

Cross-disciplinary Pilot Project with Organizational Psychology and Art Therapy: “Lunch and Learns”

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Abstract: *A pilot project of “Lunch and Learns” at Adler University, Vancouver BC Canada demonstrates the effectiveness of cross-disciplinary graduate education for MA Organizational Psychology and Master of Counseling: Art Therapy students. In this leading edge educational initiative, students provided onsite interactive learning events to organizations and presented business professionals with practical take-aways, tools and techniques for enhancing well-being and performance at work. Including graphic recording as part of the presentations provided businesses exposure to innovative visual ways to enhance imagination, creativity and productivity in the workplace. The pilot project, its background and rationale are described in the paper, as are first pilot-testing and evaluation results regarding its benefits and improvement needs. We conclude the paper by outlining future implications particularly for education in organizational psychology and art therapy-based organizational consultancy.*

INTRODUCTION

The basis of this pilot project conducted at Adler University, Vancouver, Canada was to provide a cross-disciplinary educational experience for students in the Master of Arts in Organizational Psychology (MAOP) program and the Master of Counseling: Art Therapy Program (MCP:AT). The intent was to operationalize the Adlerian value of community by giving students from the different programs a project to partner on in order to foster communication and connections on campus. Alfred Adler wrote about people maintaining healthy functioning as centering around the ideas that fundamentally humans all have a need to belong (Ferguson, 2010) and that a sense of cohesive community is crucial to Well-Being (King & Shelley, 2008). Thus the importance of a positive community atmosphere on campus and creating living connections between students in different programs has always been valued at Adler University.

The students were linked through a “Lunch and Learn” project which provided onsite interactive learning events to organizations and presented business professionals with practical take-aways, tools and techniques for enhancing well-being and performance at work. Including graphic recording as part of the presentations provided businesses exposure to innovative visual ways to enhance imagination, creativity and productivity in the workplace. The need for 21st century organizations to open to innovative

strategies as a way of engaging employees and exploring new ways of thinking (Adler, 2006) made graphic recording the ideal link between the disciplines. The student teams learned how to join knowledge in their fields into a creative combination that meets the need for change in the way organizational consultancy is delivered.

Connections to the Research: Education for organizational psychology and counseling/art therapy students at this time in history when there are dramatic and constant changes in the economy, technology and our way of life requires a forward looking vision which includes the decompartmentalization of our graduate education structure.

Research is showing that an increasing number of companies are including creative processes in their strategies for management (Adler, 2006) in order to increase engagement and effectiveness in meetings and workplace wellness (Smith, 2014). The effectiveness of working with visual techniques to deliver engaging and memorable training and developmental experiences for employees is also being increasingly recognized (Bailey, 2011).

Hands-on, experiential learning with particular attention to the visual component is being worked with as a tool to enhance visioning (Sibbet, 2012) and transform productivity in the workplace (Sibbet, 2010). As art therapy-based organizational consultancy becomes more recognized (Huet, 2011) the need for cross-program education to meet the unique training requirements becomes more vital than ever.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Who: Graduate students in the MAOP and MCP: AT programs were crossed trained by Program Directors and faculty in each department. Consultants were invited into the training process to bring in the community perspective.

Educational Objective: Program Directors wanted to increase “workplace wellness” within the organization of the University by aligning with Adlerian values of community in order to create for students a “sense of belonging” to a greater community than just their individual program of study. It was recognized that such an atmosphere of increased connection and conversation could give rise to innovative and creative educational

experiences. The experience was “made real” by including the local business community who also served our educational mission of training socially responsible practitioners.

Initial Training Workshop: MAOP and MCP: AT students came together for the first time in a 3 hour workshop to train in: a) the basic skills of graphic recording; b) dynamic presentation skills; and c) professionalism.

Student Involvement: Students from the MAOP and MCP: AT programs were engaged to deliver a majority of the Initial Training Workshop in order to maximize their feeling of ownership of the project. A senior MAOP student prepared a PowerPoint presentation to teach her peers the following information:

- a) an overview of the project;
- b) how to make and deliver effective presentations;
- c) an introduction to graphic recording;
- d) an introduction to the topics that would be the focus of the presentations.

