational game players need to match musical instruments with their sounds. **Helpful Resource:** [BBC NI - Schools - Musical Mysteries - Home Page](#)

Inside The Orchestra - 8 music activities ranging from matching different instruments to their sounds to composing your own song. **Helpful Resource:** [Orchestra Games – Inside the Orchestra](#)

Music worksheets and online exercises - **Helpful Resource:** [Music worksheets and online exercises \(liveworksheets.com\)](#)

Other helpful resources with collaborative online music activities:

- ❖ **88 free online music games** – [88 free music games online in 2021 | Stars & Catz \(starsandcatz.com\)](#)
- ❖ **Online music games suitable for classrooms** - [5 Best Online Music Games for The Classroom | Solfeg.io](#)
- ❖ **11 best online music games for classroom** - [11 Best Online Music Games For Your Classroom \(2022\) – Dynamic Music Room](#)



Alternate paint & 3-D crafts ideas – Amusing art activities at home by using home-made paints (from coffee, fruit, vegetables, spices or foods) and making craft objects with paper, cardboard, baking soda, etc. **Helpful Resource:** [27 Art Activities and Lessons to Try at Home - The Art of Education University](#)

Sixty-Second Sketch – With this activity, the teacher picks a topic and asks students to draw it for one minute. Or s/he might pause during the reading and ask students to draw a picture of what is happening at that time in the story. At the end, the sketches/drawings might be shared on a virtual board or in the chat. **Helpful Resource:** [17 Fun Virtual Team Building Activities for Students \(teambuildinghub.com\)](#)

Draw in response to music – An energising and relaxing activity in which learners are led by musical rhythms to make instant drawings or sketches. **Helpful Resource:** [20 Art Therapy Activities You Can Try At Home To Destress - Lifehack](#)

Jig zone – This is an online puzzle site with an art section. Learners can do different puzzles by dragging the pieces into place. **Helpful Resource:** [Art Jigsaw Puzzle Gallery - JigZone.com](#)

Street Art – This is an online game by The Tate Museum, London, UK, which allows the participants to make their virtual street artworks. **Helpful Resource:** [Street Art | Tate Kids](#)

Art worksheets and online exercises - **Helpful Resource:** [Art worksheets and online exercises \(liveworksheets.com\)](#)

Sketchpad – an online collaborative drawing tool - **Helpful Resource:** [Sketchpad - Draw, Create, Share!](#)

Other helpful resources with collaborative online art activities:

- ❖ **MRS. MOORE'S ART PALETTE** – [Online Art Activities - MRS. MOORE'S ART PALETTE \(weebly.com\)](#)
- ❖ **Free Online Art Games for the Art Classroom** - [Free Online Art Games for the Art Classroom - The Arty Teacher](#)



Creative Theatrical Ideas & A How-To Guide to Virtual Theatre – Through these activities, e-educators could prepare their students for a virtual theatre performance and to manage the stage via Zoom. **Helpful Resource:** [VT_Howto.pdf \(pioneerdrama.com\)](https://pioneerdrama.com/VT_Howto.pdf)

Carnival Walks – This activity is a combination of movement and theatre. Each movement reflects a different animal and uses different musical instruments. The e-educator can ask students to explore different animals and move through the virtual space how that animal might move with the music. Encourage them to think about the facial expressions and how they could add to portraying the animal. **Helpful Resource:** [5 Ways to Add Dance and Theater to the Classroom - The Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM](#)



The emoji dance – The activity is suitable for kids but could be adapted to adults as well. The rule is to dance to an emoji expression or theme. **Helpful Resource:** [17 Fun Dance Games And Activities For Kids \(momjunction.com\)](https://momjunction.com/17-Fun-Dance-Games-And-Activities-For-Kids/)

Balancing the book dance – This is a simple and fun dance activity that teaches players about body control and posture while enhancing their concentration. Some lightweight books and music are needed to start the game. The learners need to place a book over their heads before the music starts. During the dance, they have to balance the book without letting it fall on the ground. **Helpful Resource:** [17 Fun Dance Games And Activities For Kids \(momjunction.com\)](https://momjunction.com/17-Fun-Dance-Games-And-Activities-For-Kids/)

Freeze Dance – This activity is excellent for burning off energy and for giving a brain break. It is suitable for children but could also be adapted to adults. The educator plays music while learners dance. Once the music stops, the players have to 'freeze'. **Helpful Resource:** [25 Virtual Classroom Games and Activities \(signupgenius.com\)](https://signupgenius.com/25-Virtual-Classroom-Games-and-Activities/)



Glossary

Online Creativity - Use of imagination or original ideas to create something new or different. The process happens partially or entirely in a virtual environment and participants apply different online tools and applications to brainstorm, shape and do the end result.

Concept Cartoons - Concept cartoons are visual tools composed of a series of caricature drawings. Through them educators and learners can discuss and review the studied material or can draw/sketch/design virtual visual metaphors to capture the essence of the presented information or to explore alternative ideas about a specific topic.

Online Creative Boosts – These are quick one-off exercises based on artistic activities that engage students in fun experiences as part of the online session content or in between lessons. They are based on the principles of experimentation, exploration and self-challenge and allow creative use of unconventional art media.

Creative Experience – A form of creative interaction of people and groups towards a constructive and innovative synthesis of views and goals. In the process, participants engage either with unfamiliar or approach the familiar in unfamiliar ways.

Artistic Skills – A set of skills which are usually referred to professional artists and include abilities that enable someone to operate in the fine-arts world. They include: drawing, painting, sculpturing, printmaking, music composition, dancing, acting, writing and filmmaking.

Collaborative Art – This is a process of production of an artwork that involves a team to create it. Each participant equally contributes to the process. Collaborative art focuses on cooperation rather than competition and balances individual talents of each learner with the common goal of the entire group.

Collaborative Artistic Experience – A form of artistic experience in which people and groups work together to create an artwork, which reflects the ideas, views and experiences of all participants. In the process, the learners collaboratively solve problems, complete tasks, explore new artistic tools and media, and learn new concepts.



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Tips for further reading (*bibliography and links*)

- [How to Use the Creative Process to Support Online Learning - The Art of Education University](#)
- [Creativity in the classroom - YouTube](#)
- [Concept Cartoons Research - Millgate \(millgatehouse.co.uk\)](#)
- [Using concept cartoons for assessment | Assessment Resource Banks \(nzcer.org.nz\)](#)
- [Student Engagement in the Online Learning - What Works and Why \(creatrixcampus.com\)](#)
- [How to Maximize Creativity When Teaching Online - The Art of Education University](#)
- [Synfig – Free and open-source animation software](#)
- [Stream and listen to music online for free with SoundCloud](#)
- [Storyboard Maker | Storyboard Creator Software Online | Creately](#)
- [Artistic Skills For Your Resume \(With Examples\) – Zippia](#)
- [Drawing as a thinking process - YouTube](#)
- [CAPP Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme - CAPP \(cappnetwork.com\)](#)
- [The Benefits of Collaborative and Individual Art Projects for Young Children \(mathandreadinghelp.org\)](#)
- [Creative Experience: A Non-Standard Definition of Creativity: Creativity Research Journal: Vol 33, No 2 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

Check also our **T4T Library**. Here are some useful resources:

- <https://www.europeana.eu/en/distance-learning>
- [Redesigning object handling workshops for online teaching | Teaching & Learning - UCL – University College London](#)



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