

My First Experience with a PWD Participant in an AL Session

by Jennie L. Verano

I had the privilege to be part of the hosting team of the WIAL Philippines Movement event last 23 April 2022.

Our team promoted the event to different people through various social media platforms and personal group threads. Through my college "Ateneo Psychology 1995" Viber group, I was able to have three (3) college classmates interested to sign up and attend the Movement.

One classmate, Maria Luisa, is mute due to a brain aneurysm. She was interested to learn about Action Learning (AL), but she was worried that she can't participate. I, too, was worried for her. But as I noticed our WIAL poster for the event that distinctively includes a Person with Disability (PWD), this fueled my confidence to having Maria Luisa join the event. See attached poster.

Since Action Learning promotes leveraging on "Diversity of Insight and Experience", I thought it would be a great for her (and me) to experience a diversity challenge like this to learn Action Learning with familiar college classmates in a safe space, while she can participate via chat box.

It was going to be my first time to conduct my first AL session, and my first time to have a PWD participant.



What went well?

At first, my mute participant was not participating in the first half of the AL session. She may have felt excluded and disengaged. I intervened to remind her that it is a safe space for her to ask questions via the chat box, while she practiced her chosen leadership competency.

I intervened by mentioning to the team that Maria Luisa has yet to participate. I also addressed the team: *"it seems that all questions are coming from just a few members, and all answers coming from a few. How does this impact the team?" "What happens if this continues?" "What can be done to make things better?"* After this, participants became more aware of being inclusive, and asked more questions to Maria Luisa. This gave her the opportunity to share and ask on-point questions that gave the Problem Presenter more creative ideas to answer her problem. Our AL session conversation became more meaningful.

What can be improved?

I could have been more sensitively aware of my mute participant's lack of participation in the first half of the session. Instead of calling out the participant's name to include her in the conversation, I could've addressed the team generally, and reminded everyone that the first ground rule of Action Learning is "anyone can ask questions", and that it is a safe space to ask questions via chat box. I could've asked more questions like *"team, who else who have not asked a question?" Or "who else do you want to hear from?"*

My biggest learning

I learned that being a AL coach is a totally different role and approach than being a facilitator. During an AL session, I should learn to take off my facilitator hat, and just trust the AL process and script. It's a very different style to learn to ensure everyone is included, intervene when learning is needed, and end with "who has the next question?".

The other participants were grateful to have a shared unique experience with Maria Luisa. This Action Learning experience with a PWD has helped me and the other participants become more mindful and sensitive to create an inclusive and safe environment for all participants to engage and contribute authentically and effectively.