Four MCP: AT students were engaged to graphically record the Initial Training Workshop in real time, as a live demonstration of what would be taking place when the students presented the Lunch and Learns to different community organizations.

The four graphic recorder students were situated at the front of the room alongside the MAOP student presenter. Each recorder worked in his/her own artistic style to create a visual image of the content of the presentation. The MAOP student presented the pilot project concept, the outline of what the students would be expected to do and the basic framework for a powerful presentation to a company while the graphic recorders worked to highlight specific facts, concepts and ideas using visual images drawn on an easel. This innovative and engaging learning experience provided the foundation for what was to come for the students over the next few weeks.

Topic Creation: MAOP students were asked to generate presentation topics that: a) they were most passionate about; b) would be most relevant to business leaders and working professionals; and c) they saw as a potential niche area in their field. This initial list was presented to organizations who

were asked to choose topics immediately relevant to their organization and directly applicable to the work the company performs.

Companies were allowed to choose from the following list of topic ideas:

- The 21 day happiness challenge: Building the five pillars of well-being at work
- Job crafting: Shaping the future of your work
- Finding “Flow”: The art and science of mindfulness
- Building high-performing work teams
- Leading from the field: Navigating the collective emotions of a room
- Gratitude and Appreciative Inquiry: Creating an upward spiral
- Creating and sustaining positive habits: Bridging science and practice
- A leader’s guide to Co-Active coaching
- Developing a blended value proposition: People, planet and profit
- Transforming your survey data into sustainable change
- Design thinking and practice: Innovating in a corporate context
- Investing in strengths: Leveraging your signature strengths at work
- Resilience at work: Building resilience in the face of change and uncertainty
- Creating from conflict: Finding the eye of the storm
- The envisioning lab: Creating and living into a shared vision

Positive Psychology: The topics chosen were all in line with the current trend towards incorporating positive psychology concepts and practices within the workplace to promote wellness and productivity. Positive psychology is defined here as “a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits and positive institutions” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Positive psychology seeks to compliment, rather than displace, the historical focus of clinical psychology on mental illness by emphasizing “states of optimal human functioning and fulfilment, and the facilitation and promotion of well-being” (Emmons, 2006, p. 3).

The most popular topic requested by almost every organization was the “21 day happiness challenge”, which is in line with the positive psychology movement. The students ended up presenting on "Resilience at work", "Job crafting", "Gratitude and Appreciative Inquiry", "Creating from Conflict", "Finding Flow" and "Investing in Strengths".

Team Selection Process: After the Initial Training Workshop students from each program were asked to team up so that there were two MAOP presenters paired with one MCP: AT student who would be their graphic recorder. Many students chose to pair up based on mutual interest in a particular presentation topic. Others paired up based on what they thought would be a good organic fit between personalities. The team selection process was a learning experience for the students from both programs since building effective teams and working with different personalities was a major part of this project. Students in the MCP: AT program learned how to speak the “MAOP language” of Organizational Psychology and the MAOP students learned to speak in metaphors and symbols – a more “artistic visual language”. Both groups of students ultimately had to adjust and adapt their styles to create a new presentation together for the benefit of the organization they would present to.

Preparation of the Presentations: Once the teams were formed, the students were responsible for meeting and practicing their presentations. Areas for evaluating their performance were provided and each team was instructed to ensure that their presentation met all criteria. For the pilot project, the students were given one week to put their presentations together and polish their performances before presenting to a team of evaluators at the Dress Rehearsals.

Dress Rehearsals: The Dress Rehearsals were conducted at the Adler University campus in several different rooms. Each room had a team of evaluators consisting of a Community Consultant, one MAOP and one MCP: AT faculty member who provided written and verbal feedback to the students immediately after their presentations. An evaluation form was created that included feedback on the content of the presentation, the style of the presenters, the presenter characteristics and the use of graphic recording to enhance the experience. Students were expected to come to the Dress Rehearsal fully prepared and appropriately dressed “as if” they were presenting to their actual organization.

Many of the teams struggled through the Dress Rehearsal. This was due to: a) the lack of practice time; b) unfamiliarity with subject matter; and c) teammates working in differing modalities. However, the Dress Rehearsals were an enormous part of the learning experience for everyone involved in the project. The students learned how to work under ‘real life’ pressure and discovered what it takes to be mindfully prepared to present in the moment.

The project coordinators learned valuable lessons about coaching students and giving effective feedback.

Delivery in the Community: After the Dress Rehearsals students were asked to polish their performances before going out to present to the business community. The students then delivered their presentations as onsite learning events through complimentary “Lunch and Learn” sessions. These sessions were interactive and engaging, presenting business professionals with practical take-aways, tools and techniques for enhancing well-being and performance at work.

The organizations themselves represented a heterogeneous sample of for profit and non-profit organizations throughout the lower mainland. Teams were responsible for tailoring their presentations to the individual organization that they were presenting to. Despite the short notice to the participating organizations, there was overwhelming demand for student teams to present and each team was eventually matched to two different organizations.

The Organizations: The organizations covered a range of industries, including business consulting, banking, professional sport, health care, social enterprise, and the public service. Marketing for the event was minimal. Within a week of sending out our invitation to the British Columbia Organizational Development Network and our practicum partners more than enough participating organizations were identified for each pair of students to be matched to two organizations. In order to meet the demand, we needed to recruit Alumni to present as well.

The participating organizations are listed below:

HiVE Society
Homewood Health
Parkgate Community Services Society
Blue Shore Financial
The Vancouver Whitecaps
The City of Vancouver
Whitewater West Ltd.
South Granville Senior’s Centre
Health Services BC
Spark Expansion Consulting

Evaluation: Each participating organization was provided with a Lunch and Learn Workshop Evaluation Form (See Appendix A) to supply the students, faculty and organization feedback about the experience. Each team received the written feedback from their site and this feedback was collected and analyzed by the project coordinators. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluations of student performance were gathered from the perspective of participants.

Participant Evaluation Measure: A 26-item Deeper Learning Assessment Instrument (DLAI) was developed to measure the extent to which the intended objective of creating a contextually-based, experientially driven, transformative learning experience was achieved from the perspective of participants (see Appendix A). Participants were first asked to assess each of the items on a five point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” followed by a series of open ended questions where participants could provide feedback on the strengths and developmental areas of each co-facilitator. The instrument was derived from the grading guide provided to students to guide their preparation (see Appendix B).

Results: An analysis of descriptive statistics for the DLAI and qualitative comments from participants for the first and second learning event was conducted to determine student performance on each of the learning criteria, identify strengths and opportunities for development, and ascertain whether performance improved between the first and second workshop.

Average scores on overall satisfaction (4.5) indicate that participants were generally satisfied with the learning experience. Results further indicated that in all of the pairs, mean scores for each of the learning criteria increased between the first and second learning event. Students attributed this increase to a “practice effect” noting an increase in confidence both with the content and facilitation skills (e.g., powerful questions, active listening), a willingness to rely less on notes and slides, incorporate more of their own authentic personality into the learning experience, and adapt their content and process to meet the needs of participants.

Contextually based: An average score of 4.3 for the contextually based learning scale indicates that participants found the learning event to be tailored to the needs of participants (4.6), meaningful, and relevant to the

working lives of participants (4.5), and walked away from the experience with new knowledge (3.8) and valuable resources (4.3) they could immediately put into practice. Several participants reported a deeper level of self awareness, which was reinforced in some cases by self assessments of, for instance, personal resilience and work related well-being. An expanded awareness of the organization's collective capacity was also reported by participants.

Examples of practical resources students developed for participants included a USB key with videos, websites, PowerPoint slides, publically available articles and a bibliography of additional references. Other pairs of students prepared websites or blogs where participants could go to access additional resources and participate in discussion threads to continue the dialogue and expand their learning community. Several participants expressed a desire to keep the graphic representation of the group's learning experience on display as a "practical resource to remind us of our creative capacity", "an anchor we can always return to" and a "symbol of our community".

Experientially Driven: Results indicated that, overall, participants were emotionally and intellectually engaged by the learning events (4.1) and felt that the students reached an appropriate balance between the presentation and experiential components (4.3). While participants expressed an appreciation for the research findings and conceptual frameworks presented, the majority of the comments focused on the value gained from the experiential activities such as a mindfulness meditation, the "opportunity to share with and learn from co-workers and others".

A common theme that emerged across host organizations was a desire to engage in "open and authentic discussion rather than a lecture". The opportunity to engage in open discussion combined with personal reflection enabled a realization among participants that "I know more than I thought on [the topic] and there are others who care about it as much as I do". A number of participants expressed a felt sense of community that stemmed from "knowing that others struggle with the same challenges I face with this topic [resilience]".

Opportunities for development focused on a similar theme where participants felt that some workshops would have benefited from more experiential exercises and collaboration among participants. Additional feedback suggested that the time constraints prevented the group from

engaging in a deeper, more meaningful discussion and application of the topic to their working lives. Participants further reported that students could develop their skills in debriefing experiential activities to internalize the principles and tactics covered, explore potential action steps, uncover opportunities and challenges participants may encounter, and come up with collective strategies to overcome them.

Transformative: The average score on the transformative learning scale for the first (3.4) and second (3.9) events with a high standard deviation (2.4; 2.1, respectively) suggests that participants were varied in the extent to which they experienced a significant shift in their beliefs, values and/or assumptions about the topic (3.5) and left the workshop committing to a meaningful change in some aspect of their lives (3.8). Below is a representative sample of comments that indicate a significant shift took place in beliefs, values and assumptions and commitment to action. “I’m leaving with a new definition of resilience I can own.”

“I’m determined to use the information from positive psychology to improve my day to day working life.”

“I leave with a renewed appreciation of my own strengths and the strengths of this organization.”

Interestingly, these comments came from workshops where there was a closing activity requiring participants to commit to taking a meaningful action step following the workshop to improve their personal or professional lives. They were then asked to follow up with the presenters letting them know what step they took and any impact this new behaviour had on themselves and others in their lives. Some students chose to set up an exclusive online discussion thread for participants and co-facilitators where they can share their action steps and support each other as they face current and future transitions.

Co-facilitation: Average scores on co-facilitation for the first (3.8) and second (4.3) learning event suggest that the students demonstrated the competencies covered in rehearsal and that these skills improved with practice. The highest rated competencies for both events were demonstrating curious inquiry, powerful questions and active listening (4.5) and complimenting each other’s presentation style presenting in a complimentary, cohesive and mutually supportive partnership (4.3). While

recognizing and shifting the emotional energy of the group (3.4) and adapting the presentation content and process (3.7) to achieve the desired learning objectives were the lowest rated competencies for the first event, notable improvements were made in the second event (3.7 and 4.2, respectively). The following comments highlight the competency strengths of the co-facilitators from the perspective of participants:

“The flow of the presenters conducting workshop was excellent.”

“Both facilitators were great listeners and encouraged participants to speak up.”

“Excellent job bringing everyone into discussion - listening and reforming answers and respecting the participants.”

“Facilitators created an open-minded environment where it was easy to learn.”

Participants also highlighted opportunities to improve the co-facilitation by “engaging the audience more”, “relaxing, breathing and pausing”, and “providing more specific examples relevant to the working context rather than high level examples.”

Presentation: With respect to the presentation style, participants strongly agreed that visual aids were well prepared, informative, engaging and not distracting (4.2) and that the co-leaders brought their authentic personality, artistry and creativity (4.4). These scores were fairly consistent across the two learning events (4.0 and 4.5, respectively). Evidence of authentic expression can be found in qualitative comments where participants noted the unique qualities of the facilitators, such as “a good sense of humour”, “great story teller”, “talking from personal experience”, and a “calm demeanor”.

Participant comments related to student creativity and artistry highlighted the impact of graphic facilitation on participant learning:

“The image capture piece was really creative and compelling. I've never seen that before and the visual/spatial element brought the words to life. So much better than just plain text.”

“The graphic display created an accessible and imaginative aspect that pulled all components together.”

“The visual images helped get us out of our heads”.

For the most highly rated graphic facilitators, participants noted the importance of “explaining the purpose of the graphic facilitator and ongoing explanation of imagery rather than silent participation.” For a number of events, participants would have wanted “a more thorough debrief and explanation of the graphics” in order to fully appreciate its value. To the extent that these elements were missing from the workshop, graphic facilitation was more likely to be seen to distract rather than contribute to participant learning.

Debrief Meeting: Students were invited to attend a Debrief Meeting after each team had presented to their chosen organization and after the evaluations were done. In these meetings teams shared their experiences about what worked and what did not with each other and staff at Adler University.

Many interesting insights came out of the Debrief Meetings. For example, several teams shared that the graphic recording during the actual presentation was distracting for participants and therefore they chose to move their graphic recorder to the back of the presentation room thereby minimizing the distraction. For these teams the graphic recorder presented the organization with the completed visual image at the end of the presentation. Other teams decided to keep their graphic recorder front and center but have him/her focus on highlighting just a few key points they wanted to make.

In order for these insights to come to light teams had to experiment, take some intellectual risks and learn to communicate openly and honestly with each other throughout the project. The Debrief Meetings also served as informal celebrations of the hard work and effort that went into the project. Students left the session feeling a sense of accomplishment and knowing that they had some very valuable presentation skills and connections with other professionals that they did not have prior to participating.

IMPLICATIONS

This pilot project has implications for the field of education, the Adler students, Adler University and the organizations involved.

Implication for the Field of Education:

For both the field of art therapy education and organizational psychology the need to develop and research the impact of cross-disciplinary training specific to art therapy-based organizational consultancy is indicated particularly given current challenges in graduate education. Innovative organizational explorations are indicated with regard to working with art therapy to strengthen the other half of our brains and bring the practice of psychology back into alignment with the origins of our field – the psyche or “animated spirit”.

Implication for the Participating Students: There are research implications with regard to students expanding their social and professional network and profile to differentiate themselves in a competitive labour market emphasizing professional experience. This project provided a “real life” opportunity for the students to not only learn from the faculty and staff but from each other across departments. MCP: AT students became familiar with how their skills could be utilized in the business world and MOAP students gained more insight into how the world of visual representation can make the “invisible visible” in a way that connects ideas and people. The seeds of new opportunities have been sown in the students through gaining experience of how it feels to partner with people in other fields of knowledge in order to engage in socially responsible practice.

Implication for Adler University: Areas for further research include the impact the lunch and learns have had on program enrolment and local recognition of the University and participating programs.

Adler University with its emphasis on community values and training socially responsible practitioners is in a unique position to provide cross-program education which spurs the training of a whole new breed of professionals equipped to meet the needs of the working world. As long as the University continues to “walk its talk” and operationalize the values of community and connection on campus in order to achieve the ideal of optimal functioning for students, creative and leading edge Alumni will continue to graduate and make a real difference in the world.

The Lunch and Learn project created an atmosphere of collaboration and community that has stayed with the student population at Adler University long since the project itself finished. Many of the MCP:AT – MOAP students have continued to work together on other school initiatives and

projects. Several teams have forged meaningful collegial partnerships that will see them through the rest of their education at Adler University and into their careers after. The project fostered a true spirit of team work among all who participated including the faculty members who have continued to collaborate and develop this project for the future.

It is creative intersections like these that contribute to the public perception of Adler University as a dynamic and student centered institution that provides outstanding educational experiences for its students, staff, faculty, Alumni and Community Partners.

Implication for the Organizations: Future research is needed with regard to bringing the science and principles of psychology to the organizations and the broader community in a way that is compelling, accessible, and of immediate use. A community partnership with a University who keeps up with the leading edge of thought and research is a powerful alliance for any business organization with a vision to keep up with the constantly changing times.

Implications for Future Projects: For future projects of this nature the following is recommended:

1. That suggestions from participants on future topics of interest be incorporated to maintain the relevance of the content.
2. That consideration is given to making online discussion threads on the organization's intranet a standard offering to deepen the learning, create a community of support, and forward action on participant goals.
3. That a Deeper Learning Assessment Instrument be developed including action to:
 - a) Establish the validity and reliability of our participant evaluation form as a student thesis project.
 - b) Re-administer the transformative scale to participants to determine whether personal and organizational change has been sustained over time.
 - c) Have co-facilitators self rate their own performance using the instrument to compare their perceptions with those of participants.

4. That the Debrief Meetings be kept and **amplified** particularly because of the need to identify subtleties due to the newness of the experience.
5. That the Project be incorporated into credit courses. The MCP: AT students could be offered instruction on the basics of Graphic Recording and Graphic Facilitation (two separate but similar disciplines) where they could be taught graphic recording skills such as developing a visual short hand specifically for common terms in the business world. Specific emphasis would be on provision of graphic recording within the context of a lunch and learn designed to enhance the learning experience.
6. That more time be devoted to practice sessions for the teams so that the dress rehearsal portion of the project is a much more professional presentation experience for the students. Specific attention would be paid to teaching:
 - a) Facilitating debriefs;
 - b) Recognizing and shifting the emotional energy of a group;
 - c) Adapting presentation content and process in real time (i.e., “dancing in the moment”);
 - d) Designing an alliance between co-facilitators;
 - e) “getting present” prior to the event;
 - f) Reducing the content covered to allow more time for group interaction and discussion.
7. That with regard to marketing:
 - a) More time be given to market the joint venture;
 - b) That the contact person be someone who is involved in the event so that potential participants can get answers to their questions immediately. (Vezina, M.)
8. That the University ensures enough students to cover interest and high demand.
9. That the “Star Framework” (O’Neill & Eleniak, 2015) for co-active facilitation continued to be developed as an educational tool for other educators interested in cross-disciplinary training.

CONCLUSION

Choosing to visually represent the group dynamics that happened during presentations at the “Lunch and Learns” was an innovative, cross-disciplinary addition which contributed significantly to providing memorable workshops for the business community and forging relationships between them and the University, connections which will serve everyone well into the future. The results of this pilot project indicate the need for continued exploration into crossing the educational fields of art therapy and organizational psychology in order to train dynamically effective teams of art therapy-based organizational consultants. It is this “new breed” of graduates who can meet the increasingly recognized need for creative, innovative and imaginative practices in organizations for the optimization of productivity and workplace wellness.

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LUNCH AND LEARN WORKSHOP EVALUATION

We would greatly appreciate your feedback on the “Lunch & Learn” workshop you have just completed. Your opinions are important as they will help us to identify our strengths and growth areas as facilitators. For each statement below, **please circle the number that best describes the extent to which you agree or disagree with that following statements.** If you do not agree with a statement, please clarify this issue further in the “Other Comments” section at the end.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I learned something new that I can put into practice right away.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The learning event has equipped me with valuable tools and resources for my professional practice.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The learning event was tailored to the needs of participants.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The content was meaningful and relevant to my working life.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The objectives of the learning event were clear.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The learning event started and ended on time.					
7. There was an appropriate balance between the presentation, participant involvement, and exercise components.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I was intellectually and emotionally engaged.	1	2	3	4	5
9. As a result of this learning event, a significant shift occurred in my beliefs/values/assumptions about the topic.	1	2	3	4	5
10. As a result of this learning event, I have committed to a meaningful change in some aspect of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The facilitators were skillful in their use of curious inquiry (e.g., powerful questions) to draw the wisdom from participants.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The co-facilitators complimented each other’s presentation style.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The co-facilitator’s presented in a cohesive, mutually supportive partnership.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The co-facilitator’s were able to recognize and shift the emotional energy of the group to achieve the desired learning objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The co-facilitators were able to adapt their content and process in the moment to meet the needs of participants.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Visual aids were well prepared, informative, engaging and not distracting.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Co-facilitators brought their authentic personality, artistry and creativity into the learning experience.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Overall, I the Lunch and Learn session achieved its intended objectives.	1	2	3	4	5

What from this workshop was most valuable to you?

What did you value most about how _____(insert co-facilitator 1's name) facilitated the learning event?

What would you like to see more of from _____(insert co-facilitator's 1's name)?

What did you value most about how _____(insert co-facilitator 2's name) facilitated the learning event?

What would you like to see more of from _____ (insert co-facilitator's 2's name)?

What did you value most about how _____(insert art therapy

student's name) contributed to the learning event?

What would you like to see more of from _____ (insert art therapy student's name)?

What topics are you interested in learning more about for future ***Lunch & Learns?***

Other comments:

