Exploring the Influence of Role Reversal on Disability Inclusive Planning and Practice: An Action Research Approach in Local Government

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Statement of Originality

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

Katie Butler

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This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, protocol number: 2021/068).

Contents

Abstract

The full realisation of Australian social policy seeking to advance the inclusion of disabled people relies on government organisations taking appropriate actions to proactively uphold rights by enhancing accessibility and inclusivity of policies, processes and service delivery. This study aimed to gain a further understanding of methods successful in building capability in disability inclusive planning and practice within government organisations. The study drew on Vick Finkelstein's upside-down-world analogy, originally developed to illustrate the social model of disability by demonstrating the socially constructed nature of disabling barriers by reversing the experiences of those with and without disability. Taking place in a NSW regional local council, this disabled-led action research study presented a group of 13 council personnel with role reversal activities in the form of barriers typically experienced by disabled people, limiting their access to the physical environment, to information and communication. Assisted by the disabled research facilitator and fellow disabled Expert Contributors, participants were guided through a process of problem-posing, critical dialogue and action planning, inspired by Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Council personnel then carried out actions to enhance inclusivity of the council's practice over eight months. The study collected qualitative data from the action research workshops and from individual interviews. The results demonstrated that role reversal activities were effective in enabling personnel to understand disability from a social model of disability perspective and to take action against barriers to participation and inclusion. Further, the action research itself facilitated collaborative work and problem-solving; led to the identification of organisational facilitators and barriers to inclusive practice; fostered the development of champions; and influenced action beyond the action group itself. This research demonstrates that role reversal activities facilitated by disabled people, coupled with collaborative work and action, such as that facilitated in action research hold great potential for enhancing the disability inclusive planning and practice of government organisations.

A Note on the Use of Language

Throughout this thesis I have used identity-first language, preferencing to highlight disability as an integral and proud part of personhood. Identity-first language is an accepted language convention in Australia (People with Disability Australia, 2021).

Chapter 1

Introduction: Promises, Policy, Practice and Missing Links

The full enjoyment of opportunity and inclusion in Australian society depends on the availability and accessibility of the local community, education, employment, health care, justice, transport and housing. This is not yet a reality for all disabled people in Australia, but instead, captured in the vision of Australia's Disability Strategy:

> …an inclusive Australian society that ensures people with disability can fulfil their potential, as equal members of the community. (DSS, 2021)

The realisation of this vision relies on government organisations at federal, state and local levels taking appropriate actions to proactively protect the rights of disabled people by incorporating measures of accessibility and inclusivity into their policies, processes and service delivery (DSS, 2021). The current study is based upon the premise that, ultimately, the success of this policy relies on the personnel within government organisations possessing the relevant awareness and knowledge to engage in disability inclusive planning and practice in their day-to-day work. As such, it seems crucial to understand how to advance this knowledge and practice within government organisations. With greater understanding in this regard, an increased capability to support government organisations may be identifiable, and hence further methods to make meaningful advancements under current Australian disability inclusion policy discovered.

My resolve to further this understanding and undertake this research evolved from my curiosity about the significance of attitudes and behaviours in dictating the outcomes of disability inclusion initiatives. Early in my career I was employed as a Disability Inclusion Officer in a regional local council in New South Wales, Australia, between 2012 and 2017. I observed how the success of my work depended almost entirely on whether I was able to influence others to adopt inclusive attitudes and behaviours. Understanding how to attract buy-in into inclusive practice became my central focus, because it seemed it was the crucial element I needed to advance outcomes in the workplace and local community.

One well defined avenue to influence practice is through personnel training. However, I found existing popular methods for raising disability awareness problematic. Simulation activities had long been a method utilised in disability awareness training. As a disabled person, witnessing the responses of those undertaking simulations, such as wearing a blindfold or using a wheelchair for a short time felt deeply uncomfortable. It seemed to me that these brief experiences of impairment inspired far too much pity and wonderment to be helpful in producing genuine empathy for the experiences of disabled people, let alone action to bring about further inclusion. Simulation activities aim to imitate the experience of impairment, however, even this seemed inaccurate to me, as those pretending had no opportunity to develop the skills that disabled people develop to operate effectively in their day-to-day lives. I considered that what might be more important and impactful than getting a glimpse of impairment would be helping others to better understand the social barriers which contribute to our marginalisation and exclusion.

I was 18 years old when I first learned about the social model of disability. In the first year of my Undergraduate Social Science degree, I read a prescribed text, a chapter called, ‘The Social Construction of the Disability Problem’ by disabled sociologist Mike Oliver (1990). The impact of this single text had a profound impact on my life, and how I understood my positionality in the world as a blind person. I was suddenly enlightened by a new understanding that the marginalisation and disadvantage I had experienced to that point in my life was due to a society which was not built to be accessible to someone like me, rather than being the result of any personal failings. I understood that I had encountered numerous social barriers, usually in the form of inaccessible information and attitudes which had effectively influenced the trajectory of my life so far (Oliver, 1990). These understandings gave me the words to better advocate for the rights and opportunities of myself and others. Ultimately, the discovery of the social model of disability has contributed to the development of my career in community development and diversity, equity and inclusion work. It has also underscored my research inquiry into disability, community and inclusion.

It was this strong affinity with the social model of disability which influenced my work carrying out disability awareness initiatives in my role in the local council. I suspected that representing the experience of disability from the social model of disability perspective could not only bring about more accurate and meaningful understandings, compared to simulations, but also provide greater empowerment to make change by producing definitive insights into tangible actions that could be taken to improve accessibility and inclusion. I began to experiment by manufacturing role reversal scenarios, adding barriers to information, communication and the built environment into disability awareness training and campaigns. I was met with indignation upon handing out information in Braille, and caused minor chaos when a video from the Chief Executive Officer was published without sound or captions, staff assuming their computers were broken. After the initial disruption, many staff affected demonstrated understandings of the significance of barriers such as these which could block access to potentially crucial information and were able to identify more inclusive solutions. It was these powerful results that drove me to undertake this very research study, considering whether these activities could have an impact in contributing to sustained outcomes in disability inclusive planning and practice.

My interest in better understanding ways to develop the capability of government personnel to work in disability inclusive ways has also been influenced by the major reform of disability social policy over recent years. Changes have occurred at all levels of government. In 2013 the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme began transforming the way disability support was provided in Australia (DSS, 2021). In 2014 the *Disability Inclusion Act* was passed in NSW, requiring state and local government public authorities to take a greater role in influencing community inclusion (Dawson, et al., 2019). As both a disabled person and policy actor, I have been invested in seeing and understanding the impact of this policy change (Butler, 2023). With policy development came opportunities for meaningful social change like never before. However, over time, as policies progressed in their implementation, I became more curious about the factors that either strengthened or weakened their outcomes. The policy context of this research is discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

In the current study I employed an action research approach within a different NSW regional local council. I investigated methods of enhancing disability inclusive planning and practice. The action research approach also meant that the local council had the opportunity to utilise the learnings of the project in their day-to-day work. By considering government personnel could develop capability for disability inclusive planning and practice through first gaining an appreciation for the social barriers that come with living as a disabled person, I developed an experiential learning experience facilitated via a full day workshop. I drew on the work of Vick Finkelstein (1988) to back my approach. Finkelstein's writing demonstrated the social model of disability by proposing the imagining of a world in which the realities of disabled and non-disabled people are reversed (1988). This concept allowed the illustration of the socially derived nature of barriers which impact the participation and inclusion of disabled people (Finkelstein, 1989). I therefore, reproduced barriers to a physical premises, to information and to communication, barriers which are commonly experienced by disabled people. In tandem with these representations, Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) then encouraged critical exploration of social barriers, the factors which contribute to them, and enabled the personnel to create an action plan, specifying tasks they would undertake to advance their disability inclusive practice. I recruited two disabled fellows to take up roles as Expert Contributors. They worked alongside me to implement the role reversal activities and helped facilitate the critical reflection among the local council personnel.

Over 32 weeks (eight months), the research project saw personnel engage in cycles of action research, as they worked to implement their action plan, developing and refining approaches to make positive organisational change. Over this time I was able to identify the crucial factors that either helped the personnel engage in disability inclusive planning and practice, or, adversely, caused barriers. My attention was focused on three main areas of observation. Firstly, the emotional and behavioural responses arising from the role reversal activities; secondly, the organisational factors encountered by the personnel as they strove to implement their action plan; and thirdly, the impact of the overall project in influencing their practice and contributing to change. To gain these insights I collected data from multiple qualitative sources, including the original full-day workshops undertaken with

13 employees of the local council; observations recorded in field notes; a mid-term workshop; individual interviews; and a wrap-up workshop. This thesis shares and critiques the findings of the action research study.

1.1 The Rise and Stall of Inclusion Policy and Planning

In the recently finalised legislated review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the overarching conclusion determined that there had arisen a too great dependency on the NDIS for providing disability support in Australia (DPMC, 2023a).

> We want all governments to commit to creating a unified ecosystem. The NDIS should be one part of a big system that supports people with disability. (DPMC, 2023a)

The review asserted that this overreliance on the NDIS for delivering individualised and specialised disability support has led to a scheme which, after only one decade of operation is now predicted to be unsustainable in its current form (DPMC, 2023a). The bigger system to which the review referred, would involve governments contributing more significantly to supporting disabled people to enjoy social and economic inclusion (DPMC, 2023a). The NDIS review made 26 recommendations, some of which focus upon placing responsibility back on other government departments to provide more mainstream accessible and inclusive service delivery (DPMC, 2023a).

It is curious that this situation of overreliance on the NDIS has arisen, for it was not the only subject of disability policy reform taking place in Australia in recent time. Australia became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability in 2008 (DSS, 2011). Subsequent policy reform came in the form of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 which promoted a vision to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of social and economic life (DSS, 2011). Part of the core purpose of the National Disability Strategy was to "drive improved performance of mainstream services in delivering outcomes for people with disability" (DSS, 2011). As signatories to the strategy, federal and all state and territory governments were required to act upon its six outcome areas which indicated a policy response toward: accessible and inclusive communities;

rights protection; economic security; learning and skills; health; and personal care and support (DSS, 2011).

While the outcomes of the strategy were intended to be broad and reliant on enhanced inclusivity of mainstream services, a predominant focus developed around delivering on the personal care and support outcome focus area, in the form of the NDIS (Davy, et al. 2019; DPMC, 2023a; Hallahan, 2015; Mellifont & Smith-Merry, 2016). Hallahan (2015) suggested that it was not unexpected that this focus had become so significant, with the countless stories of disabled Australians struggling to obtain the most fundamental support in a broken disability support system, revealed in the *SHUT OUT* report of 2009 (NPDCC, 2009). The NDIS was intended to meet this unmet need through an insurance model, under which participants would prove eligibility to gain an individualised funding package (Walsh & Johnson 2013). In a practical sense, federal and state government funding contributing to disability-related spending was redirected into the NDIS (Buckmaster, 2016), naturally removing it from other initiatives. In 2021-2022, the focus on the NDIS had become so significant, 93% of all government disability related spending was channelled into the scheme (DPMC, 2023b).

The problem of this disproportionate focus and the risks it posed was not unforeseen. In the 2019 implementation review of the National Disability Strategy, it was predicted that without more attention on improving the accessibility and inclusivity of mainstream services, the need for specialised disability services would continue to rise (Davy, et al., 2019). Before this, Hallahan, after only two years of the scheme's operation asserted that the NDIS had attracted this dominant focus, largely to the detriment of policy which had the power to influence broader rights recognition, participation and inclusion (2015). They cautioned the risk of allowing this disproportionate focus to prevail, asserting that with inadequate attention on barriers to social and economic inclusion and rights, a welfare provision-based system alone would effectively limit individuals' agency and reinforce entrenched dependency on service provision (Hallahan, 2015). Despite outwardly espousing to operate in line with the social model of disability, the eligibility criteria of the NDIS are principally based on a person's satisfaction of adequate deficit (Horsell, 2023). The scheme is, at its core, a system which reinforces medicalised and deficit-based thinking towards disability, reliant on participants' ability to demonstrate neediness for funds (Hallahan, 2015). It is problematic that this discourse prevails most significantly in Australian disability social policy, as alone, it does little to challenge the systemic discrimination and rights violations that disabled people continue to experience (Horsell, 2023).

Within the NDIS itself there has also been a skewed focus towards the personal care and support components of the scheme. Originally, individualised funding packages were not intended to be the sole component of the scheme. In its 2011 report, the Productivity Commission asserted the scheme's success depended on a three-tiered system (Productivity Commission, 2011; Walsh & Johnson, 2013). Where tier three was intended to provide individualised support packages for those with significant and permanent impairment, tiers one and two were intended to build community capability; support to form community connections; and provide referral and information to other, community-based supports (Productivity Commission, 2011). These essential components of the scheme never developed to their best capacity (DPMC 2023b). The intention to influence broader community inclusion through the provision of Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grants and the use of the local area coordination service (LAC) to connect people to opportunities and supports outside of the NDIS fell far short of ambitions (DPMC, 2023b). This was both because the LAC service was insufficiently resourced for this work, and because there were inadequate support services funded or supported outside of the NDIS to link to (DPMC, 2023b). With disputes between government departments over who is responsible to pay for what, as well as a significant shortfall of other governments to ensure their mainstream services are accessible and inclusive (DPMC, 2023a), the intention to depend on broader community accessibility and inclusion, as part of the overall NDIS has been largely unrealised.

The true consequences of a policy agenda which has allowed insufficient attention on rights recognition and mainstream community inclusion is starkly illustrated in the final report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. The Royal Commission found that the extent and nature of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion, segregation, rights denial and discrimination experienced by disabled people was extensive and spread across all life domains and stages, often having a cumulative impact (Sackville, et al., 2023a). Although Australia has in place many mechanisms to promote the rights and inclusion of disabled people, including federal and state anti-discrimination law, national strategies and policies, the Royal Commission determined that, given the evidence obtained during the Royal Commission, Australia's current disability rights protection was failing to adequately uphold the rights of disabled people (Sackville, et al., 2023b).

The Royal Commission asserted that, since Australia's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability in 2008, insufficient steps have been taken to incorporate obligations of the convention into Australian law (Sackville, et al., 2023b). There are inadequate measures and remedies to ensure rights are recognised, upheld, asserted and defended, as well as a lack of obligation on Australian governments to take positive duties to proactively ensure the enjoyment of rights and avoidance of harm in the development of policies and decision making (Sackville, et al., 2023b). The Royal Commission also heard evidence of community attitudes, ableism and a lack of awareness of the rights of disabled people as contributing to the perpetration of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (Sackville, et al., 2023b). The Royal Commission emphasised that the general lack of awareness for the inherent rights of disabled people, is also evident among those in leadership and decision-making positions in government and non-government organisations (Sackville, et al., 2023b). The impact of this ignorance means that services and workplaces exacerbate discriminatory practice (Sackville, et al., 2023b). Disabled people themselves are also often unaware of their own rights, and this, combined with the lack of proactive protection, and difficulty of accessing remedies when denials and discrimination occur, means that these rights go unfulfilled (Sackville, et al., 2023b).

An experience which could be seen as illustrative of Australia's insufficient disability rights awareness and protection is the difficulty of disabled people to secure and maintain open employment in Australia. In 2018, only 53.4% of disabled people were in the labour force, compared to 84.1% of people without disability (ABS, 2018). Within the labour force, the unemployment rate of disabled people was 10.3%, compared to 4.6% of people without disability (ABS, 2018). These employment rates have failed to improve for disabled people over the last 20 years (Buckland, et al., 2024), and most concerningly, throughout the entire implementation of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, while the unemployment rate of people without disability reduced (Abs, 2016; ABS, 2018). Based on modelling, Buckland, et al., (2024) found that given only one third of NDIS participants of working age had employment related goals included in their NDIS plans, their status as NDIS participants reduced the likelihood of their being employed by around 7%. These problems have persisted amidst extensive policy, service and funding reforms, indicating that the broader policy approach to protect the rights of disabled people and reduce barriers to social and economic inclusion has had significant failures (Buckland, et al., 2024).

Among the factors which are considered to contribute to this high unemployment rate, discrimination is one very significant and systemic issue (AHRC, 2016). Of the 3,736 complaints received by the Australian Human Rights Commission over 2021-2022, those made under the Disability Discrimination Act made up the greatest amount at 52%, with 22% relating to employment (AHRC, 2022). In 2021, a survey of 3000 Australian workers found that 45% of those with disability experienced discrimination or harassment in the last year (DCA, et al., 2021). The Willing to Work inquiry completed by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2016 heard countless recounts of employer discrimination towards people with disabilities at all stages of engagement with employers, from recruitment; disclosure of disability; access to the work environment; when requesting reasonable adjustments; and at dismissal (AHRC, 2016). The inquiry found that the consequences of experiencing discrimination were significant, impacting ongoing engagement with the workforce; health and wellbeing; self-worth; self-esteem; and financial stress (AHRC, 2016).

Often driving disability discrimination in employment are attitudinal and organisational barriers (Meltzer, et al. 2020; Sackville, et al., 2023c). In an analysis of employment related disability discrimination complaints in Australia, Darcy et al. (2016) concluded that much disability discrimination occurs due to ignorance of employers or potential employers; a lack of initiative to discuss arrangements that can be put into place to make employment viable; and the perceived impact of disability based on assumptions and stigma. Disabled workers are often subject to an implicit negative bias of incompetence (Antonopoulos, et al. 2023). Meltzer, et al. (2020) found that workers with intellectual disability could be subjected to low expectations of capability and capacity, leading to them feeling devalued, disrespected, or unable to progress in their careers. Attitudinal barriers are also channelled into more systemic barriers which tend to become impenetrable organisational structures, such as inaccessible recruitment methods; inherent requirements of positions based on bias and ignorance; and a lack of awareness for the legal obligation to implement reasonable adjustments to enable disabled people to undertake their roles (Sackville, et al., 2023c).

Despite the rise of disability inclusion policy and planning broadly in Australia over the last 16 years, the skewed focus upon delivering on the NDIS above all else has resulted in critical problems in the scheme itself, as well as failing to adequately advance the rights protection of disabled people. Within a policy era which should be seeing significant advances in social and economic inclusion, discrimination, exclusion and mistreatment are commonplace. The Royal Commission provides evidence indicative of significant shortcomings in societal attitudes implicitly perceiving disabled people as worthy of subpar inclusion in community and economic life, demonstrated through poor experiences across all life domains (Sackville, et al., 2023a).

Yet, now in its second iteration, Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 again conveys a vision for an inclusive Australian society (DSS, 2021). Like that which came before, the strategy has outcome areas in employment and financial security; inclusive homes and communities; safety, rights and justice; personal and community support; education and learning; health and wellbeing; and community attitudes (DSS, 2021). To make the vision of the strategy a reality, the recent NDIS review and the findings of the Royal Commission indicate governments must give much more attention to proactively upholding the rights of disabled people through leadership and decision making that improves the inclusivity of their policies, mainstream services, and the communities they operate within. The complexity of this task is underscored by the general lack of awareness for the rights of disabled people, which is also present among leaders and decision-makers within government and non-government organisations (Sackville, et al., 2023c). Raising this awareness could be seen as a critical factor which must be addressed in order to see genuine progress under the strategy.

1.2 The Local Government Context

At the local level of government, local councils are significant providers of community resources and facilities (Local Government NSW, 2016). Nationally, local councils employ over 190,800 people across 400 occupations (SGS Economics and Planning 2022). Local council employees deliver a wide range of services including, planning and development assessment; roads; waste management; sport and recreation; arts and culture; community and economic development; and child, youth and family services and facilities (SGS Economics and Planning, 2022). With this broad scope of local impact and service delivery, there are multiple ways disabled people interact with local councils, as job applicants, employees, Councillors, residents and customers. It was for these reasons that I found local government to present an ideal landscape in which to position this study. Local government is unique in its capacity to impact so many aspects of day-to-day life, and subsequently influence the community inclusion of all people so significantly.

The relevance and value of this study was also indicated by recent social policy reform obligating NSW local councils to provide more accessible and inclusive service delivery. Although individual care and support under the NDIS undoubtedly received the majority of focus throughout the National Disability Strategy's 10-years, the strategy did succeed in putting in place stronger frameworks to underscore the work of state and local governments in advancing disability inclusive policy and planning (Davy, et al, 2019; DSS, 2021). In New South Wales, the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (NSW) was introduced, legislating a NSW Disability Inclusion Plan, and Disability Inclusion Action Plans (DIAPs) in all NSW government departments, agencies and local government councils to be renewed on a four-yearly basis (Disability Inclusion Act 2014). In the case of local government, councils were required to have their first DIAP in place by July 2017 (Disability Inclusion Act, 2014). The purpose of a DIAP under this Act is to outline the commitments and strategies of such public authorities to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of their organisation and that of the broader local community (Disability Inclusion Act, 2014).

The introduction of this legislated requirement meant, for the first time, many NSW local councils were needing to undertake strategic planning to specifically address areas of accessibility and inclusion (Butler, 2023). Prior to the introduction of the new legislation, only 32% of NSW local councils had a Disability-related Action Plan (ARTD Consultancy, 2013). These plans were created voluntarily under the *Disability Discrimination Act of 1992* to work to address and reduce potential instances of discrimination (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015; McGrath, 2008). In a Disability Action Plan created voluntarily, there is no requirement to ensure coverage over all matters which impact accessibility and inclusion. After undertaking a content analysis of local government disability action plans created under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, McGrath (2008; 2009) concluded that councils predominantly focused on making improvements to the physical and built environment, with actions addressing social and attitudinal issues being far less evident. NSW local councils creating DIAPs under the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* need to ensure their plans align with the identified outcome areas of the overarching NSW Disability Inclusion Plan (Dawson, et al. 2019). Their DIAPs must include strategies to improve attitudes and behaviours toward disabled people; create more liveable communities; bring about more opportunities for meaningful employment; and improve accessibility of systems and processes (Dawson, et al., 2019). Alignment with these outcome areas does ensure that DIAPs strive to address a broad range of social issues and barriers to inclusion (Butler, 2023).

NSW local councils are now in the midst of implementing the second generation of DIAPs under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014, which makes it possible to understand some of the outcomes of the first generation of DIAPs. I undertook a content analysis on the reported achievements of 32 NSW local government DIAPs, identifying strengths in delivery and suggestions of challenges experienced by local councils (Butler, 2023). While DIAPs reported actions across the four outcome areas stipulated by the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan (Dawson, et al., 2019) my analysis found that a third (33.7%) of all reported key achievements related to improvements made in the built environment, such as accessibility upgrades and innovations (Butler, 2023). Reports of achievements relating to creating meaningful employment opportunities were also significant, but narrow in their impact (Butler, 2023). Only a fifth of the 50 achievements related to employment were actual employment outcomes and were usually trainee, program assistant or entry level roles, suggesting something of the challenge in making significant change in employment policies and practice (Butler, 2023). Other areas of reported achievement related to creating opportunities for participation in community activities and events; improving access to information; and strategies to incorporate accessibility into council planning and process (Butler, 2023). Councils also demonstrated their investment in developing community, employee and business capability, reporting numerous examples of education initiatives, campaigns and training programs with the intention of heightening positive attitudes and behaviours toward disability (Butler, 2023).

Capability development is a valued component of workforce development in local government (Dawson, et al., 2019; Local Government NSW, 2017). Set out in the Local Government NSW Capability Framework are a set of skills and qualities to which personnel of local government are encouraged to align in order to provide the highest quality service to their communities (Local Government NSW, 2017). While these capabilities are encouraged to be sought when recruiting local council personnel, they are also considered to be skills that should be developed as part of learning and development programs. Working Collaboratively is one of the specified capabilities, under which local council personnel are expected to, “Be a respectful, inclusive and reliable team member, collaborate with others, and value diversity” (Local Government NSW, 2017). A positive impact reported by NSW government agencies and local councils related to the mandatory requirement to maintain a DIAP was the rise in workplace training and development that followed (Dawson, et al., 2019). However, while capability development is valued, there can be significant challenges in sourcing and delivering training (SGS Economics and Planning 2022). 70% of responding councils in the 2022 Workforce Skills and Capability Survey identified challenges to delivering adequate workforce development training (SGS Economics and Planning 2022). The most common challenges in delivering training were born out of impacts from the Covid 19 pandemic; difficulties finding quality and appropriate training; and including training within busy workloads (SGS Economics and Planning 2022). Despite potential challenges however, local councils continue to demonstrate value of training as a central component to build their disability inclusive practice.

With the purpose of better informing the current study, I undertook a desktop review of all current NSW local council DIAPs. I found the focus upon the development of disability inclusive practice through education and training remained a strong theme. Actions range across community campaigns, upskilling for local business, and training for staff and councillors. Out of 96 NSW councils who had a current Disability Inclusion Action Plan in February 2024, nearly 80% (n = 76) contained actions intending to provide education to council staff and or Councillors in areas of disability awareness or inclusion. Among these, 73 specified this education would occur in the form of training, and three did not specify how the education would occur. The indicated intentions of training usually centred around raising awareness of disability and improving the ability of Council staff to provide customer service to, communicate with, work with or employ disabled people. In this sample of DIAPs, most often, the action did not specify the methodology of disability awareness training that would be utilised. Among those which did, North Sydney Council noted elected officials and executives would undertake experiential disability awareness training. Although it is unclear exactly what this experience would be. Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council specified that they would be investigating a train the trainer type model to progress the rollout of their training. Often councils referenced the training would occur as part of the new staff induction, while others noted it would become part of the annual training calendar. Only one council specified that disability awareness training would be mandatory for all staff to complete (Please consult Appendix A for a full list of reviewed DIAPs). This data demonstrates that personnel training is an established and highly relevant method relied upon by local councils to bring about capability development and the enhancement of practice, including toward disability inclusion-related outcomes. It seems suggestive therefore, that the methodology and content of personnel training is worthy of consideration given its crucial link to bringing about quality outcomes within the current context of disability inclusion policy.

1.3 Overview of the Thesis

Across the proceeding chapters, this thesis has explored the influence of role reversal activities and their influence on disability inclusive planning and practice in a local government organisation. A brief outline of the chapters is provided below.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: Organisational Approaches to Advance Disability Inclusion

Chapter 2 explored current knowledge relating to the advancement of disability inclusive planning and practice. Literature from the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) field provided overarching context and gave valuable insight into the positionality of disability within this practice. The review narrowed into considering the factors of importance in fostering DEI practice, focused wherever possible on examples relating to disability inclusion. The chapter moved to explore approaches to disability awareness raising through personnel training. In considering potential improvements to the delivery of disability awareness training, the review explored the possibilities presented by Vick Finkelstein's upside-down-world analogy (1989) and the application of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (1970). The chapter concluded by listing the research questions developed for the forthcoming study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology: Problem-Posing and Influencing Practice with Practical Action Research

Chapter 3 discussed the action research methodology and qualitative methods applied in the study. This chapter traced the origins of action research as I worked to find and define the ideal approach for this research. My positionality as a disabled researcher, as well as the role of Expert Contributors was discussed. The full study design was articulated, aiming to ensure transferability of the approach. Finally, the data analysis, recruitment and ethical considerations were described.

Chapter 4 - Results: The Impacts: Experiencing, Learning and Influencing

Chapter 4, the first results chapter primarily focused on articulating the impacts resulting from the delivery of the role reversal activities. The chapter discussed the responses of participants as they experienced and responded to the role reversal activities. The chapter progressed to explore the influence they went on to create as a result of their participation in this action research.

Chapter 5 - Results: The Outcomes: Understanding, Planning, Responding and Acting

Chapter 5, the second results chapter focused on the practical implementation and outcomes of the action research approach. It worked to describe the participants' identification of organisational factors at play in their local council and moved on to explore how they developed and worked to implement their action plan. Here the multiple cycles of 'look', 'think' and 'act' can be observed as participants continued to learn and readjust their approaches.

Chapter 6 - Results: The Engagement: Motivation, Collaboration and Driving Passion

Chapter 6, the final results chapter explored the participant engagement in the action research. The participants' existing motivations, the safety, relatability and relevancy of the learning, the collaborative group work and the impact of a group leader were all identified as contributing factors.

Chapter 7 - Discussion: The Making of Champions

Chapter 7, the first of two discussion chapters provided an analysis of literature, findings and theory. This chapter focused on an analysis of the impacts and outcomes of the role reversal activities, the importance of disabled-led facilitation and the role of participants as champions.

Chapter 8 - Discussion: Optimising for inclusive planning and practice

Chapter 8, the final discussion chapter was primarily concerned with unpacking the identification of organisational factors of importance in disability inclusive planning and practice. The participants' journeys of discovery and interaction with organisational factors is fully explored. This chapter also highlighted the value of the action research practice itself in fostering collaboration, learning and influence.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion: Implications for Practice, Recommendations and Future Directions

Chapter 9 provides an overview of key findings, combining with recommendations for practice and future research. The foremost focus here was to provide insight into the implications of this research for practice.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Organisational Approaches to Advance Disability Inclusion

While disability policy and legislation has been subject to comprehensive reform over recent time, the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability demonstrate there is still much implementation which needs to occur before disabled people enjoy equitable opportunity, inclusion and full realisation of their rights (Sackville, et al., 2023b). The successful implementation of this social policy significantly depends on the abilities of government organisations to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of their planning and practice. Local councils, as providers of community resources, facilities and employment strive to improve accessibility and inclusion through a range of strategies that impact all areas of social, economic and civic life. In order to build a knowledgeable and capable workforce who are able to effectively carry out this work, local councils commonly focus on providing their personnel with education and training to improve their disability inclusive planning and practice. However, there is a lack of clarity provided around the methods that local councils choose to use to undertake this upskilling. Given the critical nature of this education in what it seeks to influence, the way in which this education can be undertaken and what it can achieve is of great importance in this current social policy context, and in the lives of disabled people.

The aim of this literature review was to understand current approaches to developing disability inclusivity from within organisational settings, and to identify opportunities to improve this practice. The review drew upon broad literature in the diversity, equity and inclusion field, and narrowed into specific examples relating to disability where available. The review identified common trends in undertaking this work; factors that lead to successful outcomes; challenges in practice; and gaps in knowledge. As disability awareness training was identified as a common practice employed to build personnel knowledge and capability, the ways in which this is conducted received particular attention, examining aims, methods, outcomes, weaknesses in implementation and untapped potential. This review also explored the Freirean theoretical underpinning of the approach applied in this action research, linking with relevant research to understand its applicability in the current context.

2.1 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The practice of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) refers to organisational work which aims to address inequalities, social problems and disadvantages that exist for groups of people who are marginalised or who experience forms of discrimination (Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). DEI initiatives may improve the makeup of the workforce, as well as enhance the work environment, policies, practice and service delivery to benefit both employees of the organisation and customers (Jones, et al, 2023). DEI practice has ethical importance, in that it seeks to identify and reduce instances of bias, exclusion and discrimination (Jones, et al., 2023; Mullin, et al., 2021). In Australia, this ethical importance is underscored by a range of federal and state anti-discrimination and equal opportunity laws that seek to protect against discrimination, bias and harassment on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and age and aim to obligate organisations to eliminate these harms (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014; Davis, et al., 2016). Apart from there being ethical and legislative importance to DEI, organisations who excel in this practice enhance the wellbeing and inclusion of all their people, improve performance and reduce risks (DCA, et al., 2021; DCA, 2023). Organisational leadership which promotes and acts in alignment with DEI practices has also been found to enhance personnel sense of belonging (Kennedy, 2021), as well as engagement and motivation (Alshaabani, et al., 2021). Organisations are also often encouraged to appreciate the business benefits of DEI practice, such as, improved attraction and retainment of staff in the face of widespread staff shortages across industries (Davies, et al., 2023).

The imperatives and benefits to engage in practices which enhance DEI are significant, yet it is not a given that organisations and leaders will invest in these practices which enhance both the workplace and outcomes for customers. The biennial Inclusion@Work Index undertaken by the Diversity Council Australia, surveys 3000 Australian workers aiming to understand attitudes and actions towards DEI practice (DCA, et al., 2021). The index found in 2021 that 77% of workers were supportive of their organisation engaging in DEI action, and 57% indicated their organisation was doing so (DCA, et al., 2021). A similar divide is seen among the attitudes of HR professionals and the action of their leaders, as reported in the State of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Australian Workplaces report produced by the Australian HR Institute (Davies, et al., 2023). 84% of surveyed human resource professionals believed DEI was important for the future success of the organisation, but only 50% reported their leaders also demonstrated value of DEI practice (Davies, et al., 2023). 49% of the human resource professionals said their organisation was not doing enough to support DEI (Davies, et al., 2023). On a more micro level, the Inclusion@Work index found that only one third of workers surveyed said they had an inclusive manager (DCA, et al., 2021). Managers who are not inclusive impact employees significantly, negatively influencing their employees' productivity, innovation, customer service and intention to stay with the organisation (DCA, et al., 2021). These findings suggest that while general support for DEI practice is strong, action on an organisational and leadership level lags behind.

While the majority of workers support organisations to engage in DEI practice, there is a concern related to disengagement which has the potential to impact DEI efforts significantly. The Inclusion@Work Index found that while only 4% of respondents actively opposed their organisation engaging in DEI practice, 19% neither opposed or supported their organisation engaging in DEI work (DCA, et al., 2021). Further, when asked if their organisation was engaging in DEI practice, 25% of respondents indicated they were not sure if their organisation was taking any such action (DCA, et al., 2021). This indifference or ambivalence towards DEI is considered problematic for it represents a large percentage of workers who are unaware, uninvested or disinterested in supporting DEI. Davis et al., 2016 found that this disengagement meant that managers could be unaware of strategies and policies in place to support DEI practice within their own organisation. This finding is suggestive as to one reason DEI strategies may commonly fail to be less successful than originally anticipated (Seijts & Milani, 2022). Additionally, Baum (2021), asserted that the disengaged pose significant risks to the success of DEI practice, because there lacks a personal growth mindset toward DEI (Baum, 2021). Without this introspection, these employees can continue to unknowingly act out and reinforce damaging behaviours which marginalise and discriminate (Baum, 2021). Seijts and

Milani (2022) asserted that it is essential to create opportunities for personnel to develop and exercise this self-awareness and to discover an interest in personal transformation. Therefore, the importance of determining how to increase awareness and engagement in DEI seems indicated.

Indifference toward DEI practice may be significantly influenced by personal experiences. Those who have experienced discrimination are more likely to be aware of it and report it (Baum, 2021; Bose, et al., 2023). For example, female medical program directors were significantly more likely to report their organisation as having low levels of DEI practice compared to their male counterparts (Bose, et al., 2023). This finding is significant because many people in marginalised groups are underrepresented in leadership roles, such as disabled people, those who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and those who are LGBTIQA+ (Bebbington & Özbilgin, 2013; Davies, et al. 2023). If those who experience discrimination, and hence have appreciation for the importance of DEI practice are often missing from leadership roles where they can influence DEI practice, it seems suggestive that a lack of awareness and engagement toward DEI could be particularly present among leadership, having a disproportionate flow-on impact to the rest of the organisation's staff.

Where DEI practice occurs, it does not focus on and benefit all marginalised groups equally (Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). Initiatives designed to advance the representation and inclusion of disabled people are commonly less evident within DEI practice (Chalfin, 2022; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). This is perhaps reflective of disability historically receiving far less consideration in sociological considerations of discrimination and inequality (Robert & Harlan, 2006). Gender inequity and racial discrimination receive the greatest attention from DEI work in Australia (Davies, et al. 2023). Initiatives to advance the inclusion of disabled people are considerably less prevalent (Davies, et al. 2023). For example, Davies, et al (2023) surveyed 307 Human Resource professionals and found around a third of organisations set targets for the employment of women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, compared to only 11% who set targets for the employment of disabled people (Davies, et al., 2023). Only a third of organisations were actively working on DEI efforts to support disabled people, compared to Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander people at 58% and women at 55% (Davies, et al., 2023). This inequity in approach may be impacted by the invisibility of disabled people in organisations. Disabled people are one of the most underrepresented minority groups in Australian workplaces (Davies, et al. 2023; DCA, et al., 2021). Additionally, organisations commonly fail to collect data on marginalised groups. Only 45% of HR professionals reported their organisation collected data on DEI cohorts, among those, 60% collected data on employees with disability (Davies, et al., 2023). Combined, these factors could contribute to a lesser focus on disability within DEI practice.

2.2 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Practices

Initiatives to enhance organisational DEI take various forms and focus on different areas of engagement. Fisher and Purcal (2017) categorised policies and initiatives designed to change attitudes towards disabled people into three levels: ‘government’, legislative requirements and mandates; ‘organisational’, designed to make changes to organisational policy and processes; and ‘personal’, intending to influence the attitudes of individual people. All three levels of policy or initiative play important roles and interact together (Fisher & Purcal, 2017). In Australia, on a ‘government’ level, federal and state law aims to protect people from discrimination (Davis, et al., 2016) and where breaches of human rights have occurred, inquiries may be undertaken (McCandless, et al., 2022). In NSW, the requirement for state government departments and agencies and local councils to maintain Disability Inclusion Action plans (DIAPs) is a further example of a ‘government’ level policy (*Disability Inclusion Act, 2014*). Resulting DIAPs are an example of policy at an ‘organisational’ level (Fisher & Purcal, 2017). Such strategic planning is a common method used by organisations to work to embed values of DEI into an organisation’s mission, as well as set out a plan to adopt and improve DEI practice in organisational policy and processes (Davis, et al., 2016; Hansen, et al., 2021). Arising from these DEI strategies may be further ‘organisational’ level policies such as flexible work and parental leave policies (Davies, et al., 2023). Many of the actions within a DEI strategy fall into the category of a ‘personal’ level practice, targeting organisational personnel through numerous initiatives including, consultative projects; mapping and examination of current organisational practice; awareness and anti-discrimination campaigns; employee resource groups; and personnel training (Fisher & Purcal, 2017; Gillies & Dupuis, 2013; Hansen, et al., 2021; Welbourne, et al., 2017).

In their investigation into policies and initiatives positively influencing attitude change toward disabled people, Fisher and Purcal (2017) found that impacts were most significant when government, organisational and personal policies and initiatives occurred together. For example, the implementation of a legislated change (government level) could be supported through personnel training and awareness campaigns (personal level) (Fisher & Purcal, 2017). This was observed to be the case when the introduction of the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)* was supported by funding enabling the rollout of training, campaigns and the resourcing of new planning officers in government departments (Dawson, et al., 2019). These initiatives were reported to have a snowball effect, positively influencing the adoption and implementation of the new legislation (Dawson, et al., 2019). Many frustrating failures of DEI practices are indeed often contributable back to a lack of integration with other levels of policy. For example, Gould, et al. (2022) discussed the common practice of recruiting disabled people into an organisation as an intention to build diversity. They asserted however, this action alone will not bring about the full benefits of that diversity (Gould, et al., 2022). To complement such practice, initiatives to build disability inclusivity and address potential bias should be implemented (Gould, et al., 2022; Hemphill & Kulik, 2016; Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014). In a study considering perspectives about disability among library staff, it was found that while the library met minimum accessibility compliance requirements under law, a lack of managerial prioritisation to create a truly welcoming and inclusive environment was allowing ableism and poor attitudes and behaviours toward disabled patrons to go unchecked (Pionke, 2020). In cases where personnel were unaware of their organisation's DEI practice, Davis, et al., (2016) suggested that communication strategies may have been lacking, and recommended organisations should better promote their DEI practice, and DCA, et al. (2021) suggested that organisations should work to communicate that inclusive workplaces are beneficial to everyone; not just those from marginalised backgrounds. These findings illustrate the importance of a multi-level approach to implementing DEI policy (Fisher & Purcal, 2017).

An implementation report concerning DIAPs in NSW government departments, agencies and local councils highlighted the importance of leadership influence; integration with existing strategy, planning and reporting; and resourcing as important factors for effective DIAP implementation (Dawson, et al., 2019). These factors contributing to successful DEI policy implementation have been observed in other instances. Mullin, et al. (2021) after interviewing representatives from health care organisations, noted that incorporating DEI measures and targets into the governance of health care organisations, while being particularly challenging to bring about, was critical to influence durable change in DEI initiatives in health care settings. Senior leadership behaviours, including authentic leadership; an understanding for social justice issues which could impact service delivery; providing human and financial resourcing; and championing organisational values and behaviours that aligned with DEI practice are also cited as important elements influencing the success of DEI initiatives (Cottrill, et al., 2014; Gill, et al., 2018; Gillies & Dupuis, 2013; Gould, et al., 2022). Therefore, the challenge for those working to implement DEI initiatives is inspiring these behaviours and gaining buy-in and support. Buengeler, et al., (2018) undertook a review of existing literature, examining the behaviours of leaders toward DEI practice. They found that many leaders do not yet perceive DEI as core to the success of their organisation's operations, or to their role as a leader and may therefore compartmentalise DEI as a secondary, less important element of their role that gets no attention, or gains attention only during key times, such as during the organisation's celebration of diversity events (Buengeler, et al., 2018). Leaders who have recognised the value of DEI practice may come to align DEI practice alongside other leadership priorities, and some will entirely integrate DEI practice as a core feature within their leadership (Buengeler, et al., 2018). The difficulty of influencing this integration is complicated by existing low levels of diversity in leadership (Bebbington & Özbilgin, 2013), making the relevance and importance of DEI more difficult to convey.

Flowing from governance and leadership levels, the alignment of DEI strategy and policy with other corporate strategy and the organisational environment has also proven important for the success of DEI initiatives (Dawson, et al., 2019; Gill, et al. 2018; Jones, 2016). Local Councils utilise an Integrated Planning and Reporting framework, which includes a 10-year Community Strategic Plan for the local government area; delivery and operational plans; and annual reports (Office of Local Government NSW, n.d.). As reported in the first implementation report of DIAPs in 2019, those councils who were able to integrate their DIAPs with this framework had greater success incorporating actions for inclusivity into various areas of business, and identifying the right stakeholders within the organisation when it was time to begin inclusion-related projects (Dawson, et al., 2019). Achieving integration such as this and then progressing action requires those implementing DEI strategy to develop knowledge of the organisation's workings, available resources and build effective relationships (Jones, 2016). Jones discovered that University staff driving diversity advancement in STEM employed several tactics, including, working to understand organisational politics; formed collaborative working relationships; engaged in negotiation and bargaining to advance projects; invested in internal and external networking; and were relentlessly persistent in the face of difficulties and prolonged timeframes (2016). The integration, implementation and growth of DEI strategy and practice also benefits from engagement with employee resource groups; regular auditing and review of outcomes and impacts; data collection and analysis; and review of the DEI strategy itself to ensure it remains in line with organisational changes (Gould, et al. 2022; Gill, et al., 2018; Hansen, et al., 2021; Mullin, et al. 2021).

The success of such action to progress DEI practice relies on people who are available and willing to undertake it. While leaders play a significant role in determining the integration and success of DEI practice, there are multiple other players involved in driving DEI practice. In the case of implementing DIAPs in local councils or government departments, Executive leadership, specialist Disability Inclusion Officers, Human Resources Officers and departments, champions and other disabled staff were found to contribute to success (Dawson, et al., 2019). In 2019, 40% of responding NSW government departments or local councils indicated they had an officer whose dedicated job it was to advance disability inclusive practice (Dawson, et al., 2019). This role was widely indicated as important to the success of implementing DIAPs, especially as the work can be highly complex and time consuming to undertake (Dawson, et al., 2019). Similarly, champions and allies among leadership and general staff also play valuable roles of promoting, influencing and gathering support for the implementation of DEI practice among their colleagues

(Dawson, et al., 2019; Gould, et al., 2022; Gill, et al. 2018; Hansen, et al., 2021; Quardokus Fisher, et al., 2019). Fujimoto & EJ Härtel, (2017) recognised the strength of such players in advancing DEI practice and hypothesised that an effort toward developing the knowledge, skills and perspectives of a group of personnel could have significant flow-on benefits across an organisation. They developed a conceptual framework for the adoption of diversity practice, suggesting that a small and diverse group of employees, would go on to influence the perceptions, behaviours and actions of others toward diversity (Fujimoto & EJ Härtel, 2017). They proposed that such a program could continue to evolve and grow, eventually influencing an entire organisation (Fujimoto & EJ Härtel, 2017).

Recognising the valuable role of champions and allies in advancing DEI, some organisations invest in programs designed to recruit, educate and empower organisational champions (Dickerson, 2021; Quardokus Fisher, et al., 2019). For example, Dickerson, (2021) discusses an ally program, which staff of an educational institution can join to champion and support underrepresented students, while receiving further training and development. Employee resource groups, representing marginalised groups at work, when enabled and supported by leadership can also bring together and mobilise groups of personnel, advancing DEI practice (McNulty, et al., 2018). Employee resource groups can provide insider voice and insight into organisational contexts impacting DEI; provide education to other staff; and advocate around areas of priority (Dutton, 2018; McNulty, et al., 2018). Welbourne, et al., (2017) in their review of literature concerning employee resource groups found that not only was the peer support and mentoring facilitated by employee resource groups valuable, but such groups could also enhance members' overall job satisfaction and connection with the organisation.

2.3 Practices in the Delivery of Disability Awareness Training

Essential to drive the successful fulfilment of government and organisational policies for disability inclusion are the personal initiatives which actively work to raise personnel awareness, understanding and develop the skills to practice with increased accessibility and inclusion (Fisher & Purcal, 2017; Robert & Harlan, 2006). One of the most frequently relied upon methods in DEI practice which strives to bring about these impacts is personnel training focusing on improving attitudes and behaviours toward marginalised groups of people (Davies, et al., 2023; Kim & Roberson, 2022; Mullin, et al. 2021). Disability awareness training, in particular is usually employed to raise knowledge, understanding, improve attitudes and acceptance, or increase confidence toward disability (Fisher & Purcal, 2017; Lindsay & Edwards, 2013). Disability awareness training may also seek to develop certain competencies or skills, such as the ability to work in line with universal design principles (Carballo, et al., 2021), communicate with people who use sign language (Mathews, et al., 2011), assist in the use of assistive technology (Pionke, 2020), or instruct adapted or modified health interventions (Adamson, et al., 2024).

Disability awareness training can take multiple forms. A disability awareness program may be delivered over several months and contain multiple modules, such as in Carballo, et al., (2021), but more often is likely to be a short, once-off session (Moore& Nettelbeck, 2013; Moroz, et al., 2010). The training itself could be made up of several elements including, presentations, lectures, videos, and practical activities such as simulation, role play, case studies or social contact activities with disabled people (Lindsay & Edwards, 2013; Reynolds, 2010; Rotenberg, et al., 2022). Often a number of these methods are used in combination, such as in Moore and Nettelbeck (2013), when adolescent schoolboys heard talks from paralympic guest speakers, watched a documentary, undertook simulation activities and received information about disability. In Moroz, et al. (2010), medical residents attended a day-long session where they listened to a lecture, a panel presentation and later engaged with simulation activities. In a disability awareness program for taxi drivers, the methods included discussion groups, simulation activities and social contact with disabled people (Reynolds, 2010). While disability awareness training may have similar intentions, the outcomes of disability awareness training can vary significantly based on the methods utilised (Lindsay & Edwards, 2013) and the model of disability espoused and reinforced throughout the training (Robertson & Jaswal, 2024).

Disability awareness training programs commonly feature practical or experiential methods, such as in Moore and Nettelbeck (2013), Moroz, et al., (2010) and Reynolds, (2010). Experiential learning is the practice of learning by doing (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Participants are immersed in an active learning scenario via an activity such as a role play, simulation, game or case study, in which they have the opportunity to practice their response to the situation (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Afterwards, it is essential that learners have the opportunity to reflect on and debrief about their experiences in order to process and formulate meaning and understanding (Lewis & Williams, 1994). The intention of experiential learning is to foster the development of skills or bring about changes in attitude and thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Unlike traditional forms of instruction where learners are merely recipients of others' knowledge, experiential learning encourages learners to explore problems and apply existing knowledge to the situation (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Trevisan (2004) observed that the recommendation for learners to receive practical, or hands on experiences was one which had been present in training and education literature since the 1970s, such was its trusted efficacy. Experiential learning is now an established and valued method among learners. For example, when academics were asked what training they felt they needed to enhance their disability inclusive education, there was a strong perception indicated that practical components of training would enable them to practice identifying appropriate solutions, so that they could reproduce them later (Moriña, et al., 2021).

Simulation activities within disability awareness training programs are one such example of experiential learning, having long been perceived to provide valuable practical exposure to disability (Clark, et al., 1995; French, 1992). Simulation activities attempt to imitate a real situation, process or behaviour, particularly striving to represent problems inherent in the experience being studied (Lean, et al., 2006). In the case of disability simulation, the 'problem' is the representation of an impairment (French, 1992). Activities may include using wheelchairs to get around; restricting mobility of limbs and dexterity of hands; wearing blindfolds or low vision goggles while performing everyday activities; or having hearing loss represented through low tech or electronic methods while engaging in communication with others (Clark, et al. 1995; Howard-Jones, et al., 2001; Leo & Goodwin, 2013; Nario-Redmond, et al., 2017). This method of attempting to replicate the experience of living with impairment aligns with the medical model of disability, in which the problem of disability is situated with individuals, rather than shaped by the social environment (French, 1992; Robertson, et al., 2024; Thomas, 2004).

Disability simulation activities are utilised with the ambition that they will bring about positive attitudinal development towards disabled people, most notedly, to bring about enhanced empathy of the experience of disabled people (Clark, et al. 1995; French, 1992; Howard-Jones, et al. 2001). A number of studies considering the impact of simulation techniques within a disability awareness program have reported heightened empathy or improved attitudes toward disabled people, or an increased awareness of disability (Hayward, et al., 2021; Howard-Jones, 2001; Moore & Nettelbeck, 2013; Moroz, et al., 2010; Peterson & Quarstein, 2001; Rochette, et al., 2017; Wilding, et al., 2023). In Wilding, et al. (2023) increased empathy was explained in terms of better understanding the frustrations and difficulties of disabled people undertaking day-to-day tasks, working around the challenges of their impairments. Participants of this study reported they found the virtual reality simulation they were engaging with provided an unparalleled level of insight into disability (Wilding, et al., 2023). In Peterson & Quarstein, (2001), participants reported that they understood that with patience and aids, disabled people could have comparable capabilities to others.

Results of simulation activities have also demonstrated concerning outcomes. While Undergraduate students who undertook a disability simulation program on their University campus, reported new-found empathy, respect, appreciation for physical barriers within the environment and increased understanding of disability as a result of the activities, they also reported relief that they themselves did not have disability and appeared to view disability as undesirable, limiting and frightening (Leo & Goodwin, 2013). Participants in Peterson and Quarstein (2001), reported feeling frustrated with their simulated role, relief to have normal abilities, and reflected on how lonely being disabled must be. Clark, et al. (1995), observed that after simulating disability, discussions could evolve into depressive contemplations around disability. Nario-Redmond, et al. (2017), found among Undergraduate students who engaged with simulation activities there were increases in concerns about becoming disabled, as well as heightened hopelessness, embarrassment and frustration. Silverman, et al. (2015), found that those who simulated blindness then perceived blind people as being less capable of doing independent everyday tasks, compared to those who did not undertake a blindness simulation, or simulated a different disability. Further, the blindness simulators perceived that they themselves would be less capable if they became blind (Silverman, et al., 2015). Alarming results such as these have attracted significant concern and critique of disability simulation activities.

Disability simulation activities are instigated with the goal of developing empathy for disabled people by providing an opportunity to experience disability (Nario-Redmond, et al., 2017). It is in this fundamental objective that the most significant flaw in disability simulation activities is found. While appearances may suggest simulation activities provide a representation of disability, the accuracy of the complete experience is that which is problematic. French, (1992) argued that participants of simulation training are only gaining an idea of what it might be like to suddenly acquire a disability, failing to allow participants to understand that disabled people typically develop compensatory skills which come a significant way in reducing the everyday impacts of their impairments. This lack of insight into disabled ways of being can lead to simulators developing inaccurate and unhelpful perceptions of lack of capability and hopelessness as seen in Nario-Redmond, et al. (2017) and Silverman, et al. (2015). Disability simulations are also criticised for their alignment with the medical model of disability, and inability to represent the prolonged impacts of social and environmental barriers to participation and inclusion (French, 1992; Leo and Goodwin, 2016). While a brief experience navigating in a wheelchair may give simulators some awareness for the immediate physical barriers in the environment, it cannot replicate systemic inequities which marginalise and disadvantage disabled people, as well as the everyday need to negotiate for access and maintain dignity in the face of inaccessible systems and structures (French, 1992; Leo & Goodwin, 2016). It is for these reasons that the good intent of disability simulation activities can, as Silverman, et al., (2015) said, ‘backfire’, instead leaving simulators with inaccurate and negative impressions of being disabled.

Apart from questions of accuracy, disability simulation must also be critiqued for its appropriateness. When given an opportunity to evaluate the impacts of disability simulation, the disabled respondents in Leo and Goodwin (2016) raised concerns for the further entrenchment of ableism and medicalised thinking toward disability going unchecked due to a common absence of actual disabled people in the development, facilitation and reflection processes of disability simulation activities. Additionally, by its very makeup, simulation activities revolve around a kind of game or challenge

(Lean, et al., 2006), and as such, the undertaking of simulation activities can attract great hilarity as simulators engage in a temporary identity they will soon abandon (Leo & Goodwin, 2016). These major flaws in the delivery of disability simulation, with their potential to further embed ableist attitudes, should lead to a consideration as to whether the simulation of disability is ethically and morally inappropriate, just as playing blackface is widely acknowledged for being entirely unconscionable for its inherent racism (Foster, 2005; Sharpe & Hynes, 2016). By attempting to mimic impairment, disability simulation activities are reinforcing medicalised ways of perceiving disability, and failing to adequately draw participants' attention to the societal barriers which are responsible for much of the systemic ableism that people with disabilities come up against in day-to-day life (French, 1992). The reinforcement of medicalised thinking towards disability, which perceives disability as an individual problem, cannot hope to progress meaningful societal inclusion.

The way in which disability is understood has a significant impact in determining attitudes toward disabled people (Bogart, et al., 2019; Robertson & Jaswal, 2024). In the case of disability simulation, there appears to be a misalignment between the intention of the training and the medical model of disability backing the learning, resulting in problematic outcomes. Bogart, et al. (2019) found that those who understood disability from a social model of disability perspective held significantly more positive attitudes toward disabled people. Vick Finkelstein caused great scepticism and disbelief when he started advocating for what he called, a 'social interpretation' of disability, suggesting that it was not disabled people who needed to be fixed and conform to society, but societal structures needed to change (Finkelstein, 2001). The idea that disability was not a problem with an individual, but a problem with the way society was set up to be exclusionary was considered, 'revolutionary' (Finkelstein, 2001). Finkelstein continued to agitate for this revolution and was one of the founders of the activist group, Union for the Physically Impaired Against Segregation in the 1970s (Finkelstein, 2001). Collectively, the group articulated what would eventually become known as the social model of disability, and indeed cause a significant revolution to the understanding of disability (Finkelstein, 2001; Thomas, 2004). Disabled sociologist Mike Oliver assisted to bring the social model of disability into popular circulation from the early 1980s when he started teaching it to his pupils (Oliver, 2013; Thomas, 2004). In contrast to medical or individualistic ways of perceiving disability, the social model places focus on the ways that disabled people are excluded, discriminated against and marginalised due to structural and attitudinal barriers present in societies which restrict access to such things as environments, information, communication and opportunities (Oliver, 2013; Robert & Harlan 2006; Thomas, 2004). The social model does not deny the presence and impact of impairment itself, as has been criticised, it merely reconceptualises impairment as not being the cause of oppression, marginalisation and discrimination (Oliver, 2013; Thomas, 2004). Recognising that this model of disability places responsibility on societies to be accessible and inclusive, the social model of disability is now embedded as the guiding theory in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (United Nations, 2006), and reflected in Australian disability social policy (DSS, 2021).

While appearing much less frequently in the literature, there are instances of disability awareness training programs which have employed other experiential learning techniques which can better allow participants to examine societal barriers to inclusion, in alignment with the social model of disability (Carballo, et al., 2021; Pure, et al., 2018). Ensuring this perspective is portrayed can change participants' attitudes from medicalised understandings of disability to those rooted in a social model understanding (Carballo, et al., 2021). As reported in Carballo, et al. (2021), this shift in thinking can foster understandings of the actions training participants can take to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of their practice. Emerging in the 1980s, entirely created and delivered by disabled people, Disability Equality Training ensures the social model of disability is portrayed throughout (Gillespie-Sells & Campbell, 1991; Walker, 2004). Gillespie-Sells and Campbell recommended an activity which required training participants to examine examples of discriminatory structures and reimagine inclusive alternatives (1991). To further this learning, they suggested participants then repeat the process on an example in their own workplace (Gillespie-Sells & Campbell, 1991). Similarly, in Pure, et al. (2018) learners in disability awareness training were required to respond to case scenarios in which violations of rights had occurred. Symeonidou & Loizou, (2018) in disability awareness training for young children used cartoons to illustrate and critique the social barriers which impact disabled people. In the early 2000s the UK Disability Rights Commission released the Talk video series for use in disability awareness programs. The series followed the story of a man who awoke one morning to find the realities of disabled and able-bodied people were reversed. As an able-bodied man, he was suddenly marginalised by his status, and disabled people all around him were thriving in a world optimised for them (Charles, 2005).

The concept of the reversed realities captured in the Talk video series appears to have been based on writings of Vic Finkelstein, in some of his early proliferation of a social interpretation of disability (Finkelstein, 1988). Finkelstein wrote about an imaginary world where the roles of physically disabled people and able-bodied people were turned upside-down and reversed (1988). His intention being to demonstrate how disability is a result of social structures, caused by a society which does not accommodate people with physical impairments (Finkelstein, 1988). In this scenario, a community of wheelchair using disabled people designed an entire village privileging their exact needs, including lowered door frames (Finkelstein, 1988). Finkelstein, a white South African had spent time in jail due to his anti-apartheid activism (Finkelstein, 2001; Finkelstein, 2002). When released, he was issued with a 5-year banning order to limit any activities which could contribute to further anti-apartheid action, such as traveling, attending education or social activities (Finkelstein, 2001; Finkelstein, 2002). He reflected that this state of existence was not far from his usual reality as a disabled person, already restricted as he was by inaccessible environments (Finkelstein, 2001; Finkelstein, 2002). Through this experience and observation of racial apartheid, he came to assert that the reality of oppression experienced by disabled people was not dissimilar, leading to his development of the upside-down world analogy (Finkelstein, 2002).

In the analogy, the village became exclusive, demonstrated by the challenges of able-bodied people when they came to live in the village. Unable to move around freely and incurring injuries to their foreheads due to the inaccessibility of doorways, able-bodied people soon became objects of pity and medical intervention (Finkelstein, 1988). They were prescribed helmets to protect their heads and lowered into crouching positions by specially fitted braces to bring them to the correct height to pass through doorways safely (Finkelstein, 1988). This representation speaks of the manner in which societies have historically been developed in line with the needs of able-bodied people, where disabled people were made invisible by a society which limited their presence through physical inaccessibility (Morris, 1991). The lack of public visibility of disabled people also removed disability from consciousness and served to compound the continuation of policies and actions which exclude (Omansky Gordon & Rosenblum, 2001). Instead of there being a demonstrated need to address inaccessibility, disabled people were expected to change themselves to fit into the existing environment (Finkelstein, 1988).

Finkelstein also drew particular attention to the discrimination that can occur when disabled people look for employment (1988). One able-bodied person wished to be considered for a position as a television interviewer (Finkelstein, 1988). After a procedure where they were assessed for medical fitness to undertake the role, they were deemed unsuitable (Finkelstein, 1988). The presence of their helmet was not a good look for television and due to their stooped, bent pose, they were very difficult to communicate effectively with given that it was impossible to see their face and understand their body language (Finkelstein, 1988). This scenario speaks of biases which can exist in hiring processes, a lack of consideration for the implementation of reasonable adjustments, and the resultant discrimination (Darcy, et al., 2016). Experiencing difficulties moving around their environments and obtaining work, able-bodied people soon became objects of charity because they were so disadvantaged by their situations. Charities were established and money collected in support of their plight (Finkelstein, 1988). To reference this spiral of disadvantage caused by the society's inability to allow a person with disability to participate as an equal citizen, represents the way disability has been traditionally perceived as a charitable cause, which in turn constructs disability as a helpless, limiting or pitiful position and fosters dependency (Finkelstein, 2002; Morris, 1991). It also speaks to the current situation of many disabled people, referenced in the final report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, who feel the impact of cumulative disadvantage owing to low expectations and discrimination experienced throughout their lives in various domains (Sackville, et al., 2023a).

The upside-down world illustrated how when able-bodied people were faced with inaccessible environments, they were forced to find ways to cope, to adapt and fit in, to the best of their capability with the support of aids and charity (Finklestein, 1988). Disabled people enjoyed a freedom of movement and were effectively the able-bodied people in this scenario (Finkelstein, 1988). A real-world example of this reversal was reported very recently among a sample of 21 disabled people during the Covid-19 lockdowns in China (Yang & Lin, 2023). As everyone was restricted to their homes, the disabled respondents reported that they were suddenly equal with able-bodied people, having always experienced a degree of isolation and restriction in their community (Yang & Lin, 2023). The disabled people also observed that having had plenty of practice in this kind of scenario, they did not experience the same emotional distress as their able-bodied fellows and felt that they were able to cope much more effectively (Yang & Lin, 2023). The compensatory skills of patience, mindfulness and use of assistive equipment they had developed as a result of being disabled, served them well and provided them with an advantage over able-bodied people (Yang & Lin, 2023). In this new reality, the disabled respondents felt they were no longer disabled and doing better than able-bodied people (Yang & Lin, 2023). Yang and Lin, (2023) concluded that these experiences confirmed the continued relevance of Finkelstein's analogy (1988) and the conceptualisation of disability as a social phenomenon

Despite the very powerful illustration of the social model of disability provided by Finkelstein's concept of role reversal, its translation into use appears very limited in disability awareness training and has seldom appeared in literature. One documented use of role reversal training appeared in an American pharmacy education program (Mathews, et al., 2011) where deaf people took on the roles of pharmacists and doctors while sixty-five pharmacy students with normal hearing then had to find ways of communicating with people who did not speak the same language. The program replicated barriers that deaf people frequently face including, having to be attentive to the incomprehensible communication of those using sign language to call their names in the waiting room; receiving instructions about the use of medications that they could not understand; and asking for an interpreter and being advised there was no-one available at such short notice (Mathews, et al. 2011). Such barriers were specifically designed to bring about feelings of disempowerment and frustration in students, replicating that which is felt when deaf people are unable to communicate in their own language (Mathews, et al. 2011).

The training incorporated a rigorous opportunity to reflect upon the barriers and discuss the scenarios and options for making the represented scenarios more accessible and inclusive with a panel of deaf and hard of hearing people (Mathews, et al. 2011). The students reported emotions such as confusion and frustration while experiencing the barriers, and also reported they found the exercise educational and interesting (Mathews, et al. 2011). Students provided written reflections on the exercise in which some expressed that this learning experience was much more powerful in enabling the appreciation of communication difficulties compared to just being told about them (Mathews, et al. 2011). One student expressed they never wanted other people to experience difficulties like those in the role reversal (Mathews, et al. 2011). Reported in quantitative data, the program brought about results in increased understandings of communication barriers; an agreement among 95% of participants that the experience would benefit their future attitudes and behaviours when interacting with deaf people; and an eagerness to learn more about communication with deaf people, including taking a course in American Sign Language (Mathews, et al., 2011).

Disability role reversal practice has also been observed in the European phenomena of Dining in the Dark, in which sighted guests are treated to a dining experience in complete darkness, served by blind waitstaff. Apart from enjoying their meal, patrons can also ask questions of the blind staff about how they undertake tasks (Saerberg, 2007). The practice also powerfully reverses socially normative roles of those who may be expected to require assistance and those who may provide it (Saerberg, 2007). Unable to move around the environment independently, or identify their money, sighted patrons need to rely on blind staff to guide and assist (Saerberg, 2007). Although it is arguable that elements of simulation are present in this example, there is nevertheless, a complete role reversal at play, where the barriers which are usually experienced by blind people are instead concerns of sighted people. In these alternative examples of experiential learning activities, the direct focus is upon barriers which exist in the physical environment, or that are perpetrated through attitudes or behaviours.

In a scenario of role reversal, disabled people are inherent to the delivery and success of the activity, the exercise cannot occur without. This could suggest one reason for the uptake of such methods being limited. It is far from a given that disabled people are the developers and presenters of disability awareness training. Most studies consulted in this literature review make no references to training being designed or delivered by disabled people, rarely even acknowledging this absence as a weakness or limitation of their intervention, an exception being Wilson, et al. (2009). This absence is reflective of a broader, and long-standing tendency to leave disabled people out of the development of policies, plans, programs and services which impact our lives (Frawley, et al., 2006; Frawley & O'Shea; Opoku & Nketsia, 2021; Radermacher, et al., 2010). This tendency has historically contributed to the proliferation of many initiatives which have demonstrated a lack of understanding of disability; entrenched harms; and disempowered disabled people (Frawley & O'Shea; Opoku & Nketsia, 2021). Disabled people are central to the success of initiatives striving to bring about change in disability inclusion (Davy, et al., 2019). The employment of disabled people to undertake projects to progress action under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 was identified as one of the key factors that drove success (Davy, et al., 2019). The role of disabled people in delivering disability awareness training has similar impacts. Rotenberg, et al. (2022) concluded after a review of disability awareness training undertaken in the health care industry that programs which contained elements delivered by disabled people had stronger indicated participant outcomes in confidence, competence and knowledge. Rochette, et al., (2017) also referenced disabled presenters of training as having potential impacts in addressing training participants' misconceptions about disability. Students of mental health recovery nursing reported that being taught by a lecturer with lived experience of recovery assisted them to understand the perspective of the consumer and developed their attitudes toward people with mental illness (Byrne, et al. 2013). The study concluded that students would enter their professions with greater self-awareness of potential prejudice and understanding of their patients (Byrne, et al., 2013).

Although the value of disability-led disability awareness training is indicated, in most cases where involvement of disabled people is noted, the presence of disabled people is referred to as a component only, where participants get an opportunity to have social contact with disabled people, perhaps while volunteering, completing an activity together or hearing from disabled people from a panel presentation (Carballo, et al., 2021; Lindsay & Cancelliere, 2018; Lindsay & Edwards, 2013; Moroz, et al., 2010; Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007). Programs which foster contact between disabled people and training recipients tend to corelate with strong and successful outcomes (Fisher & Purcal, 2017; Lindsay & Edwards, 2013). However, social contact has a stronger impact if it is meaningful, supported and accompanied by information (Fisher & Purcal, 2017; Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007). Contact with disabled people can help lead to the contradiction of stereotypical beliefs and formation of positive perceptions (Bogart, et al., 2019; Hayward, et al., 2021; Kim & Roberson (2022; Wang, et al., 2021). Importantly disabled people provide the insider perspective on the experience of barriers to participation and inclusion (Carballo, et al., 2021).

2.4 Advancing Understanding and Engagement: A Theoretical Framework

Finkelstein's role reversal conceptualisation represents a largely untapped area of opportunity to deliver experiential activities within disability awareness training that could assist in developing perspectives in line with the social model of disability. In order to best ensure the learning gained from these experiential activities becomes applied, consideration must be given to how to help facilitate the comprehension and understanding resulting from the activities; build and maintain personnel engagement; and enable the transfer of learning into practice. As such, this section outlines a theoretical framework proposed to be well suited to complement role reversal experiential learning.

Paulo Freire's, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) offers a pathway from which groups of learners can gain understanding of oppressive structures and barriers and then move toward attitudinal and behavioural development for social change. Freire's pedagogy focuses upon providing a framework of empowerment and liberation for those who experience oppression (Freire, 1970). Freire, who was a Brazilian philosopher and educator, first began applying his revolutionary pedagogy to illiterate learners experiencing poverty in Brazil throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Gadotti & Torres, 2009; Roberts, 2015). Freire believed in the importance of placing learners at the centre of their own empowerment (Freire, 1970). The core methodology of this pedagogy calls for reflection upon and understanding of oppression and its causes (Freire, 1970). With this critical consciousness and empowerment, there is an ability to take informed action and work toward liberation and social change (Freire, 1970; Gadotti & Torres, 2009). This pedagogy has been used for many decades, across a wide range of disciplines, applied in line with its original formation, and also with variations and adjustments made (Carroll & Minkler, 2000; Gadotti & Torres, 2009; Jackson, 2007; Roberts, 2015). In the current study I have continued exploring the pedagogy by applying a seemingly unique adaptation. In this instance, the focus of the pedagogy is shifted directly away from those who Freire would ordinarily consider the oppressed. Finkelstein's analogy of the upside-down-world (1988) presents an opportunity for those who may not have experienced disabling barriers before to engage with these problems in experiential ways. I was eager to discover if Freire's (1970) pedagogy, applied alongside the analogy would enable the reflection, learning, understanding and social change that Freire's pedagogy is best known for inspiring (Carroll & Minkler, 2000; Freire, 1970).

Freire's pedagogy places significant emphasis on those engaging with learning gaining a cognition, or critical consciousness of their oppression from which they can then liberate themselves and their oppressors (1970). Freire specified that this pedagogy is not to be applied to those who may historically be among groups who oppress. By doing so, Freire cautioned that resultant change could simply be veiled in paternalism and false generosity, bringing about insincere and charitable outcomes (Freire, 1970). In exploring the use of Freire's pedagogy, I considered modern-day factors could be taken into account. Freire's distinction between groups who oppress and those who are oppressed has been heavily critiqued, identifying that it is not possible to make such black and white determinations (Roberts, 2015). Further, in the decades since Freire's original conceptualisation, disabled people, Finkelstein among them, have agitated for equitable opportunity and the elimination of discrimination, making significant social progress (Cooper, 1999; Finkelstein, 2001; Finkelstein, 2002; Morris, 1991). In my own previous research, considering how disabled people came to enjoy genuine inclusion in their communities, I found that many respondents engaged in systemic advocacy against discrimination to benefit themselves and others (Butler, 2016). Bogart, et al. (2019) found that disabled University students, when compared to their non-disabled peers, were much more likely to consider disability from a social model perspective and to hold positive attitudes toward disability. This finding indicated that the experience of disability mediates one's own understanding of disability. By virtue of these disabled-led movements and positive perception of the social model held by disabled people, our collective awareness of discrimination and marginalisation is now significant. Further, the risks of paternalism and false generosity that Freire (1970) cautioned, I considered would be mitigated by this action research being disabled-led. Given these factors, it is possible to determine that the same binary ideas about who could benefit from the pedagogy are no longer restrictive. It therefore seemed to me that there was room to expand the focus of Freire's pedagogy beyond those groups he would have considered most in need of its application.

Freire outlined two distinct phases of his pedagogy (1970). The first requires learners to come to understand oppressive structures and commit to making change (Freire, 1970). In the second, where critical consciousness is present, the pedagogy encompasses others, bringing allies into the movement of change (Freire, 1970). The first stage is embarked upon by facilitating a process of 'problem-posing, where groups of learners examine social problems, questioning and critiquing their causes and origins (Freire, 1970; Mohajer & Earnest, 2009). For example, participants of a Freirean inspired action research program investigated chronic health problems in their community (González, et al., 2007). Engaging in problem-posing dialogue, they identified sources of pollution, land misuse and overcrowding as potential contributors to the broader problem (González, et al., 2007). Freire suggested that a representation of a situation of concern can be important to demonstrate the problem in need of addressing, as he stated:

> …we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action. (Freire, 1970, p. 95-96).

In a scenario of role reversal, learners experience barriers to participation or inclusion (Finkelstein, 1988). The experiential learning provides the opportunity to then examine the problem from a first-hand perspective, applying existing knowledge and experiences (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Critical to this examination is the determination and hope that this problem can in fact be addressed or changed (Freire, 1970). As was the case in Finkelstein's imagining of an upside-down world, once aware of their oppression caused by exclusionary societal barriers, the able-bodied people began to advocate for this recognition and their equitable opportunity in the village (Finkelstein, 1988). Not only had the problem been understood, but an approach to address it was seen as worthy and possible.

Freire speaks to the importance of ensuring the problems engaged over are meaningful to learners, relatable to their own hopes, doubts and preoccupations (Freire, 1970). In an organisational context, successful DEI practice is challenged by a significant number of staff who demonstrate an indifference or ambivalence toward the practice (DCA, et al., 2021; Davis, et al., 2016). Additionally, the undertaking of DEI related training can be resented by staff, seen as a tick-a-box exercise (Baum, 2021; Gill, et al., 2018). This can be the case when DEI training is a mandatory requirement (Baum, 2021). When employee development opportunities are voluntary, it is inevitable that fewer staff will opt to participate (Hurtz & Williams, 2009). However, engagement in training and subsequent positive outcomes in mastery of skills has been found to be stronger when participants voluntarily engage with the training (Gegenfurtner, et al., 2016). Therefore, the value of establishing relevancy and relatability to gain interest and engagement is indicated. To establish what is relevant and relatable in the first instance, Freire asserted that engaging in dialogue with learners would allow those things that are meaningful to arise (1970). Hurtz and Williams (2009) found that simply ensuring the adequate promotion of employee development opportunities, along with their positive benefits predicted higher engagement. When personnel can see a clear relevance of training such as, addressing problems they experience in their practice (Moriña, et al., 2020); improving customer and client experiences (Charles, 2005; Moriña, et al., 2020); or acquiring skills and knowledge applicable to their jobs and personal lives (Nafukho, et al., 2017) the learning is more likely to transfer into their work. Additionally, experiential learning has become established as a valuable method to engage people in meaningful learning (Lewis & Williams, 1994), proving a successful way to integrate learning with the reality of their lives and work (Charles, 2005).

The core foundation on which Freire’s pedagogy is based is the importance of engaging in critical dialogue (Freire, 1970). By deeply exploring problems of oppression and the themes contributing, learners are then able to come to a critical consciousness concerning the problems (Freire, 1970). In this dialogue, the facilitator does not simply provide information, learners engage in dialogue together, benefiting from the experiences and stories of others (Freire, 1970; Nelson, et al., 2010). In a practical sense, this dialogue can occur following an experiential learning opportunity, taking the form of debrief and reflection (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Undertaking these tasks immediately after experiential learning enables participants to complete the formation of understanding and meaning arising from the experience (Lewis & Williams, 1994). In clinical simulation programs, nursing students who engaged in a group debrief and reflection immediately following the exercise demonstrated higher levels of clinical competency, self-reflection and communication skills compared to those who were offered no opportunity to debrief after the activity (Ryoo & Ha, 2015). This finding demonstrated the importance of a group-based opportunity to discuss the scenario, give and receive feedback and understand what occurred correctly or incorrectly in the clinical simulation (Ryoo, E. N., & Ha, 2015). This opportunity to debrief and reflect with disabled people was identified as a feature missing from disability simulation activities and critiqued as allowing superficial and deficit-based ideas about disability to go unchecked (Leo & Goodwin, 2016).

The problems that may be considered in an education program utilising a Freirean approach are likely to be deep-seated, complex social problems (Carroll & Minkler, 2000; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). Additionally, Freire discussed how those engaging in processes of problem-posing and critical dialogue may well have come to internalise messages of oppression (Freire, 1970). Given these complexities, it seems possible that the allowance of time may be an important factor in enabling a richness in dialogue and comprehension to evolve. Indeed, Garzon, et al., (2018) found that the effective use of Freire's pedagogy could be impeded by insufficient time to allow for cultural immersion. Fujimoto and EJ Härtel (2017) critiqued short-term diversity and inclusion training sessions for their lack of time available to give participants the opportunity to integrate learning into organisational practice and strategy. The time needed to impact behaviour change has been considered in other contexts. While acknowledging their findings were based on scant research, Fisher and Purcal, (2017), suggested that disability education, training and awareness activities which occurred over a prolonged timeframe may have better impacts in influencing positive attitude change. Baum (2021) also suggested that DEI training occurring in multiple shorter sessions over a period of four-weeks, rather than in one single block would enable personnel the appropriate time to reflect on complex topics and fully absorb meaning. They also suggested that this approach may better reinforce DEI as a meaningful component of the organisation’s values by ensuring it is not just a fleeting mention (Baum, 2021).

Freire cautioned that in the application of his pedagogy, those who are oppressed must not become oppressors themselves (1970). The aim of applying the pedagogy is to restore humanity and liberate both those who experience oppression and those who do not (Freire, 1970). This caution is particularly relevant in the current study given the core component of role reversal. In mitigating such risk, developing safety and security seems essential. Gill, et al. (2018) and Baum (2021) emphasised that in phases of reflection and dialogue in DEI training, learners need to confront biases and fears and to be given a safe and supported opportunity to do so. Gill, et al., (2018) identified that these spaces of safety were created by those who had experienced discrimination themselves, sharing their stories of marginalisation, exclusion and bias. Similarly, in a prevention program focusing on addressing intimate partner violence, the facilitator shared their own experiences of intimate partner violence to assist in developing empathy (Nelson, et al., 2010). In Gill, et al., (2018), this vulnerability and willingness to share appeared to open learners’ hearts and minds and enabled them to challenge and speak about their own preconceived ideas, past actions and biases. Gill, et al. (2018) also identified that creating a sense of safety also allowed topics which may be ordinarily resisted to be effectively introduced, such as relevant anti-discrimination law. An example of establishing safety can be seen in a study by Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988) in which they detail a Freirean influenced educational program for teenage students who were confronted by the problems of substance abuse when they gained an opportunity to speak directly to those who had been jailed or hospitalised due to actions undertaken under the influence (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). Unlike other health promotion education which may rely on evoking fear to deter youth from problematic behaviour, this program focused on enabling the teenagers to explore the complex social problems which lead to substance abuse in a peer-to-peer environment where they could safely pose questions and draw their own conclusions (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988).

The ultimate purpose of Freire's pedagogy is to lead to a state of praxis, a meeting of theory and practice, where learners take action against oppressive structures, armed with their newly developed ideas and understandings (1970). This is the second stage referenced in Freire's pedagogy, (1970) where the oppressed bring allies into the movement for change (Freire, 1970). At this stage, Freirean informed programs have brought about action by forming coalitions to further knowledge about, and address problems of environmental risks to health (González, et al., 2007); successfully lobbied for the introduction of laws to reduce alcohol abuse (Rogers & Singhal, 2003); and influenced behaviour changes in violence and substance abuse by employing secondary processes of problem-posing and critical dialogue (Nelson, et al., 2010; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). The teenagers in Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988), became positive leaders within their own communities. They demonstrated a sense of responsibility to pass on their learnings, to continue the dialogue around issues of concern with their peers and enacted further risk prevention behaviours (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). Critical to these successes, was the coming together of people over a united goal (Mohajer & Earnest (2009; Rogers & Singhal, 2003). In these examples, Freire's (1970) expectation that others are brought along into the movement of social change was also demonstrated. These efforts demonstrate the influential nature of a collective effort to affect positive social change.

2.5 Conclusion and the Way Forward

The existence of legislative protection against discrimination does little on its own to uphold the rights of people from marginalised backgrounds and identities. To realise these rights, organisations need to engage in practices to improve diversity, equity and inclusion. These practices need to occur both at the organisational level in the form of policies and or strategies; and at a personal level, building the capability of personnel to improve the inclusivity of their practice (Fisher & Purcal, 2017). Both of these forms of DEI practice are significantly influenced by the extent of supportive factors, including leadership, resourcing and strategic alignment. While it is generally understood what factors are supportive in enabling DEI practice, less explored are methods to develop these qualities in organisational leaders and other personnel. For example, indifference and ambivalence toward DEI appears to pose significant risk to successfully advancing the status of marginalised groups. On top of this concern, disability tends to receive less consideration even within DEI practice, which could place disability at heightened risk of being overlooked. Research considering how to approach and address indifference towards DEI, and toward disability in particular appears limited at this time.

While leaders who demonstrate and incorporate value of DEI practice into their leadership are overtly important in supporting DEI practice to occur, findings of this review also highlighted the critical role that other personnel play in driving and advancing DEI practice, such as specialist staff, champions, allies and staff representing marginalised groups. It is these personnel who appear to have significant roles in the operationalisation of DEI practice, sourcing resources and opportunities, and in influencing other staff to become invested. In recognition of their significant role, further research investigating how these personnel are best discovered, nurtured, enabled and supported seems an essential step in finding methods to further the integration and spread of disability inclusive planning and practice.

When organisations engage in practices to develop personnel capability for disability inclusive practice, they commonly utilise a form of disability awareness training. While there is a great deal of variety in how disability awareness training can be undertaken, a common theme is that it tends to contain experiential elements, such as disability simulation activities to help learners gain greater empathy for the experience of being disabled and to develop positive attitudes toward disabled people. However, while the practice of disability simulation may bring about some positive attitude development, its outcomes can be incongruous with its intentions. The practice is now understood for having potentially damaging impacts due to its inaccuracy and reinforcement of deficit-based medicalised understandings of disability. Despite this problem long being established (French, 1992), examples of disability simulation activities within disability awareness training are plentiful. I sought examples of other experiential activities which consciously focused on reinforcing understandings in line with the social model of disability, and while there were some examples, this area of research appears scant. Role reversal activities, as an alternative are one such method rarely investigated. A theoretical underpinning to this concept has existed for more than thirty years (Finkelstein, 1988), however role reversal is sparingly seen incorporated into disability awareness training. While understandings of the impacts of role reversal are limited, their potential for helping learners understand social barriers, and for providing tangible ways forward for learners to adopt more inclusive practices seem promising, and hence worthy of further investigation. Local councils demonstrate an intention to continue delivering disability awareness training. It is crucial to be able to determine appropriate and effective methods to assist organisations to bring about quality outcomes.

Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (1970) appeared as an ideal theoretical backing to support the current research. With a focus on problem-posing, critical dialogue and transformative social change, it supported all the goals of this research. The pedagogy also served as an ideal tool to gain further insight into under-researched areas impacting disability inclusive practice. A Freirean approach worked seamlessly within the action research methodology utilised in this study to conduct a form of disability awareness training incorporating role reversal activities. Given current understandings, limitations and areas for further research, the current study sought to address the following research questions:

> What behaviours, thoughts and feelings arise among participants of the action research after experiencing role reversal activities?
>
> How might role reversal activities help learners to understand disability, and lead them to take proactive action to address social barriers?
>
> What organisational factors impact the outcomes of disability inclusive planning and practice?
>
> What impacts in organisational knowledge and capability can be observed as a result of an action research approach seeking to assist a large organisation improve its disability inclusive planning and practice?

To answer these questions, the current research aimed to uncover further understandings of how organisational personnel come to engage with disability inclusive planning and practice. Using a form of disability awareness training containing role reversal experiential activities, the current study sought to represent social barriers to participation and inclusion replicating those that disabled people experience. Engaging in respectful, empowering problem-posing dialogue, personnel were provided with the opportunity to reflect, develop their learnings and devise solutions and ways forward to act. It was anticipated that a valuable learning experience could be fostered which would ultimately contribute to development of greater capability for disability inclusive planning and practice.

Chapter 3

Methodology: Problem-Posing and Influencing Practice with Practical Action Research

A great deal of responsibility rests on Australian government organisations to uphold the rights of disabled people through their implementation of organisational and personal policy (Fisher & Purcal, 2017). While these obligations exist, the literature review of this study highlighted that there are matters involved in implementation which appear to have critical impacts in the success, or otherwise, of policy initiatives. This study therefore sought to consider these organisational factors and advance understanding for the optimisation of those which make a true positive impact. A central component of this discovery lay in the investigation of role reversal activities, applied alongside a Freirean inspired approach to problem-posing, critical dialogue and action, to understand their merit in effectively fostering the capability of organisational personnel to engage in disability inclusive planning and practice. This methodology chapter addresses how the research questions noted at the end of the previous chapter were explored within this highly action-orientated and inductive study using a practical action research methodology.

The chapter begins with my rationale for undertaking an action research study, exploring the particular value of the approach in addressing the problems under consideration. I have then detailed my exploration into action research, from its earliest foundations to its modern application in organisational contexts. This inquiry demonstrates the powerful role action research plays in concurrently influencing practice and research. The reader will be guided through my own journey of finding the specific practical form of action research that suited the ambitions of this study. The chapter then explores my disabled positionality, and that of my disabled fellows who contributed to the facilitation of the research. This section provides some investigation into the impact and implications of the disabled identity in the conduct of the research. With this grounding in the methodological component of the research, the chapter then moves on to explain the study design, detailing the development and incorporation of the role reversal activities; the integration of the theoretical framework into the overall methodology; and the qualitative methods used to understand the results. This section systematically lays out the structure of the action research activity undertaken over 32 weeks. I have specified the recruitment methods employed to engage a host organisation, participants and Expert Contributors. Here I have also discussed strategies undertaken to protect the identities of contributors to the research. I have outlined ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Finally, I have recounted how the data analysis was undertaken. Throughout these sections I have discussed the strategies I employed to ensure the trustworthiness, credibility and ethical conduct of the study.

3.1 Methodology Rationale

I set out to undertake my PhD with a specific interest, to discover how the social and economic inclusion of disabled people could be better enhanced through the actions of government organisations. I wanted to utilise the unique opportunity of my PhD to not only contribute to a body of knowledge, but also to engage with an organisation to help bring about useful and productive action and change towards development on a practical level, no matter how small that contribution may be. These values and motivations strongly contributed to the methodology design implemented in this research.

A standard qualitative research design on its own would have enabled me to investigate what factors impact disability inclusive planning and practice and provided me with ideas about what avenues could be explored next to advance that work. Such an inquiry was likely to assist me to gain significant insight into the organisational factors impacting the inclusion of disabled people (Mohajan, 2018), I would be left with valuable new discoveries, meaning, understanding, concepts and theory (Aspers & Corte, 2019). However, this approach in isolation would not have necessarily enabled the engagement with, or empowerment of organisational personnel to apply that newly found knowledge and utilise the momentum of discovery to participate in meaningful change and development (Somekh, 1995). It was this engagement and potential for on-the-ground change that I personally felt most intrigued by, and which I felt would come some way in advancing improvements in practice. I therefore sought a methodology which would combine all the benefits of a qualitative study, with something that would facilitate development and change as part of the research process.

My eagerness to find this extra element which had the power to facilitate change was undoubtedly shaped by my positionality as a community development practitioner. In community development, practitioners are invested in bottom-up action, from which those impacted by an issue are engaged and empowered to influence change. The issues that are addressed are defined, explored and interpreted by those living in the situation (Dustman, et al. 2014). The role of the community development practitioner is to support and facilitate the processes of definition, exploration and interpretation and to then assist in identifying assets and resources to take action (Dustman, et al. 2014). By assisting in harnessing local assets, potential and leadership, groups of people can drive meaningful development (Nel, 2018). My passion for the power of community development, together with my awareness for the complexity of organisational environments, caused me to consider whether the personnel within organisations themselves had more power to influence change than is currently capitalised upon. These personnel are, after all, impacted by this problem whether they are cognisant of it or not. Every day they interact with systems, processes and structures of organisations which have the power to either exclude or include certain people. This consideration led me to develop this project into an action research design where those closest to a situation would be empowered to make change. I later discovered that many an action researcher has come to the methodology as a result of their passion for community development approaches (Brydon-Miller, et al. 2003; Dustman, et al. 2014). This discovery was validating in confirming my feeling that action research would align well with my values and ambitions for the research.

Stringer's (2007) articulation of action research captured my attention for its alignment with the purpose and aims of the research. "Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). Stringer's approach to action research recognises that in many areas of professional practice, workers operate in a complex environment of social problems, which typical top-down intervention and policy implementation alone struggle to address and resolve (2007). Stringer proposes that these complex social issues are much better addressed when those closest to the problem are empowered to act out solutions, advocating for their intimate insight into local circumstances and intricacies as being critical to the effective consideration and creative resolve of problems (2007). This perspective seemed to me, highly relatable to the situation personnel in local government face. They are tasked with the mission of developing and implementing organisation-wide Disability Inclusion Action Plans to improve the inclusion of disabled people interacting with Council as community members and employees. Yet, a wide array of complex systemic social and political circumstances makes the task extraordinarily challenging. However, in adopting an action research approach, their insider knowledge of these complexities has great potential to be better capitalised on to address the problem and agitate for change.

Practically, Stringer's (2007) action research approach provided a framework to capture learnings about organisational contexts and challenges surrounding disability inclusive planning and practice. It supported the practical action which was such an important and central intention of this project. It ideally complemented the theoretical framework provided by Freire's pedagogy (1970) and Finkelstein's (1989) analogy of an up-side-down world to support the development of the role reversal activities. As a whole, it provided an opportunity for personnel of a local government organisation to critically reflect upon societal barriers that impact the inclusion of disabled people in their organisation and opened up opportunities for deep consideration and action to address these problems. Stringer's (2007) articulation of action research was therefore, the solution I needed which provided a framework which not only assisted in the production of quality research and knowledge production, but also engaged an organisation in a directly beneficial, practical and purposeful change making project on a local level.

3.2 The Core Characteristics of Action Research

I have used this section to unpack the foundations and characteristics of action research, with the intention of demonstrating how I came to determine the particular value of the chosen approach in the current study. Upon exploring the methodology of action research, it soon became apparent that there are different interpretations and ways of practicing action research evident within the literature (Beaulieu, 2013; Cassell & Johnson, 2006; McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). In determining the most appropriate methodology for this current study, I first sought to understand the core characteristics of action research that make it a distinct research practice. Foremost, action research differs to traditional research in that it combines the learning and discovery of research with the intent to engage in purposeful action and change as part of the research process (DeTardo-Bora, 2004; Jacobs, 2018; Kock, et al. 2017; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Somekh, 1995). Action research is driven by a desire to have social impact by respecting those at the centre of any given situation to have the power to understand and take action over problems that impact their community (Boog, 2003; Brydon-Miller, et al. 2003). It is an approach which seeks to place research participants at the centre of a democratic research process. Rather than simply being the subject of research, participants are actively involved in the research (Jacobs, 2018; Reason & McKernan, 2006; Stringer, 2007). There also tend to be common objectives sought in action research, including striving to improve quality of life, bettering knowledge for practice and addressing problems (Beaulieu, 2013; Boog, 2003; Bradbury & Reason, 2003). These core characteristics encapsulate the central purpose and intent of action research.

The evolution of action research and its core characteristics and objectives has been shaped and practiced in various fields including education, health, community development and organisational development (Brydon-Miller, et al. 2003; Dick, 2004). Kurt Lewin was not the first to practice action research, however, he is well known as an early contributor to the development of the methodology and for giving the practice its name (Jacobs, 2018). In Lewin's application of action research in the 1940s, those who would usually be seen as research subjects were active participants in research and action. Lewin worked with workers from community organisations, schools, factories or government to help them strengthen their group relations and better their practice (Lewin, 1946). This collaborative action research approach was soon after adopted by others, including the Tavistock Institute, a British organisation focused on using social science research to address social issues (Tavistock Institute, N.D.). The institute originally used action research in psychotherapy programs, team building and work in industrial relations to foster democratic participation for empowerment and better team work (Boog, 2003). Likewise, Stephen Corey introduced Lewin's work into the education field in the 1950s as a method for improving teacher practice (Corey, 1954; Jacobs, 2018; Pine, 2008). From these earlier examples, the focus of action research in encouraging research participants to take a central role in the process of research were evident, as well as the intent to improve professional practice, solve problems and bring about change and development.

While action research has always been concerned with change and improving practice, a further interest of using action research to achieve more personal outcomes of emancipation and empowerment among research participants emerged in the late 1960s (Boog, 2003). Influenced by the feminist movement and reflected in works such as Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), new strains of action research emerged, later becoming known as participatory action research approaches (Boog, 2003; Heron & Reason, 1997). As Boog (2003) conveys, the existing democratic nature of action research lent itself to the natural extension of utilising the practice to bring about outcomes in emancipation and empowerment. The process of bringing groups together to engage in collective decision making, reflection and action has the potential to have impacts for each member engaged in that process (Boog, 2003). Individualistic outcomes can include recognition of oppressive structures, improvements in self-efficacy, self-confidence to self-advocate, empowerment and enthusiasm to work together to bring about change (Buettgen, et al, 2012; Ollerton & Horsfall, 2013; Reid, 2006). These outcomes are fostered through the collaborative, team-based nature of action research where participants learn about the situations that are impacting their lives, understand that they are not alone in their experiences and find a sense of belonging and inclusion among their fellows (Buettgen, et al, 2012; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Reid, 2006). These participatory forms of action research are now well established and occupy an important part of the landscape of action research (Boog, 2003; Heron & Reason, 1997; Reid, (2004).

Lewin's articulation of action research was influential in not only cementing and proliferating its core characteristics, but also for developing a cyclical process of undertaking it, which remains a common feature of modern action research practice (Boog, 2003; Jacobs, 2018; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Stringer, 2007). Lewin's cyclical research process consisted of planning to act on an identified objective, executing the planned action and evaluating the action taken (Lewin, 1946). This third step served to enable researchers to investigate the effectiveness of the action and provided learnings to channel into further plans for action (Lewin, 1946). This three-part process could be repeated numerous times in a cyclical manner to continually reflect upon and improve the action (Lewin, 1946). These cycles are replicated in all forms of action research under different labels, but with similar intentions, for example, it is seen in Stringer's look, think and act framework of action research (2007) and similarly in McNiff and Whitehead's, observe, reflect, act, evaluate, modify and move in new directions (2011). Despite this apparent linear process however, it is rare that action researchers will step neatly from stage to stage, instead doubling back, repeating, skipping steps, or making major adjustments to their study (Stringer, 2007). The cycle though, serves as a general structure, or something of a 'to do list' to guide the research process.

Engaging in a cyclical process of inquiry in action research has important purposes. Firstly, the collaborative act of cycling through a process of planning, acting and evaluating serves as the core activity of action research, enabling research participants to engage in highly reflective discussions, knowledge sharing and learning, informing their practice going forward (Koch, et al., 2005). The cyclical process also determines if the action undertaken has had the desired impact and encourages continuous improvement (Bargal, 2008). Finally, the approach strengthens the validity of the study by testing, challenging, reflecting on or confirming the claims of the inquiry (Coghlan & Coughlan 2010; Heron & Reason, 1997; Reason & McKernan, 2006). The number of cycles undertaken is a question for the researcher, weighing up considerations such as how much time to spend on action or reflection; and whether to stay focused on a similar area of inquiry or to move beyond it into different considerations (Reason & McKernan, 2006). The cyclical process alone already typically necessitates a longer timeframe for research activities, a factor which again differentiates the action research approach from traditional experimental science which usually occurs in one moment of time (Bargal, 2008).

3.2.1 Different Approaches to Action Research

Where action research practices differ from one another, there are differences in the perspectives behind the conduct of the activity. These perspectives tend to narrow down into two key areas of disagreement among action researchers. Firstly, there is discord around the proper balance of research and action, as in, what is granted more importance and attention (Huxham & Vangen, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). It is understandable that this should be one of the key areas of dispute in the field, as action research is often criticised as not being quite proper and lacking academic rigor, due to its general departure from traditional, scientific research methods (Beaulieu, 2013; Kock, et al. 2017; Somekh, 1995). Second, the question of who performs the research and action is also of varying opinion (Huxham & Vangen, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). From the objective observer to the participant researcher, there is no single approach. Apparently observing both these key disputes over action research, some scholars have attempted to consider the various interpretations and ways of doing action research to classify different approaches into key categorisations (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018; McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). These authors identify a number of categories of action research, aligning their analysis with three key social science paradigms, positivism, interpretivism and critical theory (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018; McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). This work is helpful in demonstrating the placement of the current methodology, enabling me to define its more intricate attributes.

3.2.2 Technical Action Research

Associated with traditional, scientific positivist research, is what may be referred to as technical or experimental action research, in which, a strong focus is on hypothesis testing and the seeking of generalisable solutions (Bargal, 2008; Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018). While the idea of carrying out action research within this domain is frequently discounted and criticised, as McCutcheon and Jung (1990) point out, some action researchers find security in the approach. The positivist action researcher views behaviour as measurable and objective (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990) and the nature of reality as independent of social influences and therefore amenable to control through generalised solutions (Blum, 1955; Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Coghlan & Coughlan, 2010). In a practical sense, questions posed in this approach to inquiry are most often answered using quantitative methods so as to establish simple cause and effect type answers, enabling the identification of the impact of different variables (McCutcheon & Jung, 1995). Articulations of this form of action research are perhaps best illustrated by some of its earlier applications, such as, in the work of Blum (1955).

Blum outlined the action research approach in a manner highly comparable to typical scientific inquiry, in which hypotheses are developed and tested (1995). The additional element setting it apart from standard research was an intervention brought in at the phase of testing a hypothesis, in order to experiment with a change initiative (Blum, 1955). Blum argued that the other factor that set the approach apart from traditional science was the crucial involvement of those central to the intervention (1955). He argued that the researcher must form a relationship with the people in the situation so that a shared interest in bringing about change can be fostered (Blum, 1955).

Ironically however, within this form of research, the researcher must be objective and neutral, and is positioned as the ‘expert’ (Bargal, 2008; Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018). With the implementation of appropriate methods, the researcher is seen to be able to avoid bias and come from a value-free perspective (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). Despite his clear value of an approach which drew on some collaboration with the subjects of research, Blum himself asserted the importance of objectivity and distance all the same:

> Such a human involvement must be combined with a certain “inner distance” which is not a result of coldness but of consciousness. Through awareness of our own self and respect for the other person we can develop an attitude which combines ability for clear scientific thought with a human feeling for the people who are part of our research (Blum, 1955, p. 2).

It is at this point of the analysis of the positivist approach in action research that its shortcomings and criticisms tend to become very prominent in the literature. The idea of remaining a neutral observer in a social situation is seen as unrealistic (Cassell & Johnson, 2006). As DeTardo-Bora (2004, p. 251) asserts, “One cannot work with a group of participants without, to some degree, becoming one of them”. Furthermore, those opposed to the positivist approach in action research would emphasise that there is no absolute truth in reality; and instead that reality is influenced by a complex array of socially constructed circumstances and meanings (Cassell & Johnson, 2006).

3.2.3 Emancipatory Action Research

It is critiques such as these that have led action researchers to more flexible forms of inquiry. At the opposite end of the spectrum, approaches which entirely embrace the emancipatory, democratic and participatory potential of action research are found (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018). While it can be reasonably argued that all action research is undertaken with the intent of bringing about social change and impact by enabling people to address problems and or better their practice, these forms of action research also seek greater personal impact such as personal growth, empowerment or emancipation from restrictive power structures (Boog, 2003; Somekh, 1995). These approaches often align with a critical social sciences paradigm, within which, the subjectivity of individual scenarios is important for understanding the social, cultural and political factors at play in order to address destructive structures of oppression and domination (Cassell & Johnson 2006; Jacobs 2018). Given this focus on understanding subjective circumstances, these approaches to action research tend to be those most commonly criticised for lacking scholarly rigor and instead may be labelled as nothing greater than professional development or a support group for marginalised groups (Beaulieu, 2013; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000).

Action research undertaken within a critical paradigm, is usually that which best demonstrates participatory action research practice. In these studies, participants of research become active participants in undertaking the research, determining and acting out the scope of investigation (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018). For example, in Buettgen, et al. (2012) researchers with developmental disabilities worked together to define the key questions of concern in their study around disability and poverty. They were actively involved in research design and activities including recruitment, data collection, analysis and dissemination (Buettgen, et al. 2012). Co-operative inquiry is one form of participatory action research which exemplifies the equalisation of researchers and participants (Heron & Reason, 2006). Within this practice there are no normative expectations about who is a researcher and who is a participant, instead, everyone involved in the research contributes as both researchers and participants (Heron & Reason, 2006). All contributors are involved in the study design, conduct, analysis and drawing of conclusions (Heron & Reason, 2006). For example, in a co-operative inquiry study undertaken by academics and first-year students seeking to improve student experience, academic participants consciously stepped back from controlling the scope of the study and allowed the students to equally determine its direction (Einboden, et al., 2023). This equalisation of roles and power took the study in complex directions that the academic participants originally resisted and ultimately was considered to produce innovative and insightful ideas about ways to make change (Einboden, et al., 2023).

In such participatory inquiries, the focus of the research may be grounded in some area of human rights recognition or social change, but due to being highly participatory, also tend to serve an individually emancipatory or empowering purpose. For example, Doucet, et al. (2022) discussed a participatory action research study in which the purpose was to consider the relationships of importance to young people in care. While fulfilling this purpose, the young people involved in the study also indicated individual impacts such as wanting to find further opportunities to be involved in research, advocacy or activism (Doucet, et al. 2022). Similarly, Ollerton and Horsfall (2013) discussed a project in which young people with intellectual disabilities used photos to capture information about violations of their human rights and then collaboratively coded the resultant data. The process helped participants to understand the social structures and institutions which impacted their exercising of human rights (Ollerton & Horsfall, 2013). They then used this data to advocate for an improved recognition of their human rights with public transport authorities, the Australian Disability Discrimination Commissioner and made a submission to a public policy review (Ollerton & Horsfall, 2013). In these examples, the research approaches are highly democratic and strive for emancipatory outcomes as well as social change.

3.2.4 Practical Action Research

Action research undertaken within an interpretivist paradigm, which Cassell and Johnson, (2006) frame as an ‘inductive’ method, while Jacobs (2018) refer to it as a ‘practical’ approach, is that which is perhaps the most common form of action research (Kock, et al. 2017). This approach to action research denotes the strongest focus on finding practical solutions to problems and in improving professional practice (Jacobs, 2018). Grounded in interpretivist philosophy, the nature of this kind of inquiry is naturally highly reflexive and may utilise theories of human behaviour to assist in facilitating the acquisition of knowledge and understanding to assist in unpacking and interpreting findings (Cassell, & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008). The application of an interpretivist form of action research can also be instrumental in creating new theory and strengthening that which already exists (Cassell, & Johnson, 2006; Friedman, et al. 2009; Huxham & Vangen, 2003). Through the initiation and refinement of action, action research projects can slowly contribute to improvements in practice over time, while developing theory (Huxham & Vangen, 2003; Wiklund-Engblom, et al., 2023). It is this practical, inductive form of action research which is highly reflected in Stringers (2007) action research framework.

Just as in an emancipatory approach, the subjectivity of individual situations is important to consider in practical inquiry (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). However, the focus appears to be more upon those more immediate situations and problems within which action research can have a tangible, timely impact in addressing, rather than on larger, more complex and impenetrable institutions and systemic social issues. For example, within this form of inquiry, researchers will ask questions which aim to discover the intricacies within individual social situations, how people behave within them, the ways in which practice is undertaken, and critically, how those situations, behaviours and practices impact on others (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). Also comparable to emancipatory approaches, this approach can attract criticism due to its departure from seeking generalisable solutions and absolute truth seeking present within positivist approaches (Beaulieu, 2013). Striving for generalisability is actively rejected in these forms of action research (Beaulieu, 2013; Somekh, 1995; Stringer, 2007). Stringer asserts that the focus on generalisability is precisely the factor which alienates research from community and industry because the solutions which are intended to solve all problems, simply do not (2007). The focus in these forms of action research, which is argued to be a strength of the methodology, is instead upon seeking solutions that work for individual situations, informed by the people present within that situation (Beaulieu, 2013; (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990; Stringer, 2007).

Those who undertake or participate in practical action research are those closest to a situation in which change or development is sought, for example, practitioners, teachers, managers and may involve service users and consumers (Stringer, 2007). It may be undertaken by practitioners themselves (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011), or it may be facilitated by a researcher who recruits practitioners and other stakeholders to be involved (Stringer, 2007). These practical forms of action research have a long history in education (Cain, 2011; Corey, 1954), used by teachers as a tool for professional development, to reflexively improve their teaching methods and solve problems (Corey, 1954; Messiou, 2019; Netcoh, 2017; Pine, 2008). This work serves to provide many practical examples as to how it is undertaken. Netcoh (2017) reports on an action research study in which middle school teachers wanted to embrace the use of digital devices to enhance learning, however, were concerned about inappropriate student use in class (Netcoh, 2017). In a collaborative project between a team of students and the principal of the school, the problem was addressed by devising a traffic-light system to indicate zones of the school where device use was not permitted, permitted only for learning activities and permitted for social communication and entertainment (Netcoh, 2017). The project was successful in eliminating the immediate problem of device misuse, demonstrating the power of working with the student population to understand their preferences (Netcoh, 2017). Similarly, in a study by Argyropoulos and Thymakis (2014), an action research team worked together to address the specific learning difficulties of a student with vision and physical impairments. Utilising two cycles of action research, the research team, which included a special education teacher and an adaptive technology specialist, tested various strategies to enable the student to improve her typing skills (Argyropoulos & Thymakis, 2014). The team introduced her to a one-handed keyboard, enabling her to improve her typing speed and accuracy (Argyropoulos & Thymakis, 2014). In these examples, educators have embraced action research to solve problems and find solutions which work for their students by understanding their challenges and trying strategies which are responsive to individual situations.

3.3 The Practical Approach Applied in the Current Study

Evidently in line with a practical approach, Stringer's articulation of action research is targeted towards a broad audience of industry professionals who may want to use action research to solve problems in their organisation or community (2007). It is this focus on the everyday implementation within industry that first caught my attention for its alignment with what I wanted to achieve in the current study. Stringer subscribes to a model of action research which can be utilised to generate theory and knowledge production (2007). However, its foremost concern is with solving problems in people's lives and bringing about social change or development which is meaningful to that community of people (Stringer, 2007). Stringer asserts that action research can be used to define a problem, explore its context, analyse its components and develop strategies to rectify the issue (2007). In the case of the current study, problem solving was the focus of the action research. While on the broadest level, the problem of concern was the social exclusion, discrimination and human rights abuses disabled people continue to experience in Australia, the focus in the action research is upon actions, behaviours and practices which occur within organisational and personal levels, potentially contributing to the broader context. Attention to these issues is important because, this is where change will begin to occur, and in turn, can then influence broader impact (Dustman, et al. 2014).

As in all action research, Stringer has defined his own cyclical process from which to undertake action research, ‘look’, ‘think’ and ‘act’ (Stringer, 2007). The cycle provides a framework to allow participants to remain highly analytical as they investigate, consider and take action (Stringer, 2007). The first cycle is undertaken based on the participants’ initial understandings of the problems at play, whereas further cycles incorporate further knowledge gained from the participants’ experiences of acting (Stringer, 2007). The factors and complexities encountered, contributions of stakeholders, data gathered, and the outcomes of action all contribute to the next cycle (Stringer, 2007). The process can be applied numerous times in the same enquiry, evolving into a practice of reviewing the action ('looking again'), reflecting and re-thinking ('re-analysing'), and acting again with greater knowledge and insight (re-acting’) (Stringer, 2007). The cycle is not intended to be undertaken in a linear fashion but encourages movement between phases as required (Stringer, 2007).

Given the purpose of the study to examine and influence organisational practice, and its positionality within a local government organisation, the role and benefit of practical action research in organisational contexts was of particular interest as I developed this study design. I sought to discover examples of the practice in relatable organisational contexts. I was seeking evidence that the approach would be suitable in a complex organisational setting, while effectively supporting the desired improvements to practice. Many action research projects have been undertaken in organisational settings which follow similar trajectories of Stringer’s practical approach. Identifiable among these examples are common aims and success in improving or introducing new practices, procedures or developing the skills of organisational personnel (Butler, et al., 2008; Netcoh, et al., 2017; Winkler, et al., 2018). Throughout the design and implementation of an information technology product for knowledge management, personnel of a government organisation were engaged via action research to identify key business and administrative processes which would be impacted by the new system (Butler, et al., 2008). This engagement and addressing of potential issues were later recognised as a factor in influencing the success of the implementation of the information technology tool (Butler, et al., 2008). Netcoh, et al, (2017) used action research as a professional development tool for middle school teachers who also implemented new learning strategies in their schools as a component of their research and learning. Winkler, et al., (2018) discovered better ways to support the learning and productive development of student entrepreneurs by observing, adjusting and reflecting on the practices and behaviours which occurred in a co-working space. The observers realised that students were using the co-working space more to network rather than develop their individual business ideas; hence, they were able to introduce more individual goal-setting and mentoring practices into the program of learning. These insights into action research within organisations provided an encouraging insight into its appropriateness to enable employees of a local government organisation to identify and improve their planning and practice with the view of bringing about improvements in disability inclusive planning and practice.

The effectiveness of action research in testing and developing theory was also relevant to this study. The current study, while drawing on existing theoretical ideas, was inductive in that it uniquely combined different sources of thinking including role reversal activities; the Freirean pedagogy for problem-posing, critical dialogue and the development of new understandings; and the practical action research methodology. By doing so, the study effectively experimented with and developed a new, innovative theoretical and actionable practice. Action research can support the experimental implementation of a theoretical concept. Pollack and Pollack (2015) reported on the use of action research within an Australian government federal organisation which focused on implementing organisational change, using Kotter's process of organisational change, while also succeeding in understanding more about the efficacy of the model in practice. Huxham and Vangen (2003) reported on a study in which they worked with a team of community development practitioners within a poverty reduction organisation, using action research to transfer insights from theory on effective collaborative working into practice. The study highlighted that the theoretical concepts were not well received, understood or implemented by the practitioners (Huxham & Vangen, 2003). Wiklund-Engblom, et al., (2023) reported on an action research project seeking to understand how to create a smart working environment for personnel of a small developing enterprise. While addressing a practical goal, the research also succeeded in developing further theoretical understanding of what constituted a smart working environment (Wiklund-Engblom, et al., 2023). In these cases, these discoveries provided the researchers with important data regarding the transfer of theory to practice and further developed theoretical concepts (Huxham & Vangen, 2003; Pollack & Pollack, 2015; Wiklund-Engblom, et al., 2023).

Action research within organisations can be undertaken as an individual's project, however, its benefits as a collaborative exercise are significant. Eikeland argued that the group learning that occurs in action research is invaluable in allowing participants to test ideas and practices while learning and responding to one another (2012). Action research projects undertaken by individuals may struggle to attract interest and engagement with leadership and colleagues, and hence fail to bring about the desired change (Eikeland (2012). Another particular benefit of collaborative action research is its power to bring together many different knowledge sources, diversifying and strengthening understandings of complex problems (Guertler, et al., 2020; Stringer, 2007). This is a common feature present in participatory forms of action research, demonstrating a differentiation to other types of action research (Jacobs, 2018). Elsey and Lathlean, (2006) discovered having external or participant voices present within the action research group helped in becoming aware of consumer experience and in breaking down views on traditional ways of undertaking practice within aged care services. As a result of an action research study looking to improve inclusive practices within schools Messiou, (2019) argued that the collaboration between teachers and students granted greater insight, reflection and outcomes compared to what would have been achieved if the project was undertaken among teachers alone. Similarly, in Welter, et al., (2021) the diverse participation across public health, health care and worker advocacy groups and unions helped to uncover varied and innovative perspectives, ideas and solutions to address the problem of precarious employment conditions. Further, as action research participants engage in the activity, they may reach out to stakeholders beyond the action research group, and by doing so, the positive impact and influence of the project extends into the practice of others, benefiting other work activities (Guertler, et al., 2020; Stringer, 2007). The benefits of a collaborative action research project were sought in the current study which led the design to incorporate two groups made up of a diverse range of local government employees from different business areas and levels of leadership, complemented by the external disabled Expert Contributors.

Action research relies on the engagement of people, a practice which must be done well in order to ensure a quality action research approach is followed through. Stringer (2007) asserts the importance in investing time into understanding the existing positionality of those stakeholders participating in the research, as these people are the knowledge holders and those with a particular vested interest in the area of service improvement under examination (Stringer, 2007). Without understanding these positions, the researcher can be perceived as interfering (Stringer, 2007). With an understanding of the positionality of those participating in the action research, it can also be beneficial to the action research to ensure those with decision making and budgetary authority are involved in the study (Elsey & Lathlean, 2006). Reporting on an action research project undertaken within aged care services, Elsey and Lathlean, (2006) found that while the project had been successful in facilitating discussion and problem identification between multiple internal and external stakeholders to the services, its effectiveness in bringing about actual organisational change and development, was not particularly successful, suspected to be limited by a lack of authority within the core group of action research participants (Elsey & Lathlean, 2006). Deriving learnings from this experience, they suggested that if this presence is not possible, links to decision making power should be established to support proposed action (Elsey & Lathlean, 2006). Stringer (2007) cautioned that in the scenario of decision-makers being present, there could also be significant problems caused by hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of leadership within an action research project and suggested that it was important a group adopt respectful, collaborative practices which allow democratic participation.

3.4 The Roles of the Researcher and Expert Contributors

In the current study, I adopted the role of researcher as outlined by Stringer (2007). From this perspective, the researcher assists a group of people to explore the problems they face and helps them to work together to find solutions (Stringer, 2007). As such, the researcher in this methodology is akin to a facilitator or resource person (Stringer, 2007). As previously noted, there are different levels of participant and researcher involvement in undertaking the tasks of research in action research (Stringer, 2007). As a practical approach, the research may not be considered entirely participatory such as in an emancipatory study where participants are involved more equally as co-researchers (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018). As a PhD study, I undertook the role of primary researcher in this instance. I independently developed the research design, devised questions, undertook all activities of literature review, data collection, analysis and writing. However, I did encourage participants to see themselves as part of an action research group in that they were investigating problems within their organisation and, with that research were acting out potential solutions. I tended to explain my purpose as researching how they went about these tasks. Participants understood themselves to be carrying out an action research project that was beneficial to their organisation, also knowing that I was learning from their actions in order to contribute knowledge toward disability inclusive planning and practice on a broader level. For example, as participants worked to review a council process, I was examining the factors that either impeded or facilitated their efforts.

As well as coordinating the research, the research facilitator in practical action research may also undertake supporting tasks such as providing assistance when needed; nurturing participants through challenging times; and facilitating reflection and debrief (Stringer, 2007). There were periods of time that I was closely connected to the participants during the formal research activities, and other times when they were working independently without frequent contact. During those times of independent work, I did receive occasional requests for assistance from participants. Seen as a specialist in disability inclusion, participants felt comfortable to reach out to me for advice or a linkage to a service or support, such as to an organisation who supported disabled artists, or, to a checklist for planning accessible events. When working directly with participants during workshops and interviews, there were often elements of reflection, debrief and nurturing arising in those activities. The research did raise confronting, complex and frustrating emotions for participants, which we discussed as they arose. As the findings of this research explores in detail, there were some instances of participants expressing emotions of confrontation, guilt and shame upon coming to understand the impact of barriers in the lives of disabled people. Whenever such an emotion was voiced, I discussed with participants to fully understand their perspectives and to consider if they were experiencing significant distress. In these instances, participants clarified that these feelings were part of the journey of learning and did not stay with them for a prolonged time.

The concept of the researcher being an insider, outsider, or combination of the two, is highly relevant to the practice of action research, as these positionalities can have impacts on perceived trustworthiness, empathy, power and privilege (McDougall, et al., 2021; Webster-Deakin, 2021). From the perspective of McNiff and Whitehead (2011) who perceive action research as that exclusively undertaken by practitioners working to improve their practice, I would be considered an outsider researcher. In this study I have asked questions more aligned to the outsider social researcher such as, how do people respond to this activity? And, what can we learn about their practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011)? This is seen to enforce a level of distance between the participants and myself as a kind of external expert (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). However, there were many things in this particular study which seemed to effectively dissolve my status as outsider, and I felt much more connected with the idea of myself as an insider researcher. As a previous employee of a regional local council, I brought with me insider knowledge of this organisational context. For example, I had a comprehensive understanding of the processes, policies, plans and practices that the personnel of the current study worked within. In particular, as a former Disability Inclusion Officer I had a thorough understanding of the relevant legislative requirements of DIAPs and the challenges around implementing such policy. Webster-Deakin (2021) noted a similar realisation when they came to understand their existing knowledge afforded them relatability and a connection with participants of their research. I feel that participants of the action research perceived me as an insider to the local government world, as they freely used expressions and acronyms known only to local government personnel, as well as sharing sentiments, such as, “you know what that’s like”. Local council personnel frequently move between local councils as they progress through their careers. As such, I sense a kind of distinctiveness to those who are part of this broad, familiar network, including those who are currently, or who have been local council workers in the past.

My role as a disabled researcher will have also contributed to my positionality, as well as the intent, conduct and outcomes of this action research. I opted to utilise Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed as the theoretical underpinning of this research. From this perspective, I, as a disabled person was part of a marginalised group who have experienced significant oppression and continue to in the present time (1970). Throughout history, disabled people have been further disempowered by much research undertaken on our behalf which has further entrenched the medicalisation and segregation of our community (Barnes & Mercer (1997; Kitchin, 2000). However, the Freirean approach is empowering in that it provides for historically oppressed people to take a leadership position and gain a sense of agency over the resolution of problems in our lives (Freire, 1970). This approach allowed me to embrace my intention to influence oppressive structures and barriers to inclusion. It also specifically valued and allowed me to contribute the insight offered by my own experience of barriers, discrimination and exclusion owing to my positionality as a disabled person (Tregaskis & Goodley, 2005; Watharow & Wayland, 2022). Just as with other disabled researchers, my own experiences of marginalisation and discrimination fuelled my interest in the topic and inspired a determination to seek to understand how to bring about successful social change through disability inclusive planning and practice (Raymaker, 2017; Watharow & Wayland, 2022). My own observations of disability simulation activities caused me significant frustration for their seemingly superficial impact. I was driven to not only confirm what I suspected but determine a better way to provide experiential learning to bring about quality outcomes. According to Barnes and Mercer (1997) this is a particular advantage of research undertaken in alignment with the social model of disability, as it serves to break down oppression and isolation, and can bring about positive social change through a perspective of rights recognition.

Kitchin (2000), observed that being disabled alone does not automatically mean that one's experience is wholly representative of the disabled community. As such, to ensure diversity in perspectives and to bring complete authenticity to the representation of role reversal activities developed in line with Finkelstein's analogy

(1989), I recruited two fellow disabled people, with different impairments to my own, who I soon started referring to as Expert Contributors. The Expert Contributors were part of the action research groups during the initial workshops. They worked alongside me to implement and support the role reversal activities. They then stayed for half of the initial full-day workshops' duration. During this time, as a team, I and the Expert Contributors worked to unpack the social model of disability by storytelling and assisting the participants to problem-pose barriers within their council and further afield. At this stage, the Expert Contributors were not research participants, nor co-researchers. Their roles were more aligned to fellow facilitators. Their role, as assisting me as fellow disabled people was somewhat different to how lived experience advisors or co-researchers seem to typically be engaged. In the latter cases, this representation is often sought when the researchers themselves do not have the lived experience under consideration in the research, and so benefit from external input to provide appropriate formation of the research design (Bennett, et al., 2024; Diaz-Garolera , et al., 2022; Kerr, et al., 2024). In the current study, I was not relying on the Expert Contributors to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the research. Instead, their contribution went directly to providing a depth of experience and expertise to support the participants' learning on a broader level than I could do alone. After the initial workshops, the Expert Contributors did become more comparable to research participants, as they shared their own perceptions of how the activities of the research had unfolded in individual interviews with me.

3.5 The Study Design

The current study's design was built upon the practical action research approach articulated by Stringer, 2007). Serving as an ideal complement to the action research, while also reinforcing the study's capability as an action-orientated, change-making tool was Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed. I employed Freire's pedagogy as the theoretical framework underlying the conduct of the learning activities and analysis of the data. Finkelstein's (1989) analogy of the upside-down-world provided the tool to shape the development of the role reversal activities, as well as inserting and incorporating a very powerful and illustrative example of the social model of disability throughout the research. Finkelstein's analogy also helped me to clarify and justify the adaptation of the Freirean approach

(1970), as detailed in the previous chapter. This reversal allowed me to utilise the pedagogy to enable those outside of a historically oppressed group to agitate for change. This section articulates how I based the study around these three pillars, while utilising qualitative methods to conduct the action research over a 32-week (eight-month) period. In the development of the study design, I was supported and guided by my PhD supervisors who brought expertise in action research and qualitative inquiry. Their input assisted to ensure measures of creditability and trustworthiness were embedded into the methodology. Upon engagement of the two Expert Contributors, I met with them individually and discussed the role reversal activities and their role in assisting facilitation. This process served to further validate the chosen method of utilising role reversal activities, as both Expert Contributors indicated their willingness to explore this innovative method of conveying the social model of disability. The following sections also outline the strategies I have employed throughout the study design, recruitment, and analysis to ensure the trustworthiness, credibility and ethical conduct of the research.

Table 3.1 Study Design Framework

Table 3.1 outlines the entire study design in chronological progression, illustrating the connections between the research activities, methods used, phases of action research and theoretical links. I originally designed this framework to plan the research. I used a modified and simplified version to pitch the project to the local council. After the research, it serves as a useful illustration of the entire process of the research. The systematic demonstration of the research process is also shown to convey the trustworthiness of the research in exemplifying transferability, dependability and confirmability (Stringer, 2007). Discussion questions noted under the workshop components should be considered as broad discussion topics. As is the nature of action research, questions and discussions further evolved during the research.

Research Activity and Methods	Methodological Or Theoretical Link	Timeframe
Initial full-day workshops x2 (workshop 1) • 13 participants split into two groups. Six or seven local council personnel in each group, forming Group A and Group B. • Two Expert Contributors attended both workshops for the first half of the day, present during the most in-depth problem-posing and critical dialogue. Role reversal activities, social model barrier replication: • Participants interact with barriers which impede their ability to enter the building, access information and communicate with one another. Activities were rolled out by researcher and Expert Contributors. Problem-posing: • As a group, explored the barriers that arose in those activities. • Shared and discussed social model of disability which provides context to the activities. Played YouTube video animation depicting Finkelstein's analogy of the upside-down-world. • Further discussed contexts of discrimination, exclusion and oppression. Debrief and discussion: • How did experiencing the barriers make you feel? Overview of action research approach – setting intentions for the broader action research: • Discussed the action research process, look, think and Act and Discuss the characteristics of research Returned to problem-posing: • Organisational contexts impacting inclusion initiatives. Prompting discussion questions: • What do you understand your responsibilities unde the Disability Inclusion Action Plan to be? • What things do you do in your everyday work to impact inclusion and accessibility? • What challenges do you come up against carrying out inclusive actions in your organisation? • What barriers do you think are present in your organisation that may impact inclusion? • What things would help you to be better able to implement inclusive actions?	Role reversal activities based on Finkelstein analogy (1989). Action research phases 'look' and 'think' (Stringer, 2007). Phase one of Freirean pedagogy - Problem-posing and critical dialogue (Freire, 1970).	Weeks 1 and 2

Research Activity and Methods	**Methodological Or Theoretical Link**	**Timeframe**
Preparing to act - Groups collectively designed their action plans noting activities, people responsible and timelines. - Consideration over the approach to identified organisational issues and consider what resources need to be procured. - Discussed what can be done before we meet again? What are some of the most pressing issues that can be addressed? Further debriefing questions: - How do you feel going forward? - How do you feel about taking action over the next 3 months or so? - What could be the biggest challenges?		
Independent Action - The two action research groups combined and consolidated their action plans. - Participants began to meet regularly to discuss their plans and progress. - Participants sought additional endorsement of their action plan from executive leaders. - Participants began taking action in line with the action plan.	Action research phase: ‘act’ (Stringer, 2007). Phase two of Freirean pedagogy- Gathering support and making change (Freire, 1970). Subsequent cycles of action research began as participants observed and reviewed their action (Stringer, 2007).	Weeks 2 – 11
Individual Interviews with Expert Contributors As a reflective process, the Expert Contributors met with me individually to discuss their thoughts, feelings, perceptions and observations resulting from helping facilitate the role reversal activities and the problem-posing and critical dialogue. (See Appendix B for Expert Contributors Interview Schedule).	Reflected on role reversal activities based on Finkelstein analogy (1989). Action research phases ‘look’ and ‘think’ (Stringer, 2007). Phase one of Freirean pedagogy - Problem-posing and	Week 6

Research Activity and Methods	**Methodological Or Theoretical Link**	**Timeframe**
	critical dialogue (Freire, 1970).	
Mid-term Combined Groups’ Workshop – excluding Expert Contributors (workshop 2) The combined group met to reflect on the actions they took during the preceding 12-weeks to advance inclusive actions and discussed their next intentions. Prompting discussion questions: • How often did you meet? • What did you discuss and work on? • Discuss the nature of your group work, how productive, collaborative, effective? • What actions did you take or influence in others? • What impacts did your actions have? Identify further problems, things to continue to resolve? • What barriers did you come up against? • What organisational difficulties did you encounter? • What trouble if any did you encounter gaining buy-in to your action? • What impact did the role reversal activities have on you over the 12-week period? Next steps: • As a group, considered what further actions can be taken to address challenges and difficulties. • Discussed what further actions would be taken.	Reflected on role reversal activities based on Finkelstein analogy (1989). Triggered a new action research cycle starting with ‘look’ an ‘think’ (Stringer, 2007). Revisited phase one of Freirean pedagogy - Problem-posing and critical dialogue (Freire, 1970).	Week 12
Independent Action Participants continued their independent work after reflecting upon and reviewing their actions. • Participants continued to meet regularly to discuss their plans and progress. • Participants continued to take action, but with further learning based on the cycles of action research they engaged in.	Phase two of Freirea pedagogy- Gathering support and making change (Freire, 1970). Cycles of action research continued a participants observed and reviewed their action (Stringer, 2007).	Weeks 12 – 32
Individual Interviews with Participants As a final reflective process, each participant (excluding Expert Contributors) met with the researcher to discuss their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, actions and behaviours resulting from the action learning experience.	Reflected on persona impacts of role reversal activities (Finkelstein, 1989).	Occurred throughout Weeks 26 – 32

Research Activity and Methods	Methodological Or Theoretical Link	Timeframe
These interviews allowed participants to discuss the process and be more open than they could be in a group setting (See Appendix C for Personnel Interview Schedule).	Reflected on action research phases of ‘look’, ‘think’ and ‘act’ (Stringer, 2007). Reflected on phases one and two of Freirean pedagogy of problem-posing, critical dialogue, gathering support anc making change (Freire, 1970).	
Final Wrap-Up Session Instigated and facilitated by the participants, the final wrap-up session discussed the outcomes of the action research and mapped out plans for the groups continued work and expansion.	Reflected on action research phases of ‘look’, ‘think’ and ‘act’ (Stringer, 2007). Reflected on phase two of Freirean pedagogy- gathering support and making change (Freire, 1970).	Week 32
Member Checking with Participants • After completing data analysis, I circulated a summary of findings document (see appendix D) and invited all participants including Expert Contributors to attend a Zoom chat to discuss. • Four participants attended in the group Zoom. One participant made time to have a one-on-one Zoom catch-up. One Expert Contributor provided feedback via a separate Zoom catch-up and the other provided feedback by email. • Participants and Expert Contributors provided their input over the preliminary findings and advised where some findings warranted particular emphasis.	Element of ensuring creditability in the action research methodology (Stringer, 2007).	Occurred 12-months after the initial workshops and approximately six-months after the final wrap-up session.

As Table 3.1 shows, the study design included multiple qualitative methods to support the use of the methodology and theory and to allow me to gain the rich, insightful data I was seeking. The first data collection points occurred in the form of two interactive workshops with different local council personnel participants in each. I initially considered that I would need to split the 13 participants into two groups to manage the size. After the initial workshops, the two groups opted to come together and combine their efforts rather than stay separated as two action research groups. These workshops were not simply an opportunity for me to ask questions of a group such as a focus group (Stringer, 2007), but enabled the presentation of the role reversal activities, as well as the problem-posing critical dialogue (Freire, 1970). The workshops were highly comparable to what a disability awareness training-type session could look like with these methods applied, except that they were recorded using Olympus recorders to accurately capture the spoken data. Participants had previously provided written consent, and when placing the recorders in position I reiterated the advice that the workshops were being recorded. Observation made up an important component at that point in the study. In action research, observing how people interact with their environment and within certain situations provides a valuable insight into how people go about undertaking actions and completing tasks (Roulet, et al., 2017; Stringer, 2007). In the case of the current study, observation was used during the workshops, particularly to monitor reactions, interpretations and processing of the activities presented. Along with the workshops and other methods used, observation assisted to triangulate research findings to strengthen creditability of the research findings (Roulet, et al., 2017; Stringer, 2007).

As suggested by Stringer (2007), I recorded field notes as soon as possible after the workshops in which I had been observing responses to activities. My dual roles as an action research facilitator and observer made my role somewhat complex in the moment. In anticipation of this complexity needing to juggle various tasks at once, I prepared myself a list of factors which I wanted to take observations from to focus my attention to specific detail. Observation can be utilised to recognise all manner of physical interactions, conversations, situations, activities, events and actions (Stringer, 2007). In the case of this study, I limited my observations to focus on the initial responses when confronted with role reversal activities, and the sense of engagement portrayed by participants as they interacted with the day's activities.

The role reversal activities were the first elements of the entire action research process and were delivered one after the other to participants as they entered and settled into the initial workshops. The role reversal activities were devised with Finkelstein's (1989) analogy of the upside-down-world in mind. I developed three activities, focusing on three forms of barriers depicted by the social model of disability, physical, information and communication. Among all, I ensured attitudinal barriers were also demonstrated. The role reversal activities served as the participants' first opportunity to 'look' at the current situation through the lens of the action research (Stringer, 2007) although they did not know this at the time. The barriers also served as the initial problems the participants had to encounter and challenge, acting as the most powerful representations suggested by the application of Freire's pedagogy (1970).

The first role reversal activity was the physical barrier, created by causing an obstruction to the entrance of the building, directing participants to a less convenient and less dignified entry around the back of the building. The building utilised was a council owned facility and quite recently completed. As such its main entrance was the accessible entrance, with alternative, inaccessible entry points at the side and back of the facility. I fenced off the main entrance using poles and line, typically used to direct crowds at large events. I then gathered bins from around the facility and placed close to the alternative entrance I wanted participants to utilise. The purpose of this action was to replicate the frequent positioning of smelly bins near the less utilised accessible entrance in many establishments. I and the Expert Contributors then waited at the front of the building to greet participants and direct them to the alternative entrance. In giving directions, we did our best to remain matter-of-fact about our strange instructions, hoping to replicate the seemingly second-nature way such instructions are delivered to disabled people when directing to second-rate facilities and entrances.

The second role reversal activity, the information barrier was produced when all participants were inside the room and seated around the table. After a brief introduction, and the starting of the recording devices, I handed out a page of embossed Braille to all participants. I then asked for a volunteer to read the information to the group. To follow this impossible instruction, I then demonstrated a lack of concern for finding an accessible solution to the problem of the inaccessible Braille and advised participants they could take the Braille home to their mum to read to them. This statement was repeated after having heard it many times myself when presented with inaccessible print information. Its impact toward me has always felt infantilising and belittling, as well as dismissive of the importance of me having equal access to information. The third and final role reversal activity came in the form of a communication barrier. I asked participants to pair up and asked them to imagine they had to be away from work for a time and they needed to communicate an essential task to another colleague that must be done in their absence. I asked them to communicate this task without speaking. This was the most complex barrier to develop without inadvertently mimicking a simulation activity by taking away the tool of speech. However, I made it quite clear that the barrier at play was the fact that I had not provided an accessible method to enable the communication of essential information. I illustrated this by providing no timeframe to complete the task and hurrying the participants while they struggled to complete the task. Participants had to rapidly find ways to overcome the inaccessibility barrier, choosing various alternative ways to communicate the information.

After the completion of the role reversal activities, the workshops remained in the action research phase of ‘look’ (Stringer, 2007) while the participants moved into further phases of problem-posing based on critical dialogue, as is the core feature of Freire’s pedagogy (1970). To spark conversations and reiterate the nature of the social model of disability which the role reversal activities had just striven to illustrate, I played an animated video available on YouTube which is a representation of Finkelstein’s upside-down-world analogy (1989). It was after this that discussions and observations around barriers within council and further afield began to flow. As the discussions progressed, participants soon moved to discuss organisational factors at play in impacting disability inclusive planning and practice. It was here that I could see the participants were moving into the ‘think’ phase of action research, beginning to consider the roots of problems and how they may respond (Stringer, 2007). In this phase I supported participants to engage in action planning, setting them up for the proceeding several months of the action research (Stringer, 2007). The two individual workshop groups produced two thorough action plans. However, after the conclusion of the initial workshops, the participants opted to combine groups and consolidate their two plans into one.

The remainder of methods used focused on receiving reflective data provided by the Expert Contributors and participants. Expert Contributors met with me in individual interviews after the workshops, at which time I gained their perspectives and observations surrounding the impacts and learning resulting from the workshops. Local council personnel participants had greater opportunities to share their experiences with me of taking action and engaging in further cycles of 'look', 'think' and 'act' (Stringer, 2007) over the next 30 or so weeks. At the mid-point of the study the then combined action research group met with me over Zoom to report on their progress made during the initial period of independent work. I also encouraged them to discuss their next steps. The participants then worked independently again for another several months before meeting with me again individually over Zoom for interviews at the end of the action research. The individual interviews were the highly reflective and insightful conversations I hoped for, presenting the opportunity for participants to fully articulate their personal feelings and experiences after venturing through the entire action research process (Stringer, 2007). These conversations also served as opportunities to debrief and discuss any difficulties encountered along the way. Facilitating the opportunity to debrief is an important element of ensuring credibility by ensuring participants' sense of safety and trust for the research process (Stringer, 2007). Again, I recorded these conversations, using both the Olympus recorders and the Zoom recording function as a backup. It was during these conversations that I gained the most insight into the actions participants took which effectively gathered support for their action and made change, demonstrating the results of Freire's pedagogy (1970).

The action research group participants instigated a final wrap-up session at the end of the formal action research period in the form of a catch-up over Zoom. This fell outside of the methods I had developed for the study, however participants consented to me also recording this session and including it in my data analysis. A product of my subsequent data analysis was a preliminary summary of findings. Six months after the final wrap-up session, I contacted the action research group and the Expert Contributors to offer the opportunity to member check the preliminary research findings. Member checking serves as a valuable opportunity for participants to verify or dispute the researcher's findings and adds credibility to the analysis (Stringer, 2007). The member checking was completed primarily once again over Zoom. One participant and one Expert Contributor asked for one-on-one catch ups and the remaining Expert Contributor provided feedback via email. The member checking helped me confirm and strengthen the preliminary results and prepared me for the task of writing up the findings.

3.6 Recruitment of Research Contributors

The first step of recruitment to this study was to engage a host local council. I first made contact with a regional local council in the Hunter region of NSW with a population just over 90,000. This local council was situated within an hour of public transport from my own place of residence. My research proposal was met enthusiastically. The leaders who met with me recognised a value to the study in enhancing their organisation's approach to disability inclusive planning and practice. At this time in 2021, The local council was nearing the end of the period of its inaugural Disability Inclusion Action Plan. With this initial interest, I forwarded a letter of introduction to the host organisation and received written confirmation of their willingness to participate. The council also agreed to be named in the study, however I have not done so in this thesis. Internally, the council triggered their own endorsement of the project through a council report. I was also asked to present about the study to the council's Access and Inclusion Reference Group on a number of occasions to provide progress updates on the study. With engagement of the host organisation, recruitment of participants could then begin. At this stage there was a large delay in beginning recruitment due to Covid-19 lockdowns during 2021. In late 2021, we were able to resume recruitment. The council facilitated my connection with staff from the communications team who assisted me to film a video of myself speaking about the project and inviting participation. The video and accompanying written information were then posted on the staff intranet. The only eligibility requirements were for participants to be current staff and to have the time to dedicate to the action research. In promoting the study, it was essential that any risks of real or perceived coercion were eliminated in participant recruitment. It was therefore carefully ensured that all messages about the project came from me, rather than organisational leaders, and were promoted via widely accessible staff platforms.

Sixteen staff across the local council made contact with me to request further information about the study. I provided each person with a participant information sheet and consent form. 15 staff returned a signed consent form. Two of those however withdrew prior to the formal research beginning. The 13 remaining staff represented a wide variety of business units including strategic, community and city planning, events, aquatics, communications, customer service and information technology. Four of the participants were at coordinator level, meaning they likely had responsibility for a team. Seven held professional officer roles, and two graduate roles. All staff were what is known as ‘indoor’ staff, meaning that the study did not capture staff who worked in council depot facilities. Two participants identified they had family members with disability and one participant identified themselves as having a disability during the study. Further demographic or characteristic details about participants were not sought as they were not deemed important for the study. During data analysis I changed all participant names to pseudonyms. During write-up of the findings, I also took all reasonable steps to ensure no participant could be identifiable. However, participants were advised in the information sheet that this may be difficult to ensure if colleagues from their organization were to read the study given the small sample size and the high-profile recognition and celebration of the study within the council itself. The participants were advised that they were free to share about their own participation in the study with others.

I conducted recruitment of the Expert Contributors separately. I promoted the study via social media sites, and directly sent to organisations such as disability employment services and educational facilities where I considered it may reach appropriate candidates. There were a number of eligibility criteria specified to undertake the role of Expert Contributor. I needed Expert Contributors to have a sound understanding of the social model of disability, to be strong communicators (regardless of how they communicated) and to identify as a disabled person, preferably with a disability different to my own to ensure diversity in representation. Two Expert Contributors were engaged to participate, after reviewing information sheets and signing consent forms. During data analysis I changed their names to pseudonyms and took care to ensure they were not identifiable in the write-up. This is especially important and complex within the small disability community. As such, I have not spoken much of the Expert Contributor's specific disabilities as this information can make a person easily identifiable on top of other personal attributes that may be referred to in the study. Expert Contributors received financial reimbursement to recognize their expertise and time contributed. The host local council provided financial support to fund this reimbursement. I submitted a modification to the existing ethical approval to ensure this financial contribution was noted on all participant and Expert Contributor information sheets.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study design, methods and recruitment of research contributors outlined in this chapter was articulated in the human ethics application proposed to undertake this study. The study (Protocol number: 2021/068) received ethics approval in March 2021 from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. Once engaged, the local council offered to make a financial contribution to the research to support its conduct. This financial contribution came only in the form of reimbursement of the time and expertise of the two Expert Contributors recruited to participate in the study. A modification to the ethical protocol was made and approved in August 2021, to note the financial contribution of the host local council. The financial contribution of the council was noted in participant information sheets and declared wherever appropriate from this point onward.

Although low risk, other important ethical considerations related to participant wellbeing. I suspected that the role reversal activities and discussions relating to barriers had the potential of causing a minor level of participant distress. I planned to mitigate these risks through building in ample opportunities for reflection and debrief into the study design. If any individual participant expressed concerns or distress I planned to debrief privately and direct them toward the avenues for mental health support nominated in the participant information sheet. As noted in section 3.4, there were instances of participants expressing emotions such as confrontation, shame and guilt which I discussed with participants to understand if they were expressing any significant distress. In these instances, the emotions were indicated to have been part of the learning process and not causing prolonged distress.

3.8 Study Limitations

In developing the study design, I was aware of some key limitations arising due to ethical considerations or practicalities. While mentioned here, these limitations have been discussed in greater detail in the discussion chapters of this thesis. In most instances, these limitations evolved to conversely highlight strengths of the study or contribute new knowledge to the conduct of this unique approach to action research. Firstly, in recruiting participants to the study, their participation needed to be entirely voluntary. This meant that I did not purposely recruit a sample based on participant characteristics such as experience, leadership or decision-making power (Elsey & Lathlean, 2006). Secondly, while Stringer's (2007) articulation of the practical action research approach would seem to require me to have a much more sustained and frequent presence in the host organisation, I was connected to participants primarily only during the key data collection points. As I was conducting this study as a PhD project, while simultaneously working fulltime in industry, I simply could not give all my time to the action research. Limitations impacting many participants, and hence potential outcomes on the study included needing to fit the action research into their existing workloads. This meant that their participation in the study was undertaken amidst many competing priorities.

3.9 Analysing the Data

In the process of data analysis, the meanings behind the many statements made and actions undertaken by participants is made sense of and contributes to forming the understanding of a broader phenomenon (Ravindran, 2019). The action research study design, taking place over 32 weeks and incorporating multiple qualitative data collection methods provided me with a large amount of data to analyse. I engaged a professional transcriber to transform multiple, lengthy audio recordings into text transcripts. I analysed all data as a whole rather than seeking separate insights from the individual methods. This also allowed me to ensure credibility in the study by efficiently triangulating data from multiple sources, such as from the workshops, observation field notes and individual interviews (Stringer, 2007). The large amount of data from all stakeholders also ensured diverse case analysis and referential adequacy eliminating any risk of the data analysis being swayed by literature, theory or my own personal perspectives (Stringer, 2007). Before beginning a rigorous process of analysis, I simply read all transcripts produced by the transcriber and my field notes. I took very initial reflective notes on my first perceptions raised from the data (Ravindran, 2019).

To undertake the data analysis, I undertook a multi-phase process of thematic analysis, highly comparable to Bingham's (2023) five-phase process of qualitative data analysis. To start with and simply begin to organise and sort data, I determined some very high-level deductive codes and started separating the raw data into categories (Bingham, 2023). I did not use data analysis software in any phase of my data analysis, instead opting for careful manual methods of organising my data across tables in Microsoft Word. Such practices are generally more accessible and reliable as a screen reader user, as most popular qualitative data analysis software has significant accessibility problems (Aishwarya, 2022). Some examples of these phase one codes included, 'responses to role reversal and social model', 'awareness of barriers', 'organisational factors'. In the second phase of data analysis, I began to narrow in on these broad codes by sorting the data into further deductive topical codes associated with my main research questions and aims (Azungah, 2018; Bingham, 2023). At this stage, I had three overarching categories of data relating to, 'engagement and ongoing intentions', 'impacts of the project' and 'understanding, responding, planning and acting'. These three categorisations later translated into the topics of the three results chapters in the final thesis.

With the data effectively and purposefully organised, I was then able to engage in the inductive phases of data analysis (Bingham, 2023). The third phase of coding occurred within the three broad established topic areas (Azungah, 2018; Bingham, 2023). Reviewing each of these categories, I began a process of open coding, constantly comparing each piece of data to that coded previously to consider similarities, differences or newly arising points (Bingham, 2023). In the fourth phase I undertook a process of narrowing in on my findings by identifying patterns, rearranging and collapsing codes and finalising with themes (Bingham, 2023). At this point in the analysis, I took my preliminary findings back to the participants for the member checking phase of analysis (Stringer, 2007). In this review, participants confirmed the accuracy of the analysis and also highlighted certain themes they believed required particular emphasis. With most analysis complete and input from participants provided, I was ready to begin writing my results chapters, articulating themes such as, ‘taking privilege for granted, ‘who knows’? ‘the impact of sharing, holding and losing knowledge’, ‘connection through safety and relatability’. In the fifth and final phase, I began integrating theoretical concepts, previous literature and my original findings (Bingham, 2023). To do so, I developed further tables to code key findings from literature and theory and linked to my findings (Bingham, 2023). With this process complete, I was able to present my entire analysis in the form of two discussion chapters.

Chapter 4

Results: The Impacts: Experiencing, Learning and Influencing

The action research project strove to foster opportunities for participants to learn about disability from the social model perspective. They were presented with typical barriers experienced by disabled people in the form of the role reversal activities demonstrating physical and attitudinal barriers. This first results chapter speaks to the impacts of these opportunities, the process of experiencing, learning and, critically, how the learning went on to influence understandings and actions going forward. The impacts ranged between immediate emotions experienced upon confrontation with barriers; understanding of social barriers in council and the community; the development of empathy; personal changes and reflections; influencing the understanding of others; and organisational impacts in planning and practice.

4.1 Taking Privilege for Granted

The utilisation of role reversal activities was a central experimental component of this project, implemented with the intention of replicating the kinds of barriers that disabled people experience in everyday life, and hence to explore the impact in bringing about personal change and development. There were three barriers encountered by participants at the beginning of their first workshop, a blocked off main entry; being presented with a Braille only document to read; being asked to communicate an important message without their primary form of communication, speech. The emotions experienced with these barriers were the beginnings of the impacts felt throughout this project. Participants explained how they had felt when confronted with these barriers. The initial emotional responses were varied. Some immediate emotional responses such as confusion, frustration and that of being inconvenienced demonstrated that the barriers and their purpose were not recognised immediately.

> I was a bit confused, because I've been here before. I've always used that

> front entrance. Like, I know that these doors open as well, but it didn't occur to me that I could come this way. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

> Frustration that you can't communicate the way you normally do. It's like, "I don't know how to do this." It was just frustrating not being able to communicate how I ordinarily would. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

Angelique reported second-hand confusion after she and some of her colleagues emulated the role reversal activities in a team meeting.

> Yeah, they were very confused. We also did the one where they had to explain the task to each other, writing on the piece of paper. So yeah, it was good. – Angelique in workshop 2

Among the initial responses of some participants were explanations that they hadn't recognised the barrier for what it was initially, or else, they thought it was a test of some sort.

> You were just testing if there was anyone that could actually read Braille, I'm sure. – Laura in workshop 1, Group A

> It made me feel like it was a different language, almost something out of this world, really. – Leon in workshop 1, Group A

When I asked if participants had recognised the barriers, Laura explained that she had assumed the obstacle at the front entrance was nothing to do with the training and had been ready to ask building management to fix it.

> Yeah, okay. I was going to call them and be like, "Hey, what is this rubbish at the front? We need to move that." So I'm glad I didn't. – Laura in workshop 1, Group B

Among these initial responses, arising most common were emotions of anxiety, overwhelm and panic. Sometimes these emotions occurred as well as initial confusion, for others, they were the first emotions discussed.

> A little bit anxious that I wasn't understanding what I needed to do. – Kelsey in workshop 1, Group B

> A bit overwhelmed. – Laura in workshop 1, Group B

When presented with the Braille document, Christa explained that her anxiety was due to concern about not being able to complete the outlined task because the instructions were inaccessible to her.

> It made me feel nervous, because I was like, "What if these are the instructions for today, and I don't know how to read them." – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

Gerrard experienced similar misgivings.

> Yeah, I felt panicked. I thought, "Oh my God, how am I going to do this?" – Gerrard in workshop 1, Group A

> Yeah, I do remember having a sort of feeling of apprehension, and I think it was to do with the Braille, that sort of – and you did it really well, that, "Come on, we just need to do this. Go for it. Why can't you do it?" You kind of had that initial feeling of, "Holy crap, I can't do this. This is ridiculous." So, you know, also, yeah, being in that environment quickly you can sort of catch on, "Okay, Katie's making a really good point here," so you start to lose that apprehension, but I could imagine someone in that space that is made to feel like they should know something. It's not a great feeling at all. – Michael in individual interview

In regard to the communication activity, Laura observed that knowing the risks of what could be at stake if the task was not completed properly contributed to her feelings of anxiety.

> Well, we – so far we know what the task is and what the risk is, but we didn't have enough time to get any instructions, so that probably makes this person feel extremely anxious, knowing what the risk is and no instructions as to how to complete it. – Laura in workshop 1, Group B

Tess, one of the expert contributors later explained that she considered that some of the initial feelings expressed by participants reflected how she would feel in similar experiences of exclusion.

> …people genuinely seemed to verbalise that they had the same impression that I would get, if that makes sense. Like, the frustration in the communication one, for instance. – Tess (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

Helen, the other expert contributor, observed that for some, the anxiety they experienced at being confronted with the barriers was paralysing and rendered them unable to try and problem-solve the barrier.

> …some people are better problem solvers than others, too, because there were some who didn't even get to think about, "Oh sugar, I've got to do something. How am I going to approach it?" They just sat there in the midst of fear, and then when we asked for feedback they went, "Oh, well, I haven't really done anything because I was so worried." - Helen (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

Christa observed a similar fear response from some of her colleagues.

> I think people who maybe haven't been exposed to barriers that people live with disability may face were really uncomfortable and really didn't know how to act or engage, particularly with that one where we had to communicate without using our words. You know, there were some people who sat there and just didn't do anything. Like, they just – that was such a stumping point for them, they didn't know how to move past it. – Christa in individual interview

In the participants' individual interviews, toward the conclusion of the action research study, the initial emotional responses were often discussed, such as the confusion, anxiety and fear, however, by this point, a number of participants were able to name what feelings and realisations came after the initial emotions. For example, Laura illustrated how her initial confusion then turned into more complex feelings of recognising privilege and feeling ignorant.

> Well, I guess probably that's a bit of a two-part answer. So initially there was a bit of a feeling of being, I guess, confused and unsure of what was going on. Things definitely seemed, I guess, out of the normal as to what I would expect in those types of settings, particularly in terms of being able to easily access

> the venue and the information and that sort of thing.
>
> And then, you know, I guess after that was kind of – like, once I cottoned on as to what was going on there, there was definitely some other feelings that came up, so I guess feelings of being a little bit ignorant, and I guess feelings of being quite uneducated, and probably quite privileged. – Laura in individual interview

Similarly, when Angelique replicated the barriers in a team meeting, she noted an initial confusion, followed by a deeper understanding of what the activities were working to convey.

> …We blocked off the main meeting room and you had to go around the other side, which everyone was very confused about, and, yeah, it was a bit of an inconvenience, and then we kind of explained what we'd done and they were all, yeah, kind of shocked about it, I guess, in a way. – Angelique in individual interview

A number of participants reported reflecting on feeling confronted, or taking their privilege, or their ability to navigate life without barriers for granted. In most instances where participants reflected on 'taking for granted', feelings of shock or anxiety were also noted. Danielle discussed how she was initially taken aback by the entrance barrier, and later considered what is typically taken for granted.

> Well, I missed the barrier one, because somebody cunningly diverted around that, which was me, but I was quite taken aback at how impactful that was. It's definitely not something that we consider on an everyday basis, but we certainly should. And at the initial instance, it was kind of a point of panic. I was like, "Oh my gosh, how do I turn my communication style on its head? How do I approach something differently?" You know, we very much take for granted that our communication and way of being and doing is straightforward and it's reciprocated by everyone else, so to have that kind of put in your face to be like, "Wait a minute, no, you need to do something completely different and consider other peoples' access," I was quite panicked, to be honest. – Danielle in individual interview

Danielle was not alone, a number of other participants made highly comparable reflections.

> …And, you know, the one where we had to communicate without speaking to someone was hard. Like, you almost panicked as to how to convey that. But it was interesting just how much, like, I take that for granted. I think that was really interesting. - Angelique in individual interview

> I think the first one where you blocked access to the facility through the front door and we had to enter through the back, it kind of shocked me a little bit, because I didn't realise, I guess, my privilege, in the sense that it didn't even click with me what you were doing at the time. I think the one with the Braille paper was a little bit more obvious, like I understood the meaning behind it. But, yeah, just the first one was more shock, because I just wasn't being aware, and it was, yeah, not a great feeling, because I was like, wow, this is something we really need to think about more, because it just didn't even click with me. And then the Braille one was – how did I describe it? It was kind of like, oh, okay, you can really – it's giving you insight to the other side. I could pick up on it straight away, but it was like, wow, it really isn't – it's not fair. I guess that's how I felt. – Kelsey in individual interview

> I think that – so those activities made me feel very sort of confronted in the sense that I felt like once we understood the meaning behind those activities, I felt like kind of a little bit in shock in the sense that, you know, there's so much that goes into your, like, someone – like, that I have the ability to see and hear and I'm not in a wheelchair or anything – so much that I take, or we take for granted, and that it made me really open my eyes to understanding what barriers that people with disabilities go through on a daily basis that I don't always, and in some situations haven't even thought about. And, yeah, so it was very like, wow, and something that I'll never forget. – Rachelle in individual interview

Rachelle perceived that her colleagues were experiencing similar feelings after experiencing the barriers.

> From my experience with the participants around me, we were very much of the same feelings, had very much the same feelings arising from those experiences with the activities. Like, you know, just that one with the Braille and that expectation, like, well, read it, work it out, and we were like, wow, you know, that is so difficult. This is so difficult for so many people, and we don't take the time to think about it. It's just not at the forefront of thinking. It's just that, oh, we should all be able to access things and read things, but it's not like that, and you kind of take for granted the abilities that you do have sometimes. And I think, yeah, it was very confronting. – Rachelle in individual interview

The recognition of taking things for granted was one that appeared to translate into learning for Angelique.

> I guess it kind of made me feel a little bit naïve in that thinking that you know what disability would be like, but it was kind of a bit more eye-opening in that regard, I think. And, you know, also taking that lens into my personal life and looking at things that I take for granted. I think that was a really big learning for me. – Angelique in individual interview

4.2 Impacts Behind the Barriers.

The intention of presenting participants with the role reversal barriers and later to engage in dialogue about the social model of disability was to assist them to engage in dialogue about the barriers and to consider what impacts these have in people's lives. Soon after experiencing the role reversal activities, participants began to identify exactly what impacts the barriers had on themselves and relate that recognition of the impact to experiences of others. The impacts that the participants identified from experiencing the role reversal activities were quite extensive including, exclusion and being left out; risks of misinterpretation; inability to participate or access; and the need to invest energy into problem-solving to work around access problems. When reflecting on the experience of being provided with the Braille document that they had no way of reading, Michael and Nikki identified the very realistic impacts of being left out, excluded and not being able to be productive at work when it was important.

> I think as well, if there were people in the room who could read this, and I was someone who couldn't read that and I had to go away and take it home to be able to do that, I suppose that, yeah, people would get that message instantly, whereas I'm left out. I can't understand what's going on, because I need to go and find other means to do it. – Michael in workshop 1, Group A

> I just thought that's not really realistic if it's going to help us today, but if there's no one here who can help us with it, then it's not going to actually help us at all in taking it home and finding a way to read it. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

Leticia identified that these kinds of barriers have very real impacts in excluding people from meaningful activities such as employment.

> And, to be honest, we don't employ many people that have disabilities, and it's all this kind of thing that stops that from happening. – Leticia in workshop 1, Group B

Ian became keenly aware of the physical barriers associated with the alternative entrance.

> It just was not the normal way of entering, I guess. That's the main entry, and then going around the back, then also noticed the steps are – there's normal steps, but then there's also the level change. I thought that if it was somebody other than – had difficulty, an aged person or whatever with that level change it would be a challenge to enter from this side. – Ian in workshop 1, Group B

Others recognised that the barriers they encountered in being able to communicate effectively could have very high risks.

> Misinterpretation, like if you're trying to communicate something that's, you know, maybe it's an emergency or something and the other person doesn't understand, or can't communicate the same way you do. There could be miscommunication and something quite serious could happen. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

On an interpersonal level, the participants also recognised some of the cognitive load which must be experienced by individuals who encounter these barriers. Leon expressed his immediate reaction of needing to problem-solve the scenario which he acknowledged could take away from his ability to focus on other things.

> You probably spend a lot of brain power in trying to solve problems which most people wouldn't see as a problem. For example, this, the first thing my mind went to is trying to how I'm going to read this. Is there an app for it? Do I – is there information I can read in regards to familiarise myself with some of the key words so perhaps I can then break this down. And I guess what that does is, it takes away your ability to focus on other things, because your mind is trying to problem solve simple tasks… - Leon in workshop 1, Group A

> …the reality is, like, you know, that would be your reality. They don't allocate extra time for you to come up with different communication methods, so – no, I think it was good. Even I struggled. I was like, "Oh, how else can I communicate?" And I think also because you didn't provide any other rules or considerations. It was just, "Without talking, communicate," and then I was like, "Am I allowed to write? I don't know." – Christa in individual interview

Some of the participants recognised that these impacts are likely to be exacerbated for disabled people because an organisation may not have the skills or equipment to offer suitable accessibility. They talked about being ill-equipped to provide equitable access to a disabled person in a real-life scenario.

> I thought about if I was in a meeting and I handed out pieces of paper and someone said, "I can't read this," what would I do to – I wouldn't have the skills to adapt to that situation, you know, I wouldn't know what was available. And you said it so plainly, like, "Come on, this is the sheet." - Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

> I guess it highlights that here at Council we don't have a means for all of our staff to – like, we don't have an app that we would empower our staff to have to read a Braille document. – Laura in workshop 1, Group B

4.3 Recognising Social Barriers at Council and in the Community

As well as the initial role reversal activities, the initial workshops guided participants through a range of exposures to disability from a social model perspective. After viewing the animated video based on Vick Finkelstein's analogy of reverse worlds, the participants were then encouraged to explore social barriers more broadly. In this problem-posing dialogue, they were aided by myself and the two expert contributors. By sharing our own stories and drawing out ideas, we collectively identified barriers of concern to disabled people. Across the two workshop groups, the participants explored many considerations across various domains. The following discussions demonstrated learning, the realisation of inequities, and the very serious and complex nature of barriers. This particular kind of discussion arose more often in the first workshop group. One of the first observations Christa made related to the accessibility of the documents her department produced.

> I don't know about other units and departments, but our documents are all written in Open Sans Light size, like, 10 or 11, and you can't – it's so hard to read. You've got to zoom in, or you change the font for yourself so that you can actually read the documents. If we're putting those – I don't know if we are putting those out to the public or not, or if it's just my department's weird decision, but that's just not accessible for people. Like, Open Sans Light is a light font, obviously, and then it's in a small size so you can't read it, so you either have to upsize it yourself so that you can read it or change the font or whatever. So, I don't know if that's in anyone else's department or if it's just mine. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Is it the issue is that the documents we produce aren't accessible? – Michael
>
> Yeah. – Christa
>
> So, it's one that I struggle with is justified across the page. Some of the research that I've seen is people with dyslexia, that actually makes it quite difficult for them to read at times. So, we've got – our writing guide hasn't had that lens across it. – Michael
>
> Yeah, it hasn't had that accessibility and inclusion lens. – Christa

Gerrard raised a frequent barrier present in many local government Council Chambers, including this one.

> There’s no lift for the Council meetings. – Gerrard in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Would you like to be carried up? – Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> No. – Gerrard
>
> Good luck carrying this thing up. (referring to her power wheelchair) – Tess (Expert Contributor)
>
> [Laughter]
>
> But I think it’s on a website that you have to please contact Council first. – Gerard

Michael picked up on my own explanation of where the emergency evacuation point was in the building we were situated in during the workshop.

> Yeah, before when you mentioned the emergency egress, it’s on the grass. – Michael in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Yeah. Emergency plans are never made for disabled people. Don’t use the lift in the emergency. Okay. – Tess (Expert Contributor)

This particular discussion evolved into highlighting the frightening reality for disabled people using wheelchairs in the event of an evacuation in a multi-level building. Some participants expressed shock at learning that this is a commonplace arrangement made to manage the evacuation of disabled people.

> At my old job, the emergency exit was up on, like, the fifth floor, so you had to go down emergency stairs, and we were literally explained, if there’s someone who physically can’t get the stairs, we have to put them in the stairwell and leave them. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Yeah, that’s always the rule. – Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> What? – Michael

> Really? – Leon.
>
> Yeah, you have to – if you… - Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> So they're fire safe for a certain period of time. – Katie (Researcher)
>
> Yeah, there's fire doors – stairwells have fire doors on them, and you just… - Helen (Expert Contributor)

Helen, one of the Expert Contributors, drew one of the workshop group's attention to the furniture in the room we were in.

> Can I just ask one question about this space that we're in? Is this available for the community to hire and access? – Helen (Expert Contributor) in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Yeah, I believe so. – Christa
>
> Yeah, it is. -Gerrard
>
> Turn around and look at the furniture behind you. – Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> What are we looking at? – Katie (Researcher)
>
> Those perching stools and the high tables. How many people can safely use those? – Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> Yeah. It's so interesting, because we live in a world that we are accustomed to, right, and then we think this is completely normal until we look with different lenses, right, and then you see, like, right, this isn't as appropriate as you previously thought. – Leon

Christa identified a complex scenario where accessibility conflicts with safety concerns. In this scenario, the height of the gates on playgrounds was discussed. This particular example forces councils to have to make decisions between access for disabled people and safety of children.

> the gate to get in and out, like, if you're a parent in a wheelchair, the gates are, like, up here, so you can't reach to open the gate and go into the

> playground with your kids. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Have they since lowered that…? – Katie (Researcher)
>
> I know it was in discussion, but I left in the time that it was… - Christa
>
> But there's risk with low – the problem is the risk… - Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> Yeah. – Michael
>
> Yeah, obviously if children… - Christa
>
> and then you've got to outweigh what that risk is. – Helen
>
> Yeah, which I think is what they were in the process of doing. But, like, is there a way that we can make it accessible for people in wheelchairs that isn't a safety concern for children? I don't know. – Christa

As the discussions evolved, a few prominent areas arose where the analysis went deeper into understanding root causes and organisational complexities that were identified as exacerbating certain issues.

4.3.1 Recruitment and Employment Related Barriers

Arising as a major focus of the discussions were barriers that may prevent disabled people from securing and maintaining employment at Council. Both initial workshop groups discussed the recruitment process of council and potential barriers within. The length and complexity of Council job applications was identified as a concern.

> Even just the application itself takes so much time. Like, you can't just do a resume and cover letter. There's questions you have to answer, and – it's a whole process. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Because the time it takes, it takes – there's 30 clicks plus to do an application. The process is so long. It takes so long, that there is change beckoning on that. – Gerrard in workshop 1, Group A
>
> …each job you apply for, it's more than a couple of hours of amending and

> changing a resume to fit the role, your examples and everything else. So it is a very stressful process already. – Leon in workshop 1, Group A

The participants also identified the risk of poor communication or confusion in the recruitment practice. Many discussed a common interview location at Council which was difficult for applicants to access. Christa shared her own experience of interviewing for her own job, an experience that many others then related to.

> …there mustn't have been any customer service team at the desk at the time, and so we've got the glass sliding doors, like automatic doors but they're not automatic if there's no one at the front desk, and I wasn't given any instruction on what to do if I got there and the doors didn't open, and then I'm like, "Am I in the right spot?" Like, "I know this isn't the main admin building. What do I do?" And then I text the interviewer and I was like, "Hey, I'm out the front. Am I in the right spot", and they let me in. But if you had a disability – it was uncomfortable for me, but if you had a disability and you didn't know and the doors didn't open, you'd be like, "Well, I must be in the wrong spot." You might miss the interview. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

A common thread among all discussions related to barriers related to securing employment was that the requirements in application, interview and pre-employment assessments are the same across roles and individuals which the participants identified as a key problem. Job applications are usually required to be completed online, even if the position was outdoor and required little computer use.

> I think even in the recruitment process, you know, everything for us is online and it's a written application and the rest of it, and I think that that would take so many people out. I know in the pools that we certainly don't judge the written application. We'll meet with everybody, just in case, because you just don't know if it's the written application that's holding people back. – Leticia in workshop 1, Group B

Upon reaching interview when applying for a position at Council, applicants are required to complete a psychometric test, or as the participants most frequently referred to it as, a personality test. Participants highlighted their own anxieties associated with having to complete this test during application. Danielle provided an example.

> That one freaked my brain out. I was like, “What do you want?” – Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

It was generally considered that if this element of the recruitment practice caused so much stress, it would surely cause additional barriers to some with disability.

> …How is somebody that has some challenges around understanding perhaps the language, or on the autism spectrum, how can you then be successful at that stage? So that is something that, you know, it is an obstacle. – Leon in workshop 1, Group A

Once the groups began discussing the psychometric test however, they realised that it was causing unnecessary stress and barriers. Some participants in the know were able to explain that it is not used to make hiring decisions.

> It is stressful, and that’s the way I look at it, and I wonder how many applicants… …look at this way: Can I handle pressure? That’s kind of like the way I look at it, is that it’s one of the reasons to justify having me there, because again, I’ve had that done, but in many stage of the interview we talked about it. Your understanding is perhaps HR looks at it and assesses you based on that, but then recently I’ve been included on the panel, an interviewing panel, and unless HR does that on their own without sharing it with us, none of that was sharing with me either. – Leon in workshop 1, Group A

> So I sat on, what, three or four panels here, probably 15 or so in my previous role, where they’ve all had this personality test. I have never ever seen it used as part of the determination process at all. – Michael in workshop 1, Group A

> …you hear nothing more about it. Like, you do the personality test. You’ve gotten an interview either way, from memory. Like, they book you in for an interview and the personality test is a component of the interview, but as you said, it’s not assessed, from your experience on the panel, so why is it part of that interview stage if they’re not assessing it as part of the panel, and you

> hear nothing back about, you know, “You were successful with your personality test,” or “You weren’t,” or whatever it would be. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

> Really it’s just a bit of an overview of things to expect, so that I guess managers can have a bit of an insight as to how to best manage you and help you. – Laura in workshop 1, Group B

These realisations led the participants to consider if the intentions of the psychometric testing could be better explained to candidates.

> …the personality test freaked me out and I had no idea what was going on, right? But if they’d explained that to me in that way, that was, like, “We’ll help you fit into the organisation.” You know, it’s such a different thing. - Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

Another source of anxiety the participants named when applying for a council job was the requirement to complete a pre-employment medical. Participants discussed needing to complete the medical regardless of the role they were applying for, a requirement they saw as inappropriate for positions which were primarily desk based.

> I found the pre-employment medical very intense as well for the role. Like, the things I was made to – certain things I was made to do in it. – Kelsey in workshop 1, Group B

> It doesn’t seem to differentiate – like I was saying, it’s not targeted. I walk on site, so it’ll be uneven, so I need to have that ability, but then basically an office-bound person, someone at the depot or in events is going to be lifting and shifting and moving things, which I don’t do. – Ian in workshop 1, Group B

> I didn’t understand why I had to do the medical. For an indoor role, I didn’t feel it was relevant, and it made me so nervous. One of the things I had to do was breathe into something for as long as I could, and I don’t know why. She didn’t explain it to me or anything, but I couldn’t get to what it needed to be, so I did it so many times, and I walked out just feeling so anxious, because I was like,

> "I don't know what I was just doing. Is something wrong? Should I see a doctor?" She didn't explain anything, and I walked out really anxious. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

Identifying the discomfort with this inflexible test, the participants easily related their own experiences to concerns for disabled people who may struggle even more.

> …After the interview, then you have a medical test, which that is also – can put you out of your comfort zone. I've heard lots and lots of different feedback in regards to the medical test, which is – it really is very intense. It's designed to make sure that you are very articulate and that you can move fast, which again, if you have any sort of impairment, how will that position you to start with? And so after the medical – I have serious back problems, and I was concerned and very anxious about how could that implicate my employment.
>
> …then after your medical comes back okay, you get the offer. That's how it works. So it is very layered. – Leon in workshop 1, Group A

As they discussed their concerns with the pre-employment medical, the expert contributors were able to share how this would cause very real concerns for them if they were to apply for a council job.

> Yeah, I had a back injury last year, and the things that he would do to make sure that I was okay, like crawling around and jumping and hopping and very interesting things that I – I was like, I don't know if I'll make the cut. – Kelsey in workshop 1, Group A
>
> [Laughter]
>
> I was really worried. - Kelsey
>
> So imagine how a person like I feel walking in going, "Oh shit, I can't jump, I can't hop." – Helen (Expert Contributor)

The participants soon came to realise and discuss the more systemic impact of recruitment related barriers, which they suspected would certainly impact applicants to Council jobs. They demonstrated an understanding that discrimination is so common within recruitment broadly that disabled people would be likely to try and hold off disclosing and asking for reasonable adjustments for as long as possible, an assumption confirmed by the expert contributors and myself.

> I feel like people with disabilities would probably be more likely not to ask for the help, because then they'll think, like, "That might make my application look worse compared to other people who aren't asking for that extra help as well." So some people might not feel confident asking or saying what they need for the application process. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A
>
> I've never disclosed… - Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> No. – Katie (Researcher)
>
> Yeah. – Tess (Expert Contributor)
>
> in an application. Never disclosed. – Helen (Expert Contributor)
>
> Well, I mean, exactly what Tess was saying before, you know, when you're submitting your applications, if you at the outset say, "I'm a person living with a disability and I use a wheelchair," and then you have your application, the reality is you're much less likely to get an interview than if you submit your application and then you go, "I'm a person with a disability"… – Christa

This same desire to maintain secrecy about disability was suspected to also occur for people on the job.

> I wonder how many people at Council have a disability and then not disclosed. Maybe our employment rate of people with disabilities is higher than we know it is, because people aren't disclosing. I don't know what the solution… - Christa in workshop 1, Group A

Danielle suggested that when starting a new job, one could easily be keen to avoid drawing attention to any extra needs.

> …like, you don't want to be that person who says, "Oh, can I have a different desk," or "Can I have…" You know, you just kind of want to get through your

> probation period and not rock the boat and not be that guy, so… - Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

The participants identified barriers which could continue to inhibit a person's ability to disclose disability receive reasonable adjustments, as well as impact council's overall workforce diversity. There were mixed recollections about whether or not data was collected about disability when onboarding new staff. Regardless of it was or not, they had not seen evidence of any such data being used to strive for diversity in their workforce. They identified the importance of this when reflecting on the general prevalence of disability in their local area.

> Councils are usually the largest single employer in their area and should be reflective of community, so a kind of question is, is Council reflective of its community in terms of its employment base? – Ian in workshop 1, Group B
>
> Do you look at those sort of statistics internally? – Tess (Expert Contributor)
>
> Not in local government… – Ian

The participants also realised that Council may not currently have a clearly articulated path to enable staff to ask for reasonable workplace adjustments.

> Do you have processes in your organisation where you could accommodate people that needed different things, whether it be something like culturally, access, non-English speaking?... – Tess (Expert Contributor) in workshop 1, Group B
>
> Yeah, I mean, I think THAT that's probably all, like I would say that's a case-by-case basis, and it would be, I think most people would come to the HR team… - Laura
>
> So how is that sort of – is that widely communicated through the organisation that that is there? – Tess (Expert Contributor)
>
> I'd like to think that when I on-board people personally I try and address that stuff, but that would be the extent of it. – Laura

Nikki reflected that she could not remember if reasonable adjustments had been discussed during onboarding.

> I was just thinking, like, I – because I'm kind of new, and so I was trying to remember the process, and if there was ever an email or anything to be like, you know, "If you need any extra assistance, call this number," or anything. I don't remember if there was anything like that. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

4.3.2 Progress in Access: The Gap Between Good Intentions and Implementation

As discussion surrounding the nature of barriers progressed, participants soon identified an interesting phenomenon. While recognising progress in accessibility developments, they also identified that there was frequently a gap between good intentions of building to standard and implementation of a design that genuinely met the needs of disabled people. This discussion was sparked by a comment from one of the Expert Contributors.

> I'll just pick up on one of your comments there, you know, standards. One of my most hated comments is, "Oh, but it meets the standards." Yeah, well, it might, but just because it meets the standards doesn't mean it's usable by everyone. – Helen (Expert Contributor) in workshop 1, Group B

> And it's such a culture, especially in the planning area, where if you can – like, there's no foresight. It's just, "I can tick that box, and yes, done." Doesn't consider the lived experience or, you know, someone in the future who might live in that building or something like that. It's just very stock-standard. – Danielle

> It's really like the bare minimum, isn't it? – Laura

> Yeah. – Danielle

This regimented adherence to building to standard was identified as causing a significant problem. While necessary at its most basic level, the participants identified this attitude can leave out the voice of lived experience which can help enhance the design and ensure the end product is functionally usable and provides dignified access. Participants considered that the community engagement piece was that which could frequently be lacking.

> What was talked about before is that, I think a lot of the time the work we do ticks a box, and it's about thinking about the users and that kind of thing, what you were talking about, and having those conversations and saying, "This is what we're thinking. What do you think," and having that input from lived experience and that sort of thing. – Kelsey in workshop 1, Group B

> Because often the tick box will be a ramp at the back of a building down a dark alley, and you don't really think about the safety. I mean, you talk about risk assessments and things like that – sorry, I used to be a compliance officer, so – but yeah, so you talk about risk assessments like that, you know, that solve an issue – do you have adequate lighting? Is it going to be covered by bins? Quite often neither of those boxes are ticked. We've just ticked the accessibility box and not worried about the rest of the context. - Tess (Expert Contributor)

> …I think that that's where it gets really tricky from a user perspective, because obviously I'm operational, and I see what happens at the pools, and we had somebody that came in and did an assessment and said, "This is how your change rooms should be, and this is all the equipment you need, and this is how it has to get set out." And then I have individual users that come in and go, "I need a chair to sit on while I'm getting changed, because that chair's wet." And then I go back to the person that planned the change room and they go, "No, you can't have any more equipment in that room, because then it would be overcrowded." "But that's what that one person needs." And we were talking about, you know, individual people and helping, and that's where it gets really, really tricky, and that's where we need assistance, because I've got one person going, "No," and I want to help this one person who wants a dry pair of jeans when she puts them on to walk out of the pool in, you know? – Leticia in workshop 1, Group B

Ian shared an example of discussing the need for a full access audit in the development of a private facility. In this example, there was limited awareness of the need for considering accessibility beyond the width of doorways.

> …then there's the private developments, subdivisions and other facilities and, you know, schools with a new basketball stadium. In that process, we're required to look at access… …and at the end of the process he's … putting it to me, even though at the beginning of the process I identified that you needed an access audit for it, and he came back to me when I said, "Well, why haven't you done this," and the response was, "Well, the building guys looked at it and all the doorways comply with the Australian standards." I said, "Okay, well, how do they get from the car park in there." You know, the access audits need to consider these broad things… - Ian in workshop 1, Group B

Tess shared an example of completing an access review on a recently completed build with a group of others with disability and noting many considerations which had not been covered by adhering to standards.

> Okay, so it was cleared as accessible. We went over there as a group. That was actually the first project that we did together. We came back with two pages of notes. The door to the accessible toilet, you can't open it. … I was like, "Well, that's not really helpful." I mean, I've got very limited mobility in my arms, so – so we were all like – we did suggest solutions… … There was just really basic stuff like that, but it still met standards, but it wasn't useable. – Tess (Expert Contributor) in workshop 1, Group B

Christa discussed frustration with circumstances which arise where the community express regret at not being consulted when Councils are making key decisions.

> I feel like Councils just make decisions, especially community decisions, without actually really consulting the community to drive that decision forward, and then the community's like, "Why'd you do this? That's not what we wanted." If we take that additional time to get that engagement, find out what they need, what they want. So I don't view it as criticism. I view it as, okay, we can use this to inform what we do next. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

Rachelle reflected on these discussions during her individual interview and highlighted the divide between normative expectations about what people need in a space, and the reality of the lived experience which may in fact, require something different. Her reflection highlighted the entrenched and unintentional impact of ableism, that is, someone coming from that position of privilege simply not being able to understand the disabled experience.

> …when Leticia was talking about the accessible toilet and all the feedback, for example, that someone provided her that had a disability, that when it was designed it wasn't actually designed from the perspective of a person with a disability, and so then they were able to then get it redesigned so it actually was functional and practical and served a purpose for those using it. And that to me was so interesting, and I just thought, that's what we need to be doing. We can't just be thinking it from an abled person's, like, without the disability, and just assuming that it's all going to work for that person. You've got to – you can't think like that. – Rachelle in individual interview

The participants began exploring why this particular barrier existed and how it may be exacerbated. They considered that their connection to community may not be strong enough to assist them in collecting the feedback they required. They identified that there were processes getting in the way of collecting authentic community feedback. They discussed a Facebook group that local citizens could use to provide feedback on council proposed plans. While local residents could comment on Facebook, their feedback could not be utilised unless they had followed the correct linked channel and completed a declaration around conflicts of interest.

> The problem with the Facebook group is when we've done formal consultation on a strategy or a master plan or something, if somebody posts something on Facebook, we don't consider it. You have to click on the link and then go and do a declaration that you haven't made a thing, and you have to do a formal thing. Like, it's super inaccessible just generally. – Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

> I think we find that a lot of people are commenting if we post – if there's a social post saying, "Go to this link and let us know your thoughts." People are

> just commenting on that Facebook post, which we can use a little bit, but not really. – Kelsey in workshop 1, Group B

Danielle considered that an ongoing channel of community engagement was lacking.

> …With our consultation, we do it for a certain period of time and it's specific for that project. We'll be like, "You have 28 days to comment." We don't have ongoing consultation channels where people can have meaningful feedback all the time and it's constantly being incorporated and reflected on. – Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

4.4 Developing Understanding through Experience and Stories

A key aim of this research was to understand if the activities of the original workshops helped to develop accurate understandings for the experience of living with disability. The results demonstrate that the experiential nature of the role reversal activities, combined with the facilitation provided by disabled people were the key factors which helped participants' to develop enhanced understandings of disability and empathy for the experience of encountering social barriers in everyday life. These results also demonstrate that the impacts were sustained and long-lasting, as these reflexive insights were offered during participants individual interviews, 26 to 32 weeks after the original workshops. Leon and Ian provided an insight into how the experience of the role reversal activities developed their understanding.

> …we tend to live in our space, and we don't get to understand what the challenges are for people with disability, and it's not until you feel those challenges that I guess it puts things in perspective. So it was really interesting.– Leon in individual interview

> The way I operate is often through experience, and so if I experience something it tends to resonate more than reading or what have you. So being shown a little bit of what life can be like with a disability, the challenges and the arrogance or ineptitude of people in realising and assisting someone with disabilities, so it has created that better understanding. – Ian in individual interview

Ian explained how this understanding evolved when presented with the barriers.

> Initially I didn’t really pick up on it, until when you came into the room and talked about it and handed out the sheet with the Braille on it, I think it was, and started to proceed with the experience, common things that you had experienced with comments and the reference to, “Take that home and get your mother to help you.” It increased my awareness, opened my eyes to what other people may experience beyond my own perspective, and it was an insight to the challenges and lack of awareness, I guess, of society in presumptions, assumptions… - Ian in individual interview

Leticia explained that she was most impacted by the Braille activity.

> I really thought that the access to information one was probably the most confronting one, because I would hate to be in that situation where I was given information and obviously I couldn’t read it or access it, and especially when you’re saying, “Oh, take the note home and give it to your Mum.” I suppose that one hit a lot harder, because it was Braille… - Leticia in individual interview

Christa, who already had a level of understandings of disability through her work, also conveyed enhanced empathy when reflecting on the activities of the project.

> …I just felt it was a really creative way to show the reality of how things often aren’t accessible or inclusive. So it kind of just opened my eyes to, as you said, a role reversal and experiencing that firsthand. And yeah, I found them really insightful. – Christa in individual interview

Another essential component of conveying messages accurately about disability and reinforcing an understanding of the social model of disability came from having disabled people presenting the information and stories. Participants often spoke about the impact of hearing about barriers directly from those who experience them.

> They took the activities on with interest and diligence and compassion. I think having you as the teacher or instructor did help things be more sort of

> firsthand, understandable, be able to comprehend things a little bit more. – Ian in individual interview

> I probably didn't realise the broad scope of disabilities. That's probably one thing. And I would say more so than the activities, but also listening to the commentary around them with the additional people that were present, that kind of gave me more of a felt experience or a learned experience. When some of your colleagues – I think Helen was talking about her experiences in entering venues and things like that, I think I probably really resonated with those kind of things. So I'd say that, yeah, listening to storytelling and shared experiences probably gave me more insight. – Leticia in individual interview

Leticia also explained that hearing Tess's experiences of applying for jobs as a disabled person was particularly eye-opening.

> So I thought that that was really interesting as well, and the fact that, you know, she had a really challenging time applying for jobs, and then getting into the interviews and those kinds of things were really challenging also, and I thought that that would be really stressful, because you're stressed enough when you're going for a job interview, let alone having those experiences to try and physically get into the building. Yeah, so I suppose, for me storytelling's a really big learning, Katie. – Leticia in individual interview

For Danielle, hearing experiences directly from disabled people appeared to help demonstrate the core principle of the social model of disability.

> I'd had not much exposure to people with different disabilities or abilities or anything like that. Even cultural differences: Where I live it's quite mono-cultural and very limited exposure. So I think that's a similar context in (name of council) workplace. So it was wonderful to be able to hear about your experiences, and your colleagues, whose names completely float me, it was such a while ago now. But I think that was so humanising, and to be able to understand peoples' perspectives, and to just hear how something so small can be so limiting, like just access to a coffee shop or a bathroom or, you know – how do I say? I didn't realise that such small things were the issues. I'd come in thinking that disability was the biggest barrier, and left thinking it's

> not. That was the biggest kind of take-away that I got from the process. – Danielle in individual interview

A number of participants explained how their understanding of disability had been broadened as a result of the activities and discussions. Michael, who has a family member with disability was reminded of the broad spectrum of disability.

> Yeah, so as I mentioned on the day, I have a member of my family who has a disability. And, you know, it's really interesting. So I've been, and my wife, we're focused on a specific area, so it was actually really eye-opening for me, and a good reminder that disability's so broad and covers so many different aspects.
>
> So you know, when I first turned up, I didn't really think too much about being told to go to the other entrance until I actually walked around and went, "Well, that's strange." But, you know, the information, getting information on Braille and how you sort of just made the assumption, or played the role of making the assumption that everyone can just read this. What's the problem? Just move on. Like, how is this a problem? It was really a good reminder for me that it's such a broad aspect, broad cohort of the community that we need to be catering for. – Michael in individual interview

Laura explained that the activities helped her to realise the variants in severity of disability.

> I think it's quite easy for us to think of people with a disability as maybe, like, the extremes, so someone that doesn't have the same level of mobility and might need to be in a wheelchair, or someone that's completely blind, or someone that's completely deaf, and so I think those activities kind of highlighted the spectrum. – Laura in individual interview

Christa explained how she felt it was easy to get in a pattern of primarily considering physical disability in her role at council, and so appreciated the reminder to think more broadly.

> …there’s such a wide range of disabilities that people are living with, so I think it was good just to sort of – I think often even in community planning it’s easy just to fall into that, I guess – my wording’s not going to be correct here, but physical disabilities, sort of, you know, they’re in a – like someone’s in a wheelchair or – you know, you don’t always take into account things like screen readers being able to read your documents appropriately and those sorts of things.
>
> So it’s just kind of reminded me, and, you know, made me sort of look at, okay, well, what other things can we be doing to make sure that our information and our programming are as accessible as possible for the whole of community, rather than just sort of narrowing in on that traditional, for lack of a better word, physical disability of wheelchairs and walkers and those sorts of things that – I think particular Councils often lean towards sort of just doing the key standards and the sort of tick box approach, so it’s a constant, like – I’ve got to constantly remind myself to go above and beyond that. – Christa in individual interview

Tess, one of the expert contributors explained that her own understanding of disability had been broadened as well.

> I thought about how information is delivered, but not the spectrum of it. So I guess it’s sort of that even more broadening of your perspective, if that makes sense, to the wider variety of disabilities in terms of information gathering. …I guess it’s just that stopping and thinking about things a little bit more myself is something that I actually took out of that. – Tess (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

I was interested to understand if the expert contributors perceived the participants had gained an accurate insight into being disabled. I asked the expert contributors about what they observed in the responses of participants and whether they considered these reflected their own experiences of encountering social barriers and exclusion.

> I think it was largely empathy that people were responding with. A little bit more of an understanding, I think, too, as well. I don’t know that everyone got

> all of the points you were trying to make, but I think largely it was they really did. – Tess (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

Helen and I discussed her impressions of how people had developed understandings of disability with the role reversal activities, comparing with her existing understanding of how people tend to experience and interpret typical disability simulation activities.

> Given what you've seen of simulation activities, did these role reversal activities, do you feel like they – how did they compare to those…? – Katie in Helen's (Expert Contributor) individual interview

> Maybe it was just me going, "Huh, that's one for us. Now you know how we feel."… … Maybe it was just me going, "I feel so validated now." – Helen (Expert Contributor)

Helen went on to explore why she thought the role reversal activities may have had a different impact to simulation activities.

> …sitting someone in a wheelchair is like, to me, it's – how do I say it? There's so many variables and variations of who sits in a wheelchair and how that person feels and what their disability is and what their capacity is that just doing that as one activity and thinking you're giving someone insight is not the way to I think to engage and to engender any understanding. I don't know.
>
> Why did yours feel more comfortable? They were probably more encompassing than just not everyone with a disability uses a wheelchair, or not everyone with a disability is blind or vision impaired. They're somewhat – I don't know that extreme is the right word, Katie, but they're somewhat extreme examples. – Helen (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

For some participants the impact of understanding was so powerful that there were also more intense feelings experienced during the project.

> I think some personal things that arose was like kind of a bit feeling sort of a little bit guilty in the sense that why aren't we, or why weren't we thinking about all of these things already? So I think those things came up for me, that

> it should just be a mandatory, compulsory way of thinking about (type of project)… …And yeah, don’t get me wrong, there were some aspects already that were considered, but there was many that weren’t, and I just kind of felt like, yeah, that I was definitely on a learning curve. – Rachelle in individual interview

> Yeah, I think it was really useful, Katie. I think once we’d had an opportunity to digest everything from the workshops and then go back and take on those different tasks ourselves, from me personally, I thought during the workshop we were really excited about making change and solving these problems and getting things done and seeking improvement, and then when we broke off independently, it was almost, from my perspective, a bit of shame that, to realise how poorly we’ve been doing, and that accessibility hadn’t been a key to us, and that’s – you know, like a key cornerstone of what we do.
>
> And that’s massively challenging for me, because when I went through university, the whole reason I became a (profession) was to create cities for everyone, to be open and accessible and inclusive and fair, and create equal opportunities. That was the whole reason, and then to realise I’ve been working for Council for several years and this hadn’t been on the agenda was like, we are doing not very well. That was my reflection on it. – Danielle in individual interview

My immediate response to Danielle’s openness was to try to ease this feeling of shame by explaining that she and the council would not be alone in developing their understanding of disability. Danielle quickly explained that she had moved on from those feelings, and through the project had rallied to channel her understanding into making change.

> No, that was right at the beginning, and through the journey, making the steps and finding like-minded people who championed the actions that we took and will continue to take, that’s been powerful for me. – Danielle in individual interview

4.5 Changes in Perspectives, Paying it Forward and Organisational Influence

The longer-term ambition of this project was to consider if the methods implemented could help influence long-term impact. As Helen expressed, the true test of success would be evident later in the project when participants would demonstrate translation of the learning into their everyday practice.

> …the message got across, but did the message get across for that particular duration of workshop? You'll get to see this because you'll get to see what their action research project and the outcomes look like, so hopefully the answer is no, that was the trigger that started something positive that will now allow them to use a bit of that learning and lens that we come from and put it into their own work context or their own personal context, depending on the situations they might find themselves in. – Helen (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

An indication of the extent of the internalisation of the learnings from this project comes from the way that a number of participants reported how the learning had changed their perspective. With this change in perspective, it became clear how participants were improving their practice, subsequently creating more inclusive activities environments. As well as influencing their own practice, some had begun sharing the learnings with others, also working to change their perspective by extension. Where a shift in perspective was indicated, participants frequently described how that was impacting their practice at work.

> …one of the great things about being on this project is that it has definitely changed how I'm seeing things, how I'm working in Council, when I'm programming, when I'm thinking about activities, considerations to take into place and put into effect just to be more inclusive, instead of just going down a particular path. It's really opened up my way of thinking, and to really think outside the box and go, "Right, have I considered all of these other things to make sure that everybody is going to have a good experience," you know? That it's really made me think very differently about things, that's for sure. – Rachelle in individual interview

> …it's thrown another lens in front of my eyes, so whenever I'm entering a building or looking at a facility, and I do go and look at quite a lot of aquatic centres and sports facilities as a part of my role, so that is probably another lens that's there now. Even when I go into a library, you know, and I go around to a lot of the council facilities, and I was looking at the ramp at (name of facility) and I was thinking, "That would be really challenging to get in and out of… …Yeah, so I suppose it has given me more of an awareness. – Leticia in individual interview

> …having the workshops with yourself and your guests and my colleagues, it was very – how do you say – it gave me a different lens, and so that every time that we were producing a report or doing some change management, it was always kind of like, "Well, is this for everyone? Is this accessible to everyone?" - Danielle in individual interview

> Being mindful, you know? After we've had that activity, every event that I've been to, I've always been really aware about how is this accessible for somebody that needs to have an accessible point of arrival, or even how can they move freely within the establishment that I'm in. So that one's really interesting, because now there is not one establishment or venue that I go to that I think about, is this wheelchair accessible? Is this easy for somebody to get in and out? - Leon in individual interview

Michael explained how his perspective had been impacted and provided an example of applying his improved perspective at work.

> Yeah, look, I definitely think that post that first workshop that we did, just my lens, yeah, has certainly taken a bit more of an active look. – Michael in workshop 2

Michael provided an example of setting up a large event and becoming aware that the cable covers running between the stage and production desk had the potential to cause an access problem.

> …this would've added an extra hurdle through a main thoroughfare. So I actually got the team to change that location, so in terms of the location of the

> production desk. So it wasn't as good a result, because it was a bit more prominent, and we try and hide those things, but what it did mean is that through that thoroughfare where they wanted to put the cable trays, we didn't actually need it. We came from a different angle.
>
> So I suppose just that thinking there where – it may have been something that we'd looked at in the past, but I suppose when I was going through that site walk, I suppose that was one of the lenses I wanted to make sure was just, okay, what are we doing from that access perspective. And yeah, so I agree it's definitely having an impact. - Michael in workshop 2

Michael's intervention also demonstrated the re-thinking of priorities. Where concealing the production desk was a typical priority for the purpose of aesthetics, he reframed the priority to be about access for all event patrons.

Kelsey advised of her own perspective shift, as well as having a desire to learn more, and develop the awareness of others.

> I'd just like to thank you for, I guess, letting me be involved in this. It's been very eye-opening, you know? A little bit out of my comfort zone, but I think that's really important. And it's something that I've learned a lot from and want to continue to learn and make others aware of this… - Kelsey in individual interview.

During the duration of the project, other participants actively began influencing the perspectives of others. In the first workshop, two participants asked if they could repeat the role reversal activities in their own team meeting. Angelique reported how the activities had influenced her own perspective, and that she wanted to help her team to see similarly. She and Christa rolled out all three activities in a team meeting and reported how their teammates received them, as well as the conversations they then had about barriers and progress required.

> Yeah, I think for me, it's just made me have that lens over everything that I'm doing, and making sure that our team have that lens. Christa and I took those activities back to our team and did those activities in a team meeting, and I think that was amazing, you know, and the team kind of had that in their mind

> from that point on, thinking with that lens of through everything that we're doing. – Angelique in individual interview

Angelique explained how she facilitated the discussion, demonstrating how she reinforced the reality for disabled people being confronted with such barriers on an everyday basis.

> I think that was really interesting, because you could see the frustration, and to me, I was kind of like, well, imagine that having to be every day, like, that's an every day sort of thing. Imagine if that was how your life was and it was just a normal aspect of your daily life. – Angelique in individual interview

Laura provided an example of paying the learning forward in her personal life.

> So I went to the gym the other day, and when I got there – and I went to the gym knowing that I had somewhere to be straight afterwards and so I was planning on using their bathroom facilities, and I was wanting to do my hair. They have hair straighteners and blow dryers and everything in the bathroom. And I got there and they're like, "Oh, we've got the bathrooms closed unfortunately for – we've got a plumbing issue. We do have one disabled bathroom that you can use if you need to use the bathroom."
>
> I was like, "Yeah, no worries." And I was doing my yoga class and I'm thinking, "Well, I wonder – well, I assume, like, it's a disabled bathroom. I'm sure there'll be all the same facilities in there." And got in there and no, there wasn't a hair dryer, there wasn't a hair straightener. And so I went to the front desk and I said, "Oh, hey, you mentioned that I could use the disabled bathroom. Just wondering what hair styling tools are made available to your disabled patrons, or patrons that need to use the disabled bathroom." And he was like, "Oh, oh, um, oh, look, you know what? I'll go and get the hair – like, what do you need? I'll go and get it out of the female toilet for you so that you can use it."
>
> And in my mind I was like, "They're hardwired into the wall. You won't be able to, but that's fine, I'll let you go." And I was like, "Yep, yep, that'd be great. I'll have the hair dryer and the hair straightener, thanks." And he walks

> in there, come back out and he's like, "Oh, they're hardwired into the wall." I was like, "Oh, okay," like in my mind thinking, "I've already put all this together. You don't need to tell me this, but that's okay." And so he was like, "You're welcome to – I'll let you go in and use those styling tools in the female bathroom," which was great. You know, I was very grateful for that, but yeah, it left me thinking, "Wow, so you just don't get to use hair styling tools apparently if you can only use that particular bathroom."
>
> So yeah, I wrote an email to them just to kind of say, "Hey, I don't know if you've realised this, but this has come to light through this." I haven't heard anything back from them. And I was late for my meeting with my friend that I was catching up with, but I got there and I was like, "I've made a stand. I've had to highlight this issue. It's not fair. It's not okay."
>
> Yeah, so like others have said, your lens does change just by this type of stuff. – Laura in workshop 2

Particularly powerful about this example was how Laura did not explain the full extent of the issue to the gym staff member, recognising the value of experiential learning and problem-posing, she guided him to make his own discoveries about the extent of the accessibility problems and inequity at play.

4.6. Conclusions: Impacts

Through a combination of experiences, storytelling and time to reflect, participants of this action research were able to enhance their understandings of being disabled and translate their own shifts in perspective to impact their practice and, crucially, begin to influence the perspectives and practices of others.

Initially confronted by the role reversal activities, participants experienced feelings like confusion, anxiety and shock. These intense feelings appeared to be the crucial element which then moved participants into being able to articulate the impact of the barriers such as feeling left out and missing important information. As the storytelling evolved, participants began to observe barriers in council and the community, and before long were able to critically analyse the contributing factors which exacerbate complex, systemic barriers, such as those impacting inclusive recruitment and employment.

Several months after the initial workshops, participants demonstrated that the learning had not just caused a fleeting impact. They spoke of their enhanced empathy for the experience of being disabled; an appreciation for the broad scope of disability; and some expressed how they had experienced particularly powerful feelings of guilt and shame at not having fully appreciated these experiences previously. During the eight-month duration of this action research project, participants had the opportunity to begin applying their learning. Many shared the experience of having developed an accessibility lens over everything they did. They used this new insight to make changes to their own work practice. Encouragingly, they demonstrated how they began to influence others by either explaining the practical consideration that needed a re-think, or, walking others through the realisation of the barrier. Some were so keen to have others experience the same journey of learning, they replicated the original role reversal activities for their entire team.

These results have demonstrated the impact of the role reversal activities and accompanying learning in contributing to building understanding and capability for inclusive planning and practice. The next chapter explores how the participants utilised their enhanced understanding and knowledge to bring about action.

Chapter 5

Results: The Outcomes: Understanding, Planning, Responding and Acting

The action research methodology employed in this project allowed participants to use their learning and insight gained from the project and channel it into actual change efforts. This chapter details how the group responded to their learning and awareness and considers how they devised and carried out action. Responding to a secondary question of this research study, my analysis particularly focuses on the organisational contexts which were either conducive, or obstructive in enabling the participants to progress disability inclusive planning and practice in the context of the project. During the initial 1-day workshops, I guided the participants through the typical processes of an action research project. The workshops were designed to facilitate initial phases of learning and thinking, setting up participants to engage in self-directed work to take action over the next eight months. The cyclical nature of action research was emphasised, reassuring participants that they would likely engage in multiple cycles of learning, thinking and acting in order to find successful methods to progress their efforts. The previous chapter detailed the learning which was influenced by the role reversal barriers, examination of the social model of disability and story-telling. The next phase involved translating learning into acting by considering the particular contexts at play which had contributed to the current situation and which may continue to have an impact during a phase of taking action. In action research terms, participants had entered a ‘think’ phase of the action research cycle. This chapter will highlight those explorations and then follow the journeys of participants as they engaged in action and further phases of learning, thinking and acting over the remaining time of the project.

5.1 Who knows? The Impact of Sharing, Holding and Losing Knowledge

In the initial workshops, when participants engaged in problem-posing dialogue, they discussed the current status of disability inclusive planning and practice at council. The participants considered what factors helped or hindered this action. Arising as a strong theme among their observations was the role of knowledge in determining how matters relating to disability inclusion were prioritised and progressed. Where there were barriers identified in sharing and retaining information about disability, action was impacted. Leading participants to these considerations was an exploration into who was currently thinking about and acting to support the interests of people with disability; as well as what initiatives were currently in place. Many local councils have an officer who is particularly focused on matters of disability inclusion. While this council had a community planning and development team, as a smaller regional council, they did not have a designated disability inclusion officer.

> …we have no one internally that is the advocate for disability inclusion. – Michael in workshop 1, Group A

While the council did not have an officer specifically focused on disability inclusion, it did maintain a Disability Inclusion Action Plan and an Access and Inclusion Reference Group. The current Disability Inclusion Action Plan, legislated under the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)* had been in place since 2017 and was currently nearing its expiry in June 2022. Significantly, as dialogue began to shift into considerations over current disability inclusion planning and practice, it transpired that many participants had not heard of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan before the workshop.

> I personally never heard of it. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

> …I actually didn't know we had one at this stage, and I thought this session might actually be feeding into it, as in they were kicking off a project. – Michael in workshop 1, Group A

The discovery of the plan inspired a flurry of activity with many participants checking the plan for relevant responsibilities via the council's website.

> I just had a look at it, and I do have quite a few actions in here that I have just sent to my team, saying, "Hey, guys, can we…" – Jason in workshop 1, Group A

The Access and Inclusion Reference Group was a community committee of Council. With community and Councillor representation, its purpose was to provide input over council projects. Awareness of the Access and Inclusion Reference Group was mixed. Some participants were aware of the group and had received feedback about their area of service; while others were disappointed they had not heard the feedback generated by the group.

> Nothing got fed back to me, but – yeah, see, that's something that was not discussed in our team meetings… - Rachelle in workshop 1, Group B

Leticia, who was employed at a coordinator level, reported that she had received detailed feedback about her area of service, and suggested that perhaps the information was not disseminated to all staff.

> …it certainly is getting through to the departments. Whether or not it's getting to other workers… - Leticia in workshop 1, Group B

The patchy and limited awareness surrounding the Disability Inclusion Action Plan and Access and Inclusion Reference Group led participants to consider how this information had not reached them. Local councils typically provide an induction program for new starters. Christa identified that information surrounding the Disability Inclusion Action Plan was not currently included in this program.

> …The DIAP's not discussed in the induction day, which obviously not everything can be discussed, but you would think, like, cross-organisational deliveries, like the Operational Plan and Delivery Program and the DIAP, those sorts of things would be discussed in the induction. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

While information about the council's work in disability inclusion was not present in induction, one workshop member found that the general distribution of knowledge on the subject was limited. Upon searching the council's intranet she found there were no references to the Disability Inclusion Action Plan. If information was not disseminated purposefully, it was unlikely that staff would know to seek it. Nikki explained that for her, it was simply a case of there being too much information to be across, and in her role information was gathered on a need-to-know basis in order to serve her customers.

> …I kind of only know about things that customers ask me about. There's so much information, and you can't get taught it all, so I learn things as I get asked from a customer. I've never had a customer ask me about it, so it's not something I've had to look into. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

In her individual interview, Leticia reflected on the impact of outsourcing to consultants to write the Disability Inclusion Action Plan and the lack of integration with other planning structures at council. She considered these to be key factors in determining the level of awareness around, and implementation of the plan.

> I've read the old DIAP, and obviously I was aware of it, but I was shocked when we did this project how many people were not even aware that we had one. But after reading it and analysing it, and the fact that that process is given to somebody else, so somebody else external to the company actually writes the DIAP, and they go, "Here you go, (name of council) stamp, there you go, there's your DIAP." And it hasn't been integrated, and this is where I started to have my learnings, you know, like, of course a lot of these actions aren't going to be performed if no one knows it exists, and if it's not integrated at every level within the organisation… Leticia in individual interview.

Without effective integration into the council's operations and broader plans, Danielle identified that it was understandable that many staff may not know about the Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

> It's kind of like internal knowledge. Like, if you know, you know, but if you don't, you don't. If there's not something that's strictly legislatively, you know, the local Environmental Plan or something like that, or something else, then it's not at the forefront. So it's more of the culture around how we implement all of our plans, because there's a lot of plans and there's a lot of strategies – Danielle in workshop 1, group B

Without this integration, knowledge about the disability inclusion planning agenda appeared to be held only by those in the know. This information was then placed at significant risk of being lost with natural staff turnover. This was well illustrated by a discovery of Laura's.

> I just looked it up on (name of staff intranet) and we do have one article that references the access and inclusion group... …it looks like the people who are in that article, which was from 2019, no longer work for us. – Laura in workshop 1, Group B

This workshop group suggested that this discovery illustrated how turnover of staff played a role in determining how information about disability inclusion was retained and shared.

> If we have turnaround in key areas, it's really hard to continue the discussions and to pick up the work loads and to understand exactly where things are at, and if it happens several times, then we've lost the entire connection. – Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

Leon, in workshop 1, addressed the impact when a large number of staff are entering the organisation and working hard to cover the workload. He explained that there is generally a focus on obtaining the most need-to-know critical information. This could lead to an oversight on information about disability inclusion.

> …we were on-boarded during a very difficult time for our time, where we had quite a lot of attrition, so we were replacing the attrition whilst we were training people… …it's one of those things that you do the job that you have to, and you get to those things as you are exposed to it. – Leon in workshop 1, Group A

Ian identified that staff turnover was a problem which could impact any project, and reinforced the importance of processes being put in place so that information and activities could not be lost.

> But you do get that a lot, where there's been change of staff members, loss of knowledge and so forth. But that's where it's good to have those policies and procedures and so forth that sort of have it enshrined rather than relying on people to check in. – Ian in workshop 1, Group B

While staff turnover could be responsible for a loss of information and communication breakdowns, participants identified that siloed ways of working in

Council could also cause information to be effectively trapped, and for people to be working with little awareness of what is happening elsewhere in the organisation.

> Yeah, that's a big thing in Council is the culture that we don't share wins. So, like, my department is responsible for X, Y, Z, and that's what – it's like, even if we need to collaborate with other people, at the end of the day it's our sole responsibility. We don't say, you know, organisationally, "We want to achieve this outcome, and how do we all work together to do that?" - Danielle in Workshop 1, Group B

Rachelle discussed how this disconnection could make it difficult to communicate effectively with customers.

> …you've got someone on the end of the phone like myself, who knows nothing about DAs, and I'm managing (another project), but then I have to communicate with the rec team about the facility, but then there's all this handballing, and then the person that you're handballing it to in terms of the specific question about the DA is not helpful, and then none of us know what's going on, and it's just embarrassing. And so that's happening all the time on so many different levels. Like, it's not good. – Rachele in Workshop 1, Group B

5.2 Challenges to Prioritisation

Among explorations of the factors that could impact disability inclusion planning and practice, several circumstances, attitudes and behaviours within an organisation were referenced for their challenging impact in maintaining this work as a priority. Some participants noted that they felt disability inclusion was just not readily considered as important as other areas of work. This was a general observation, not necessarily one linked exclusively to the council. However, it was raised in consideration of what could be impacting the situation at the current council.

> …I haven't experienced it yet, but there's still that, it's not as important as. It's not on an equal playing field, that, you know, accessibility social impact assessments are as valuable as the environment, or state of environmental effects, the traffic requirements. – Christa in Workshop 1, Group A

Tess, one of the expert contributors supported this impression, sharing her findings from a local government forum, with Councils represented across the state.

> One of the things that kept coming up from all of the other Councils was that they had access and inclusion officers, but they weren't necessarily always listened to. So I mean, just because you've got someone doesn't mean they've got the power to do what they need to do. – Tess (Expert Contributor) in workshop 1 Group A

Jason identified that intentions to do disability inclusion could be very strong, but that this enthusiasm could fade with the competition of other priorities weighing in.

> …when we introduced the DIAP however many years ago, at that time there was quite a lot of focus on it and everyone went, "Yeah, we can do this, this, and this," and then, again, one of those things where lots of other noise happens and there's other distractions and, yeah, start to, like, for me, I was part of that process in terms of looking at how we could implement some of the actions in the (name of department), but I can't even remember, like, I would need to sit down and actually go back through… - Jason in workshop 1, Group A

Leon queried how it was that other minority groups were successful in achieving comparatively higher widespread recognition and action. He clarified that he was considering this on a broader scale than council alone.

> …an interesting question would be to how did the Indigenous group and how did the LGBTQ group manage to raise so much awareness and inclusion, and a group that is just as important, which is the disability, has not been included as much? Is there a reason for that particular…? – Leon in Workshop 1, Group A

Nikki and Krista provided considered responses to this observation.

> I think it kind of depends how loud the group has been, because if you think about it, it kind of started with gender. That was like the first big one. I think females have really pushed the gender, and then other cultures kind of then

> came on the back of that and did the same kind of concept as what female rights really pushed. So it was kind of like, who's yelling louder? – Nikki in Workshop 1, Group A

> I think it's in the too hard basket, because promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTQ, we don't need to change infrastructure, we don't need to revisit our buildings and how they're designed… …or, like, policy accommodations. We provide them with health requirements et cetera for Aboriginal people who have high health risks, but for a lot of disability inclusion, so that they can access the same things we do, we need to refit buildings, or we need to invest money in the infrastructure when we're developing new stuff… - Christa in Workshop 1, Group A

Christa's observation highlighted the significance of perceived high cost in ensuring disability inclusivity. Jason considered how this could result in less than optimal accessibility outcomes.

> I think we touched on it a bit there, like, that, it costs too much… …They would have got X amount of million dollars to do it, and they would've went, "Okay, we need this, this, this, and this," but it's big scope, and then it blows out and they go, "Okay, what are we going to pare back?"
>
> Things start to slide, and stuff like the different types of chairs and different types of tables, the way that the lens of how to get the money is, that stuff's like the really really nice to have, but to get it in within this budget, this is what we can deliver, and that stuff just gets put off. – Jason in workshop 1, Group A

As well as potential financial implications, actions towards improving accessibility and inclusion often require significant commitment to change. Reservations about organisational change were discussed for their impact in effecting positive development towards action on matters such as accessibility and inclusion.

> Like, it's very hard to have drastic change when things can – like, there's such a big scope for change. That's very scary. – Danielle in Workshop 1, Group B

Rachelle and Laura considered that there could be various reasons for a reluctance for change.

> Yeah, I wonder where that comes from, then. If it's fear, like, if it's just purely, like… - Laura in Workshop 1, Group B
>
> Fear. Money. – Rachelle
>
> Yeah, like just the energy to put behind it. – Laura

Leticia also flagged that other happenings in Council could also impact general unease and anxiety about change.

> There's a fair bit of fear going on at the moment with restructures, so I reckon that's a big part of it, if I'm going to talk about elephants in the room. – Leticia in Workshop 1, Group B

5.3 Progressing Learning and Thinking into Action

Once participants had thoroughly unpacked current and potential barriers to progressing disability inclusive planning and practice, they were ready to plan the action they would take after the initial workshops. Taking into account the factors they had learned and thought about over the course of the day, each group created action plans specifying what they intended to do. While the individual workshop groups initially created their own action plans, soon after the initial workshops they decided to form a collective group and compared their separate plans, bringing them together to create a consolidated action plan. Each action added to the action plan was backed by a rationale drawn from the dialogue and discoveries over the course of the initial workshops.

Some actions were developed in recognition of the direct barriers experienced by people with disability in accessing council services, facilities and jobs. For example, actions addressing concerns around the psychometric testing and pre-employment medicals; checking accessibility of the new council administration building; creating a register of council staff with skills in alternative communication or who spoke Auslan and; a need to update the community facilities auditing tool to ensure greater accessibility in the LGA. Some actions went beyond immediate barriers and considered how systemic social change could be brought about. For example, an action devised to improve accessibility of council events included an intention to increase the representation of disabled artists and performers to demonstrate to disabled attendees at events that they too could have opportunities to share their talents.

> …it shows kids that there is an avenue or pathway for them. So maybe it's not just for the crowd, but also to showcase the artists. – Ian in workshop 1, Group B

Other actions were devised in order to improve the council's engagement with disability inclusive planning and practice. These included, completing a review of the current Disability Inclusion Action Plan and developing a communications campaign to raise staff awareness; improving connection and collaboration with the Access and Inclusion Reference Group to better outcomes on projects and; introduce disability inclusion corporate training.

Table 5.1 Combined, Summarised Action Plan

The following table is a summarised and deidentified version of the combined action plan. This is provided to demonstrate the breadth of actions approached and the nature of barriers and organisational complexities addressed in the course of taking action. The participants' rationales for including the action are provided.

Action	Tasks	Rationale
Obtain executive leadership approval on action plan associated with the action research project.	Present to Unit Manager for their progression to executive leadership	Intention to ensure organisational buy-in.
Ensure the consideration of accessibility in the design and delivery of new council administration building.	Consult architects about what accessibility considerations have been included into the design of the new administration building. Query the incorporation of technology which could enhance the accessible design.	Ensure the inclusion of optimal accessibility features.

Action	Tasks	Rationale
Improve accessibility auditing of community facilities	Create an additional auditing checklist to ensure accessibility is included in community and recreation facilities. Ensure feedback from the Access and Inclusion Reference Group is considered.	Framework is in place to ensure new assets exceed accessibility minimum standards. Ensuring the Access and Inclusion Reference Group are appropriately utilised.
Improve inclusivity of council recruitment	Raise accessibility considerations over pre-employment medicals and personality profiling in relevant HR team and working groups.	Recognition of the significant potential barriers present in conducting these practices.
Review the current Disability Inclusion Action Plan	Understand status of current DIAP and development of new plan Promote / celebrate DIAP projects, wins, status and milestones.	Understand current problems in the DIAP's implementation so as to instigate improvements for the next plan. Raise awareness of the current plan, its actions and achievements in preparation for the next DIAP.
Review Development Control Plans to incorporate greater accessibility controls.	Determine current accessibility provisions and update to contemporary best practice controls.	Recognition that the current controls require updating to incorporate enhanced accessibility requirements.
Create register of languages spoken and skills of staff to support customer experience, including second languages, Auslan, Braille, Alternative communication	Ask staff to add secondary languages and skills to their intranet staff profile. Instigate a communications campaign to encourage staff to complete the update of their profile.	In recognition of the significant impact of barriers to communication and access to information
Review accessibility of council forms (online v hard copy) to	Undertake gap analysis on form accessibility and	In recognition of the significant impact of barriers to

Action	Tasks	Rationale
ensure they cater for a range of customer needs	consider what forms can be digitised Investigate ability to have a customer service self- serve terminal, with accessibility considerations. Review Writing style guide for accessibility.	communication and access to information
Introduce disability inclusion corporate training	Introduce disability inclusion training as a standardised feature for staff.	Intention to build awareness and consideration over disability and inclusion at council.
Increase collaboration and connection with the Access and Inclusion Reference Group	Increase collaboration with the AIRG to better inform planning and decisions from an accessibility perspective.	In recognition of the value of the group's feedback in strengthening the council's outcomes.
Increase the representation of performers and contributors with disability at local events	Engage with artists/performers/ musicians.	Intention to build disability representation and contribution to local events.
Procure and present data on disability in the local government area.	Obtain and present baseline community data, including number of people living with disability etc. across the LGA.	Intention to create a better understanding of the number of people with disability in the LGA and the impact of disability inclusive planning and practice.

5.3.1 A Good Time

While the actions chosen by the participants were based around their understandings of barriers which needed to be addressed, there also arose evidence of strategic consideration for the inclusion of many actions. Timeliness or matters being of a time critical nature arose as a contributing factor to some actions devised. At the time of the initial workshops, the council were looking forward to the completion of a new council administration building. The participants, having discussed in detail features of a customer service centre which could optimise its accessibility decided that they needed to ensure these features were included in the current project. This action therefore was identified as being extremely timely.

> …now's the time, because it's being installed, and if it's not already been customised, you know, and we still have time to make small changes… - Leon in workshop 1, Group A

Similarly, there was also a degree of urgency identified within the action seeking to consider inclusivity of the psychometric test and pre-employment medical. A current project was in its latter stages reviewing the human centric design of council processes.

> I think one area that hit me as something maybe I could contribute to was the recruitment process, where it is harder, and as I've been just part of the (name of project team), we didn't really look at the disability aspect, and I feel like it would've been good to have done this discussion six months ago. So now that I understand a bit more, it's given me food for thought to revisit how we've done this recruitment process and the design, to go back to the team and go, "Hey, guys, we probably need to consider this." Because it's a really good time – it is a good time, because we are redesigning the website and things like that. – Gerrard in workshop 1, Group A

5.3.2 Quickly or Easily

Also arising was an interest in action perceived to be possible to undertake quickly or easily. Group A in particular raised a number of such actions. The document accessibility action was nominated as a problem which could be resolved almost immediately.

> I feel like the document accessibility's an easy one to – like, I feel like that should take not even a week. Like, that's such an easy fix. Like, some components of it, obviously, like the IT side of it… - Christa in workshop 1, Group A

With mindfulness towards communication accessibility, participants identified a current concern in their customer service delivery. If a person did not speak English or required the use of alternative communication, they were not sure how they would ensure successful communication. However, they identified a potential solution to the problem, creating a register of council staff who spoke second languages, including Auslan, or possessed additional skills such as the ability to read Braille.

> I want to find out if there’s anyone in the organisation, because if we could have a list of anyone who’s trained in anything like that, and we could just call them. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

This action was also identified as another which would be easy to implement.

> Yeah, but that could be something that’s really simple to… - Jason in workshop 1, Group A

When examining the current Disability Inclusion Action Plan, participants in Group A noted that an action seeking to incorporate disability awareness material into council staff induction had not been completed. Participants expressed surprise that this action had not been fulfilled as they expressed how easy this action should’ve been to implement.

> I feel like that would be such a simple thing to implement, though. Like, it’s weird that it’s been kind of pushed back. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

Group A however did not progress this observation into a new action. Group B did identify the same area of required action and added disability awareness corporate training to their action plan.

5.3.3 Closing Knowledge Gaps

Actions which developed awareness and visibility of disability went on to receive strong attention, particularly from Group B. In many cases the intention was to address those gaps in knowledge which had been identified as being organisational barriers. They suggested that a stronger connection was required between council staff and the Access and Inclusion Reference Group. They devised an action which would enable the sharing of knowledge and better awareness over current issues.

> …I wonder if, when they have meetings or something, we could invite someone from different teams just to come along. They might say no, they might prefer someone else, but at least it's getting that kind of exposure across the different issues. We find that quite useful for knowledge sharing. Danielle in workshop 1, Group b

When detailing an action for disability awareness training, Group B recognised some of the Council's existing training as being a useful model to demonstrate how this action could be completed.

> We have a Code of Conduct and IT safety. I'd see it could be a similar training, where you've got to do a module online. – Ian in workshop 1, Group B
>
> As part of your on-boarding. – Laura

Group B brainstormed multiple other ways that knowledge and awareness could be developed throughout the organisation, including undertaking free online courses and taking advantage of International Day of People with Disability to conduct a staff education campaign. They discussed how they could ensure their leadership became disability aware and referenced the value of a program they had seen rolled out recently.

> It was good the way that our guiding principles training was undertaken, because that was our managers got that training first, and then they had to deliver it to their team. I thought that was good, because then they had to absorb it and they had to engage with it. – Danielle in workshop 1, Group B
>
> That could be cool, that they then have to deliver it, so it proves that they went and they listened. – Rachelle

Despite this strong consideration and focus for Group B, the detail of these ideas did not appear to translate into the eventual combined action plan. The resulting two actions did not contain specificity for the tasks that would be undertaken.

5.3.4 Addressing the Disability Inclusion Action Plan

With the strong awareness for the organisational barriers present in maintaining disability inclusion on the agenda of council staff, both groups devised actions surrounding improved implementation of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan. As a central driving force in helping progress the disability inclusion agenda, the Disability Inclusion Action Plan became a significant focus for the participants. Initially, both groups discussed the need for all participants to read the plan and then engage in a review progress to understand its current status. Once again, group A referenced this action initially as an easy one to get started on, however, Michael soon addressed the need to ensure this action was more substantial.

> I guess an easy action would just be everyone reviewing the DIAP and seeing what actions fall with their team. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Can we go a step further, review and then get something on (Staff intranet) reminding people? – Michael

Christa also volunteered to progress this action further by examining the current organisational context behind the Disability Inclusion Action Plan's implementation.

> I'll have conversations in my team as well around – I know that the DIAP is on the agenda with management, but it's not getting fed down to me where things are at and what's happening, so I'll get some – maybe some of this has happened, or are in the process, or have been held up for whatever reason. So I can come back to you guys with that. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A

This action evolved primarily in Group A's action plan and was finalised in the combined action plan. It contained various tasks, including reviewing the current Disability Inclusion Action Plan and conducting a communications campaign throughout the council to raise awareness of its aims. With satisfaction of these tasks, the action aimed to have a dual purpose, to understand the plan's current status and, to address the significant gaps in staff knowledge about the plan and their responsibility. The action's evolution took various contributions to reach this point.

> The DIAP promotion, reviewing actions of DIAP and where it – I don't know what the action is. – Christa in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Making some noise about it. – Michael
>
> Yeah. - Christa
>
> I think we could just start with an understanding of where it's at. Like, we're doing a new one, is that… - Jason
>
> Yeah, so this current one, or the one we've got at the moment is 2017 to 2022, so I assume it would end in June, and then we're developing a new one. So maybe we just put as the broad action, "DIAP," and then understand where – I think regardless of the status and stuff, I think we still should promote – there should still be something around promotion of DIAP as an action, or as a task, so that new starters know that we have one. – Christa

5.3.5 Attracting Organisational Buy-In

Some strategic decisions were made for the way an action was approached in order to improve its chances of success. While discussing the intention to promote the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Michael suggested that in order to show support for good work undertaken already, they should draw attention to successes in their communications. Such action was seen as important to demonstrate positivity and also to encourage the Council through celebration of its success.

> …if they've done a really great job, then we should be celebrating that. We should be promoting that, going, "Hey, we're awesome." – Michael in workshop 1, Group A
>
> Yeah, go Council. – Christa

The first action of the combined action plan was to gain executive approval for the proposed action plan. The purpose of seeking this approval was to try to ensure there would be a level of buy-in and support for the group's work.

> Quick question. Is anyone that's going to be sponsoring this from our ELT team? – Leon in workshop 1, Group B

> In terms of? – Christa
>
> Endorsing, I guess, so we can ultimately have a bit more weight. I mean, you guys have been here for a bit longer. How does it work…? - Leon
>
> Good point. No, it does need a – it needs a (senior manager's name) or someone… - Gerrard
>
> Yeah, it needs a (Senior Manager's Name) to endorse and put some weight in it and put a stamp on it, you know? – Leon

5.4 Taking Action

With their action plan created, the next phase of this action research project involved taking action. Towards completion of the initial workshops, the participants devised their methods for undertaking the work, collaborating and staying connected. These arrangements are detailed completely in chapter 6. This was a pivotal part of the project because its successful continuation depended on how the participants were able to progress the project in between the formal data collection points of the study. The entire project took place over 32 weeks, or eight months. After the initial workshops participants engaged in self-directed work for 10 weeks, at which point I reconnected with the participants for a mid-point workshop. The intention of this activity was to understand the work undertaken since our initial workshops and to discuss successes, challenges and intentions for the remainder of the formal project time. After this mid-point workshop, the participants again engaged in further self-directed work until their individual interviews between week's 26 and 32. The individual interviews served as a useful opportunity for me to understand the participants' individual experiences. The participants also instigated a final project wrap-up meeting at week 32 at which they discussed their plans for continuing their action beyond the formal project. At the data collection points, the participants shared with me the challenges they encountered taking action, the successes they had, and the ways that they revisited and revised the actions in order to act again.

5.4.1 The Complexity of Making Change

While there was a great deal of outward optimism indicated for bringing about positive change during the initial workshops, as the project progressed, participants began to identify multiple complexities to navigate standing between them and their ability to take action. By the time of the second workshop at the mid-point of the project, participants had identified many complexities. Leticia articulated her revelation that taking action was far from easy.

> I'll just say, can of worms, again. So you think things are really simple and really easy, but once you start unpacking them and typing down and looking at actions, there's so much more behind each of the actions, and you've got to go back and look and examine again. And then, you know, you hit a few barriers and you've got to work out how you can get around that. So, you know, to act on things, yeah, you really have to go back and look and think a lot more before you can act. – Leticia in workshop 2

There were other instances in which the participants realised that a task which had originally seemed like a quick win or easy to complete was complicated by unexpected complexities. A prime example came with the groups' eagerness to identify second language and additional skills of their staff to offer assistance to customers with alternative communication needs. Leon explained how they came to understand the full scope of the action.

> This is a piece that it was a lot – it has become bigger than we originally thought. So originally we thought this would be as simple as just asking everybody to update their profile and stating what language they speak and how they can support us if we need. Then I asked for Laura's help, and we started looking into it further, and we are now at a stage where it's sitting with (manager's name)… …because apparently if anybody's putting themselves up there as a helper, whether it is to support with different languages or whatever, there is an award payment that we need to be paying to these people, so it is a lot more structured than we first thought. – Leon in workshop 2

Some complexities arose due to factors associated with work occurring concurrently, outside of the action research project. Some actions had originally been developed by the participants with observations asserted as to the timeliness of the action. These actions were usually those with associated projects already in progress. In the case of the construction of the new administration building, it transpired the participants' involvement came a little too late to bring a full consideration of optimal accessibility.

> I would suggest that we could've done better in the design, and by the time this project kicked off and we started to look into that, it had been – you know, all the contracts had been signed and construction was very much under way, and there was not an opportunity to do that sort of detailed review, or get someone, an expert involved to do a comprehensive review of everything we could do to make people feel more comfortable and included within the new building. – Michael in individual interview

Leon discussed how some of the complexity associated with the actions he was focused on was due to their progression being reliant on other projects and actions external to the action research project.

> Well, I can say my experience has been similar in a sense, where everything – so the two items I'm looking at right now are dependent on quite a lot of things that are happening… - Leon in workshop 2

The same complexity was expressed by Laura who had been working on the action relating to reviewing recruitment processes.

> …I'll be honest in saying I am in a little bit of a state of waiting to see what happens, purely because we are implementing the new (name of software) system, which that will be, like, I guess, we will migrate from using our current system… …I think it's a bit of a work in progress. It'll just continue to evolve, but yeah, we do have some set processes that will be changing that will probably be coming into effect within the next three months, so it'll all be part of that. – Laura in workshop 2

Leon went on to explain that these hold ups then caused him to feel like his progress to report was limited.

> …But, yeah, so you almost feel like you don’t have a lot to update everybody on, but, you know, I guess it’s because everything is being developed together. And I find myself in that look stage more often than anything. – Leon in workshop 2

Laura similarly expressed that she felt deflated that she felt she had not been able to make as much progress as other participants at the end of the project.

> …I would say that in terms of being able to implement those things, they’ve kind of really just sat there until we worked through some of the other processes that were already on the go, which has been a little bit deflating, because I have been able to see other progress from other members of the group, you know, like I guess more tangible change has happened off the back of it. – Laura in individual interview

Danielle explained that a high level of scrutiny and competing priorities over action undertaken in her area of work from developers and the community entailed complexity in making improvements to accessibility and inclusion.

> I haven’t had any resistance, but in terms of the planning controls that we’re looking at changing and improving, they get heavily scrutinised, so it’s not easy to make implementations and say, you know, “This is going to better things.” It’s always, “What does that mean? What’s the cost? How does this impact developer communities?” You know, the argument that it’s for the greater good or, you know, this’ll just improve things for the community isn’t weighted particularly well. So, watch this space. – Danielle in workshop 2

Other participants made the discovery that the complexity in their actions lay in the amount of research they would need to do before acting. Leticia explained at the mid-point workshop that she had had to consider multiple questions that arose as she prepared to take action on improving community facilities.

> And then you’ve obviously got IT to ask is there new technology or are these hearing loops the best thing that we can use? And then there’s obviously cost, and then getting that through as well. And that’s just one little piece of the puzzle. So that’s the way my brain works. More questions every time I look at something. - Leticia in workshop 2

Ian also expressed the realisation that much research needed to be completed to ensure actions were completed appropriately.

> …where to find information, resources of information. So the usual thing of doing some searching online, googling, to see what information was available at the state level, and then maybe more broadly what has occurred. So for example, the All Abilities Inclusion for events, I found broader information on the Internet for that around Council policies and things. I didn’t find a whole lot, but that was an area to start in. – Ian in individual interview

5.4.2 Contingent on Prioritisation and Support

The proposed action could not occur in isolation. Participants soon needed to connect with their immediate teams and across teams to progress change. The importance of organisational prioritisation and the support of managers and leaders became notable as central in determining the difficulty or success in achieving action. Participants reported mixed experiences of organisational buy-in and prioritisation. Michael suggested in the mid-point workshop that given the council’s current landscape of change, he sensed a receptiveness to the kinds of changes their action research group were proposing.

> …I think now, from an organisation perspective, is a good time to be able to be getting that buy-in, because it’s almost like the whole range of projects that are happening as part of this customer-driven transformation, it’s almost like the usual now for the organisation is, okay, just because we’ve been doing something, that’s not the way that we’re going to – everyone’s sort of in this mindset where everything’s changing type of thing, and this is just I suppose another thing now that we’re looking at. - Michael in workshop 2

Leon also shared that he found the interest and buy-in to the projects the group pursued was generally highly positive. He contributed this to colleagues feeling invested in the proposed impact of the project.

> LEON: I guess from my perspective is, when you talk about the cause, and it's a great cause, and considering we are going through a customer-driven transformation and there is a lot of those elements that have not been accounted for during the customer-driven transformation, that rings a lot of, I guess, alarm bells. But once you – when you approach somebody and you talk about what is this for, then every – in my experience is people are opening up and be like, "Yeah, sure, let's see what we can do," and everybody's being really helpful. – Leon in workshop 2

Christa identified that while everyone in the action research project team was invested in achieving results, she indicated that gaining that buy-in beyond had been more challenging.

> I would say prioritisation and lack of investment potentially in them... …for me, I just feel like it's not a priority for other people, and I feel like I've really had to chase things to follow them up. Everyone who's been involved in the group has been really active and engaged with it, but when you're talking to anyone outside of the group, it's like, "Oh yeah, I'll get that to you when I can." - Christa in individual interview

While Laura's primary areas of action were impacted by an impending software change, she also identified that she was contending with a lack of buy-in from her immediate team. Laura found this difficult to express during the mid-point workshop and waited until her individual interview to share this experience.

> …for me it has been a pretty challenging process to get the buy-in that I would have liked to, and I think – there's probably something that I've been wanting to do as a result of the work that we've done is take my team a bit of a list of recommendations from what I found. But, look, it has definitely been a bit of a journey. – Laura in individual interview

Angelique explained that intersecting factors of competing priorities and gaining buy-in could make action difficult to progress.

> Obviously competing priorities and different deadlines, that's been one of the ones. Making some of our actions a priority has been a difficult one from some people, because we do have all those big workloads. And the other one would probably be making things happen. So, you know, there'd be a lot of setbacks or pushbacks from different levels of management on different actions, so I think making progress has been a challenging one. – Angelique in individual interview

Michael identified the struggle of maintaining time for the action in a busy scene of competing priorities was a challenge.

> So for me, the biggest challenge was finding the time to continue to progress things. That was certainly my biggest challenge. – Michael in individual interview

Laura reflected on the power of time in both inhibiting progress and facilitating it. Laura had taken on responsibilities under a number of actions and upon discovering one was rather more complex than first considered, she asked for help from a colleague in her team to investigate it. This colleague had the time to thoroughly research the matter. Laura noted what a worthwhile investment in time this had been.

> So I handed that to one of my colleagues to do some other research to understand how other Councils approach that, and she, like, this other colleague of mine, came up with some really amazing feedback. And it was just really interesting to see, like, you know, I feel like my project of work that I'd kind of taken on and all the ideas was like out here, and I'd given her just this tiny little portion of it, and she was able to really hone in and pull out some really, really great data. So, yeah, I just kind of looked at it and gone, "Oh, imagine if we could put that kind of time and effort into each of these different ideas that I have and just understand how other Councils do it." - Laura in individual interview

Leon expressed the view that the allocation of time to commit to these actions was closely linked to the organisational support and leadership over the project. He proposed that in order to ensure participants had more time to allocate, a greater endorsement from the organisation would have been of benefit.

> What I would have liked more is – and again, this is all circumstantial – if this was a project that was, I guess, fully endorsed by the Council, almost like as if we had goals towards it, we would have been able to give a lot more.
>
> Because what happens is, there is so many activities happening that we were like, “Oh, let’s – you know, we have a meeting today,” and then you go into the meeting and then half of the people were able to produce results and deliver on updates or whatever, and the other half got caught up with other stuff that was happening at work… …there was probably a lot of people that want to deliver a lot more, but they got caught up with work, and consequently we didn’t produce as much as we could have. – Leon in individual interview

Michael also expressed a similar hope for continued executive leadership support to help maintain the momentum of action beyond the formal project itself.

> I think getting the supports, the continuous supports from our senior leadership team is critical. A lot of the things that I see in this project should be business as usual, you know, should be integrated within everything we do, but we just haven’t hit that point yet. So really getting that strong leadership, not just from this group, but from the directors of the organisation would help in the longevity of the project. – Michael in workshop 2

The level of support from management and leadership had a direct impact on the participants’ ability to progress their action. Rachelle found that her course of action was redirected after seeking approval from her superiors. She spent time investigating how she could use social media to support her initial action. However, upon taking the proposed steps to her manager was advised she could not pursue those steps of action. Rachelle was confused even at the point of reporting this barrier as to why it had even been a problem. Rachelle however, soon rethought her path of action and determined another way forward.

> And then when I asked my team, like my managers if we could do that, they were like, “Oh, I don’t think that’s something we can do.” So I was like, “Oh” – it was a bit of a, “Why not, though?” And I still don’t really know the answer to that, to be honest. So yeah, I guess that was a bit of a – so what I did then when that was not an option, basically I then just researched all the organisations locally to begin with, and then I made contact with them myself, just initially by email, then some phone calls, and then when I had (name of organisation) respond, I went and arranged the physical meeting.
>
> But yeah, that was, I thought, sort of a bit of a, yeah, like, why – I just don’t have an understanding of why I couldn’t go down that path. There was reasoning behind it, but … - Rachelle in individual interview

Leticia expressed that for her, taking effective action had been pivotal to aligning her action with an existing scope of work and gaining support from a executive leader who was able to influence the commitment of budget to the project. Leticia was working on an action to incorporate an additional auditing checklist to one already utilised to conduct regular compliance audits of community facilities. Leticia envisaged a tool which would enable the council to enhance accessibility and inclusion beyond minimum standards. She pitched this concept to a manager responsible for overseeing the current audits.

> …I said, “Well, how about you tack on this access and inclusion project that I’ve been working on,” and he said, “Oh no, we’ll be compliant with everything within the building codes, but nothing additional to that.” And I said, “Oh, okay, well, how does that work? How is that compliant?” And he said, “Well, it is compliant, and we’ll be ticking all the boxes off, but in relation to everything that you’re talking about” – so I was talking about the desk heights for people in wheelchairs, whether or not they can still have eye contact, and that aligning to our guiding principle of being welcoming, having hearing loops in places like libraries and aquatic centres and places like that, and also, you know, we talked about events and the example that we were given about the cords and the work health and safety speedbump that goes over the cords and people not being able to go over that – he said that because he was

> analysing all of the community centres and everything like that, that he would need a budget if that was going to happen. - Leticia in individual interview

Leticia then met with an executive leader and explained the proposed action and the advice she had received in order to make this practice a reality. Her proposal was met with support and after investigations of the budget required, she was advised the full scope of the proposed additional audit would be undertaken. Leticia reflected that this success had served as her most significant learning of the project.

> …the biggest learning was working out in Council, you need to get things done with people that do have a budget, and otherwise it won't happen. So finding a team that was basically going to do this audit anyway, to try and tack it on and to get funding for it, that was the biggest challenge. -Leticia in individual interview

Laura expressed that for her, some difficulty came with the need to engage in challenging conversations about how things were done at council in order to progress her actions. She expressed how emotionally fatiguing this had been for her, especially as she found she was also challenging her own existing knowledge.

> Not that I think that there was anything to, like, there was any argument or whatnot, but just trying to come at it at a very pragmatic, logical way as to why we do things and whatnot, and that was actually quite challenging… …like I just said to you, like at that time all of my preconceived ideas, my unconscious bias, was very much being challenged, and so also trying to be open and receptive and contribute in a way that wasn't just being, "No, no, this is (name of business area) and this is why we do things," and, you know, to actually be a contributing member of that. So yeah, that was interesting to navigate through that.
>
> I think it was a lot, to be honest. Like, I can remember being really exhausted after, at the end of that day, because there was a lot going on in my brain as to why we do things and how we could do things better. – Laura in individual interview

At the most fundamental level, sometimes it was difficult to find the right colleagues to get started. Kelsey was working on the action to review actions of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan and discovered that due to changes in teams and staff turnover, it was challenging to find those responsible for actions.

> I think for the DIAP currently our biggest challenge is a lot of the teams have changed, and I know within my own team, when I have spoken to them about some of the actions that our team has been assigned, they're not aware of it at all, so it'll be trying to chase the right contacts for who implemented certain actions in these tasks. So that's going to be, I think, my biggest challenge moving forward, but they're all really supportive of helping me find the right information. – Kelsey in workshop 2

Communication and engagement were reported to be important methods for gaining organisational buy-in. One of the tasks associated with the action relating to reviewing and promoting the Disability Inclusion Action Plan was to rollout a communications campaign. As part of this campaign, the participants took the opportunity to promote the activities they were undertaking as part of the project.

> So we put together an article for internal staff to keep up to date with the project that we're working on. So it was put out last week, and it just pinpoints a couple of the tasks, so people know what specific things we're working on, and we'll be able to update as those tasks are complete moving forward, and I think that'll tie in nicely with the DIAP, because Christa flagged that we'll need to do some internal and external consultation, so she thinks that'll tie in nicely. We'll be able to engage people more with that. And that's also been shared with the Councillors, because they're always keen to know what we're doing.
> – Kelsey in workshop 2

Leticia explained how the group had received advice from leadership to conduct this communication to assist in developing appropriate awareness and buy-in to their activities.

> (Name of manager) basically said it would be really good to have that communication go out to everybody, so that if we needed to reach out to other departments or other people to get them involved in our project, it gave them

> a little bit of awareness of what we were doing, and that has certainly I know helped for me when I've been reaching out to other areas and other departments for assistance in this space. – Leticia in workshop 2

Laura also observed that this communication effort had proved helpful in supporting their action.

> And then some of the girls from the comms team were, I guess, promoting some of the work that we were doing on our intranet system, so that was kind of good as well, because it did help the executive leadership team. It kind of formalised it a little bit more, and that meant that if we were going to them asking them for feedback or advice or buy-in, it did kind of make it more – you know, it's not this little project that I'm just working on in the corner. It's something that a decent amount of stakeholders organisation-wide are all coming together to try and achieve some good outcomes, so that was really good. – Laura in individual interview

5.4.3 Rethinking and Adjusting

As anticipated, once engaging in attempts to take action, many participants identified complexities or barriers which meant they needed to reconsider their approaches to taking action. They revisited phases of looking and thinking and then many took new steps to act again. The team reviewing the development control plans identified that a full review would take a considerable time to complete, as well as entailing considerable complexities. Determined to begin the journey however, they began investigating interim changes to have an impact sooner.

> Just we've got, I guess, a dated DCP at the moment, which as Michael said is going to be comprehensively reviewed. That's going to take some time, so we're trying to put some interim processes in place to sort of improve our ability to assess applications and hopefully have better outcomes, rather than just sort of I guess waiting until we get improved controls into our DCP. - Ian in workshop 2

The original action to identify staff second language and additional skills in alternative communication also evolved to be a complex action which would take time beyond the scope of this project. By the time of the mid-point workshop however, participants were already considering adequate alternatives if the action could not progress as first devised.

> One of the things that we are thinking as well, Katie, which I think I might have mentioned it to you, if everything else – if we can't proceed for whatever reason, we will be looking to the introduction of maybe an app that we can help with certain people with certain disabilities, and should we need to speak with them, especially people that are hard of hearing or something that we can produce Auslan while we are typing or texting, something that we can help. – Leon in workshop 2

Laura's actions were significantly impacted by the impending introduction of a new software system. While she found this delay frustrating, she realised that incremental and quick changes to the way her team communicated with customers could be made in the meantime.

> …that has just been a really quick shift. It's still I think mentioned on our ads as a psychometric assessment, but when we talk about it in phone calls with our applicants, we just call it a personality questionnaire.
>
> And I think that even that has been – like, I haven't started collecting any of the data off the back of that, but I guess, yeah, we have, as a team, a HR team, have spoken about some of the things that we can be saying to try and put applicants at ease, and that a psychometric test sounds quite intimidating, so maybe it's just some simple tweaks around language, and that's something that we've all been trying to integrate into our process. – Laura in workshop 2

Similarly, while significant changes to the administration building's completion was not possible, Leon identified that as a result of the group's work, he had noted an increased consideration over the chosen furniture for the completed space.

> And another great thing, too, is our new building, after our meetings – and this was, I think, I don't know if it sat with Michael, but there's been all these talks about making sure that we have desks that are slightly lower that we can

> assist anybody that is in a wheelchair, for example, so they don’t have to feel awkward about us going around or doing anything different other than just being served like anyone else would be served, really. – Leon in individual interview

Rachelle’s earliest proposed plans to take action had not been approved by her manager. While confused about the reasoning, she soon readjusted her approach and achieved significant success. Instead of using social media to engage with local organisations, she directly approached a local organisation to discuss engagement of disabled artists and performers.

> Just from my experience dealing with the external organisation that I dealt with, (name of organisation), the feedback there was so positive, and they were so excited at potential opportunities, and just starting that relationship there I think is really good. And already, you know, we’re seeing that there’s people that are excited to be a part of it, like part of our events on that performance level as well. But just, like, the fact that now I’ve reached out to multiple external organisations, it’s exciting to know that we can start building these new relationships, and that they know that they can also reach out to us. So I think that’s been really positive so far. – Rachelle in workshop 2

Rachelle went on to establish multiple community connections to foster more significant engagement of disabled people at the council’s local events as performers, artists and contributors.

> One thing for (name of event) that we did was we reached out to a whole number of organisations to see if they would be interested in participating in the event through art making… … they actually had a lot of their clients make some great (art) for the event, and they had so much fun, and they just shared the experience and said, you know, “Thank you for involving us,” and just how much they enjoyed it. So that was really great to see. – Rachelle in individual interview

Additionally, while not a specified action of the project, the learning from the project had a significant impact on rethinking the approach to accessibility at council events.

> And then also just really ensuring that when we do event set up and things, that we're considering accessibility. Like, we did that for, I think it was (name of event)… …We were really, really conscious of the fact of our cable tray placing, and all of the things that could impede someone in terms of their accessing the site. So yeah, we were very conscious of those things during set up. – Rachelle in individual interview

Christa in the final wrap-up acknowledged the challenges that the group had encountered and drew attention to their determination to persist by adapting their actions.

> …pretty much all I wanted to do was just check in, say thank you all so much for your passion and commitment to the group and the levels of change we've made. I know that for some of us it feels like we've just hit a lot of brick walls or we haven't really been able to make a lot of change. Like Leon, I know you're waiting on the website redevelopment to be able to make some of those implementations, but the work that you've put towards that and the follow-ups you've put in making sure that it's something that doesn't fall off the bandwagon. Just, yeah, really appreciate everyone's commitment to the project. – Christa in final wrap-up

Table 5.2 Status of Combined Action Plan at the Conclusion of the Formal Project

The following table is a summarised and deidentified version of the combined action plan. It notes the current status of actions at the conclusion of the formal project.

Action	Tasks	Status at formal project end
Obtain executive leadership approval on action plan associated with the action research project.	Present to Unit Manager for their progression to executive leadership	Combined action plan approved for implementation
Ensure the consideration of accessibility in the design and delivery of new council administration building.	Consult architects about what accessibility considerations have been included into the design of the new administration building.	Accessibility report reviewed and found to satisfy baseline requirements.

Action	**Tasks**	**Status at formal project end**
	Query the incorporation of technology which could enhance the accessible design.	Advocacy was undertaken to address some features that had not been included in the development.
Improve accessibility auditing of community facilities	Create an additional auditing checklist to ensure accessibility is included in community and recreation facilities. Ensure feedback from the Access and Inclusion Reference Group is considered.	Successful allocation of budget to the inclusion of an additional auditing tool which would consider enhanced accessibility beyond minimum standards.
Improve inclusivity of council recruitment	Raise accessibility considerations over pre-employment medicals and personality profiling in relevant HR team and working groups.	Incremental changes made to the use of language when discussing requirements for the psychometric testing and pre-employment medical. More significant changes were delayed as a result of the introduction of a new recruitment system. Investigations had been undertaken into website extensions that could assist in making the process of applying for positions more accessible for individual needs.
Review the current Disability Inclusion Action Plan	Understand status of current DIAP, and development of new plan Promote / celebrate DIAP projects, wins, status and milestones.	The DIAP for 2017-2022 was reviewed and actions transposed into a spreadsheet allowing more effective tracking and referral to responsible staff.

Action	Tasks	Status at formal project end
		Communications campaign undertaken using the staff intranet. Identification of appropriate strategies to strengthen the development and implementation of the next DIAP, including stronger integration with council's IP&R framework.
Review Development Control Plans to incorporate greater accessibility controls.	Determine current accessibility provisions and update to contemporary best practice controls.	Interim work undertaken to update.
Create register of languages spoken and skills of staff to support customer experience, including second languages, Auslan, Braille, Alternative communication	Ask staff to add secondary languages and skills to their intranet staff profile. Instigate a communications campaign to encourage staff to complete the update of their profile.	Further research completed to understand the legalities of engaging staff to be identified to perform these potential additional duties. The intention was to continue this research, but also to investigate the merits of assistive technology that could be implemented in the customer service centre to create effective methods of alternative communication.
Review accessibility of council forms (online v hard copy) to ensure they cater for a range of customer needs	Undertake gap analysis on form accessibility and consider what forms can be digitised Investigate ability to have a customer service self- serve terminal, with accessibility considerations.	Action was absorbed into concurrent project of council website review. The review was an obstacle to making progress on this identified action, but with hopes that accessibility would ultimately be better considered as a result of the larger review.

Action	Tasks	Status at formal project end
	Review writing style guide for accessibility.	
Introduce disability inclusion corporate training	Introduce disability inclusion training as a standardised feature for staff.	Some project participants undertook their own professional development, completing free courses in web accessibility and related topics. Recommendations had been made for further adoption and rollout.
Increase collaboration and connection with the Access and Inclusion Reference Group	Increase collaboration with the AIRG to better inform events, planning and decisions from an accessibility perspective.	This action did not appear to progress past its inception, even though a number of participants expressed a hope to collaborate more with the group at the mid-point workshop.
Increase the representation of performers and contributors with disability at local events	Engage with artists/performers/ musicians.	Connections made with local and representative bodies supporting event accessibility and representation of disabled performers and artists. Progress was underway to increase performers with disability at local events but some progress had been impeded by event cancelation due to severe weather events.
Procure and present data on disability in the local government area.	Obtain and present baseline community data, including number of people living with disability etc. across the LGA.	Review completed on current ABS and related data and presented to relevant teams.

5.5. Conclusion: Outcomes

Participants who volunteered to take part in this study were eager to engage in action which would make a positive impact in advancing the inclusion of people with disability in council and the community. This chapter explored the action that they undertook. More specifically, the chapter was concerned with exploring how the action was undertaken and what factors were obstructive or helpful in progressing the work.

Before participants devised their action plans, they spent time considering the barriers that disabled people experience, as well as the current contexts at council which they perceived to influence disability inclusive planning and practice. These discoveries ultimately went on to shape both the content of their eventual actions, but also influenced some of the strategic decisions they made about how to approach the action.

The participants found that knowledge was a crucial factor in influencing disability inclusive planning and practice. They discovered that many of the participants were unaware of the council's current Disability Inclusion Action Plan and the Access and Inclusion Reference Group. Without an awareness of these crucial pieces of infrastructure, the council staff could not pursue action under the plan, nor access the expertise of the reference group members. The participants considered that this absence of knowledge was impacted by its lack of integration with staff training or council planning tools; staff changes and turnover and; siloed ways of working. Participants also considered there could be other organisational circumstances and behaviours which impacted progress in disability inclusive planning and practice in council. These included a lack of prioritisation; perceived high cost to ensure accessibility; and fear and resistance towards change.

As participants progressed to develop their action plans, there arose evidence of their consideration for the barriers experienced by people with disability. Actions addressed barriers encountered in council and the community, and the structures and systems which were thought to contribute to the problem. Additionally, in the creation of their actions, participants also made a number of strategic decisions, including, choosing actions which aligned with other projects, citing the timeliness or time critical nature of the action; actions which were perceived to be quick or easy to undertake; actions which would close knowledge gaps; actions which would influence improved implementation of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan and; actions to attract organisational and leadership buy-in.

Over the self-directed time of the project, participants worked to implement their action plan. Many participants discovered a great complexity to acting that they had not anticipated. Complexities included, realising the full scope of an action and its multifaceted connections; understanding that an action wasn't easy or quick as first assumed; concurrent work impacting the progress of an action; need for community or developer consultation; and extensive time or research requirements. As well as navigating these complexities, they observed factors which either supported their efforts, or caused roadblocks. Organisational and leadership buy-in, prioritisation and support of the action influenced the action's success. The participants had mixed experiences of obtaining this buy-in and support. Participants also discovered they could help influence these factors by instigating a communications campaign to promote their work. As is an anticipated part of action research, the participants often needed to reevaluate their actions, reverting to stages of looking and thinking before acting again. Participants who encountered complexities and challenges had to engage in this practice. In these phases, the participants often demonstrated ingenuity in finding ways to progress their action, including, devising interim or beginner solutions while waiting for a larger piece of work to commence; and readjusting an approach to achieve the same outcome. While negotiating complexities, challenges and readjusting, participants demonstrated satisfaction or progress on their action plan. While doing so, their experiences help to highlight multiple factors which impact disability inclusive planning and practice.

Chapter 6

Results: The Engagement: Motivation, Collaboration and Driving Passion

The action research project required the participants of the study to collaborate with one another over a period of eight months. The initial workshops took place with the 13 participants separated into two groups. However, after those workshops were complete, the participants opted to join the two groups together and advance their action collectively. This self-direction and enthusiasm to make the project as impactful as possible came as one early demonstration of their engagement in the project. Demonstrations of engagement became significant, as these highlighted the factors that contributed to the success of the project in advancing action in disability inclusive planning and practice. This chapter examines what fuelled this engagement; the investment in the project, the quality of their work together and their passion for pursuing the work. The findings suggest the value of an initial personal motivation and voluntary participation. As the research activities got underway, the importance of a comfortable and safe environment for participation became notable. Most significantly, as the project progressed into self-directed work, after I stepped away from the facilitation, the nature of their collaborative work and group leadership was vital for keeping the project progressing. These results explain some of the scaffolding that was needed to ensure participants could then go on to take actions to bring about change. While the participants came with existing motivations for volunteering to take part, as the project developed, further factors became evident for reinforcing this motivation to continue. By the conclusion of the project, most participants still had significant enthusiasm to continue the work and had clear intentions for the action they wanted to take beyond.

6.1 Motivation to Participate

This action research study relied on participants to volunteer to take part. Early in the initial workshops all participants introduced themselves and their motivations for putting up their hands to participate began to be voiced. Two participants had family members with disability.

> I have an autistic son, so this is quite close to my heart as well, so I'm quite interested to go through this process and learn a little bit more and share my knowledge. – Michael in workshop 1, Group A

Gerrard shared in his introduction that he had lost his daughter at a young age due to severe disability.

> …she had a hearing problem. She was deaf. She had Noonan Syndrome, which meant she had a heart condition. She had lots of operations, and she died when she was two, so it gave me a big insight into how hard life was going to be. – Gerrard in workshop 1, Group A

Other participants indicated their interest was due to previous experience working to ensure disability inclusive practice. Ian indicated that he had been exposed to thinking about disability inclusion through his work with other councils and was inspired to bring some of this awareness to the current council.

> I've worked for large and small local government organisations, and I think my experience with a large organisation that had resources with an aged and sort of disability officer was really valuable to showcasing and exposing me to a lot of areas that I didn't normally think of, so from that experience I'm hoping to pass that on to new planners as they come into the organisation to try and get them to think outside the box. Yeah, so I'm just hoping to learn a bit more today. – Ian in workshop 1, Group B

Some participants identified their interest was due to working in the disability sector before. Rachelle indicated that she had worked to coordinate supports for people with disability, and had later done some support work. For others, the motivation to participate came entirely from a desire to ensure their work was inclusive and serving the community well.

> I was really interested in being a part of this… …I want to make sure that I'm being as inclusive as I can be, so I really wanted to come along. – Kelsey in workshop 1, Group B

> …I deal directly with the public, which is why I’m really excited to be here and see what we can do to help our customers. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A

In the initial introductions no participants identified themselves as having a disability. However, Laura shared about her own disability later in the first part of the initial workshop, appropriately linking to an assertion that much disability may go undetected.

> …there would be a lot of people that may have a disability that we are not aware of. I personally am dyslexic, and that’s something that I only recently learned about, and, yeah, it’s been really interesting, because a lot of the stuff you’re saying really resonates with me, and that’s just one type of, I guess, neural processing, whatever you want to call it, difference, I guess in the way that my brain works, but there would be so many different people that work for us at Council that have things like that that possibly aren’t even diagnosed. – Laura in workshop 1, Group B

Tess, one of the Expert Contributors commented on Laura sharing about her disability at a later time in the workshop, indicating that the comfort to do so had probably developed with the contents of the discussions.

> It was interesting to see some people probably identified themselves as disabled after some of the conversations that we had as well. I thought that was interesting. - Tess (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

6.2 Connection through Safety and Relatability

While participants came to the project with their personal motivations, once the project was in motion, there were some strong factors which appeared to influence the ongoing engagement of the participants, building their comfort and confidence to participate, strengthening their empathy and providing impetus to continue. A number of participants referenced the safety of the workshop environment. This sense of security helped to reduce anxiety and enabled participants to build the confidence to contribute freely. During the member checking process undertaken with a sample of participants, I presented a summary of my data analysis. There was a strong consensus that the importance of the safety created in the space should be emphasised. It seemed that this sense of safety developed in the initial workshops was owing to a number of factors. In workshop 1, Gerrard shared his connection to disability came from having and losing a child with disability. Helen observed that the sadness and emotion felt in the room was a factor which quickly served to build safety and comfort among the participants.

> The thing that I probably didn't think was going to come out of either group was – what will I say – the upset or distress during the introductions of the participant who had lost a child due to a disability… …I think everyone handled that really respectfully. But, yeah, it wasn't necessarily something that I'd thought, "Okay, we're going to get this disclosure from this." I'd gone along thinking, "Yeah, we're the ones who are going to disclose, because we're the ones giving them some insight." But I think we got – that was probably, you know, a good icebreaker in terms of other people feeling safe in the room. – Helen (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

As the days progressed, it became clear that the way the workshops were delivered also helped build a sense of safety. Danielle, amongst the latter part of the day's discussions, indicated that much comfort came from having myself, Helen and Tess, as disabled people facilitate the initial workshops.

> But hasn't it been so valuable just having Katie and Tess and Helen in the room just to talk about your experiences. It takes away the stigma and the taboo and the – you know, we're not exposed to people with different abilities on a day-to-day basis, so that learning is massive for me personally. – Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

Helen, an Expert Contributor observed the developing comfort in the workshops and suggested it could be attributable to our openness for participants to say whatever they needed to say.

> …there was a curiosity and some of them felt that they could come forward and ask additional questions, so that meant – but I think we said, "Look, things aren't off-limits. Ask if you need to ask." And I think they were all very respectful of us and our stories, and then became comfortable with who we were in the room… - Helen (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

This observation was confirmed by Laura and Danielle. Laura advised that she appreciated feeling like the participants could say anything without fear of being ridiculed for it.

> And, yeah, I mean, just your openness and approachability. You know, I mean, it was a big deal I think even in the first instance just for you to kind of reassure us that there was nothing that we said that was necessarily wrong, because that can feel very – you know, I mean, we're in this whole realm at the moment of cancel culture, and people I think, you know, see what happens to celebrities saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing, and we worry that, "Oh my goodness, what's going to happen if I do or say the wrong thing at work," when it, obviously, like I said, for our group, anything that was inappropriate was obviously coming from a really uneducated space. – Laura in individual interview

Danielle indicated in the initial workshop that this sense of safety would extend into their confidence to take action. When discussing how to ensure accessibility at events, some participants had indicated reservations towards talking about disability or asking about accessibility in the fear of unintentionally stereotyping attendees. I reassured participants that this willingness to assist and get accessibility right was more likely to be perceived positively.

> That's a good – like, it's really interesting that you said, "We don't want to stereotype," and Katie said, "Don't worry, you won't be stereotyping." That's something that we haven't really spoken about is that fear of being vulnerable and having a go and not wanting to get criticised for our efforts. That's a massive cultural thing. – Danielle in workshop 1, Group B

The particular mix of participants in the room also appeared to contribute to a sense of comfort to speak openly. Laura indicated having worked with some people in the room previously, she had felt at ease to contribute due to their respectful, open and collaborative natures.

> …I was really happy that the people that were a part of that project were, because for the ones that I had worked with before, I knew – I know that they

> are very respectful, very open-minded, very collaborative staff members, so I felt quite safe in that environment… - Laura in individual interview

As the project progressed, participants often identified factors about their own lives which related to experiences we discussed. These realisations appeared to strengthen their engagement with the mission of the project. Together with the safety of the environment, they were able to express and draw on these experiences. The initial components of the workshops focused on exploring the social model of disability, both through the role reversal activities and in proceeding discussions about social barriers. Participants soon demonstrated the relatability of these experiences to their own lives and that of those close to them. Helen observed how different participants used their own experiences to relate to the activities and discussions.

> I know in the second workshop, when we did the paired activity and weren't able to verbalise, and I did participate in that one, the young person I had working with me then disclosed that she had a recent diagnosis of dyslexia, and I felt terrible for the situation I'd put her in, but she absolutely understood what it was like, because of that recent diagnosis and coming to a greater understanding of barriers. So I think that one for me was a really close one of, "Oh, look, here's someone who does understand because they've got that lived experience."
>
> But for others, I think they related, like, there was someone in the room… …that had emigrated, I don't know how long ago, but he also related some of the activity to how he felt being someone who was learning a second language, or isn't necessarily understood all the time in terms of the message that he's trying to get across. So some people used their own lens to try and sit in the space of a person with disability, and I think that's really encouraging. – Helen (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

Leticia found herself relating to one of the experiences shared by one of the Expert Contributors.

> …on a personal note, well, I also really liked the way that each of you did a bit of storytelling and told us a little bit about the challenges that you all face, and

> I think one of them was about being slow to process things, and I thought that that was really interesting because I’ve actually been diagnosed with an illness and had to go on to a drug which has really slowed my processing down, and I’ve found it really hard to access words, and so that’s, again, given me a real learned experience, because I am now facing a lot of those challenges. – Leticia in individual interview

Leon was able to appreciate physical barriers in society due to being very tall. Because of his familiarity with dealing with this particular challenge, he indicated that the physical barrier to the room entry was not one that surprised him so much. His understanding was already developed in this regard.

> …I do experience lots of challenges with my height, so when we had those blockages, to me, navigating around those blocks in order to get into the building, it wasn’t to me so much of a challenge, because I’m so used to having to bend down when I walk in certain establishments. What I’m used to, sometimes I have to kneel when I’m talking to – for example, if I’m sitting next to somebody and the seats is just not comfortable enough, I will have to kneel because it’s more comfortable for me. So that’s the interesting part is that, to me, I’m used to having to be flexible because of my height. That wasn’t so much of a challenge. – Leon in individual interview

The importance of this relatability evidently helped participants to see how the work was relevant to their own lives, and those of people they were close to. Combined with a sense of safety to express these observations, they were free to make these observations and observe the relevance.

6.3 The Influence of Collaboration

Becoming evident as a key factor in maintaining engagement in the project was the value of the working relationships the participants built with one another. From the initial workshops, the participants demonstrated exceptional teamwork in undertaking the role reversal activities, working through the problem-posing dialogue and then devising areas for action. Many of the participants indicated they saw value in having a cross-section of council staff from various business units represented in the projects.

> …breaking into groups and working through some of those tasks were good. Being relatively new to the organisation, it had benefits of, for me, interacting with others, and also because they're from different sections of Council, they have different tasks and daily roles, and it was good to understand their context with the activities and the whole scope of the workshop. – Ian in individual interview

The benefits of this collaborative work continued into the phases of taking action after the workshops. Kelsey valued the varied experiences that working collaboratively brought about, as well as the nature of collaborative work for progressing an activity.

> It was really positive. I think everyone has different experiences coming from all different areas of Council, so being able to come together and see the different things that people are bringing up, and where they click with other peoples' thoughts, and being able to buddy up and work on something together has been really effective in this working group. – Kelsy in individual interview

Angelique suggested that the work undertaken on reviewing the Disability Inclusion Action Plan and devising plans for its successor, would not have progressed so well without this collaborative effort.

> …I think the main thing that I've really liked is having those regular meetings that we had with all different departments across Council, and seeing all those different departments come together and want to make change and change the ways that we're working. …working on our DIAP, and I think that the progress of that has progressed a lot more because of these meetings and because of our team being a part of this project. – Angelique individual interview

Danielle provided a rundown on happenings after the initial workshops, detailing how the participants began to drive work independent of the research facilitation. Her description of how the action evolved demonstrated the value of allowing people to self-select to participate, as well as their varied experiences and positions in the council. She also emphasised the value of everyone’s drive and passion to have an impact as being crucial in driving the progression of the action.

> So obviously we set the foundation at the workshop to discuss those key principles, and how those goals would fit into our current roles and our current, you know, if we found opportunities to push those targets through, like with event management and our digital transformation, and the new (name of suburb) Council building and things like that.
>
> So it was a fantastic experience to have all of these people voluntarily agree to do something that was beyond their current workload to seek improvement. And you may have experienced similar environments, but how it typically goes in Council is people are randomly invited to a meeting that they potentially don’t really want to be part of, don’t have any interest in, and everyone kind of digs their heels in, and you leave the meeting thinking, “Oh my God, what’s everyone doing from this? Like, that was the most unproductive experience ever.”
>
> But what happened with this group of people was everyone brought something to the table with a clear understanding of how they wanted to seek improvement, and how either they could align their skill or their role. And in some instances, we didn’t have particular skills or roles but people were like, “I’m really interested in that. I want to learn more, so I want to help that team achieve that goal.” So it’s kind of completely alien Council environment, but infinitely positive. – Danielle in individual interview

This engagement continued to have positive impacts. Many participants discussed how the collaboration had helped address the long-standing problem of siloed working, a problem typical of local councils.

> And the fact that that whole group collaboration is willing to support… …in implementing the new plan as well, that’s quite unheard of in Council. We’re very siloed in what we do, so just getting us together with a unified goal was powerful, because that doesn’t particularly happen across Council at all. – Danielle in individual interview

Laura also advised that the project had had flow-on impacts in that she was now able to collaborate with other participants on further projects at council. She spoke of working collaboratively with Danielle to prepare a presentation to illustrate the diversity of their local government area.

> So that was a really cool kind of knock-on effect of this working group was that it did kind of foster some collaboration with Danielle, which probably wouldn't have happened otherwise. And I'm really keen for that to be a bit of a regular thing when we get new census data, if it's new or surprising, for that to be shared with our team and to have that cross-team collaboration happen a little bit more. – Laura in individual interview

Laura also explained that the siloed nature of council work may have previously impeded this kind of collaboration from occurring.

> Laura: I think that that's such – like, we need to do that better. Like, it just seems so obvious, doesn't it? Like, why wouldn't you collaborate with your teammate, but we kind of get siloed. – Laura in individual interview

For others, the collaboration expanded beyond the initial project group. The tasks they chose to work on during the project led them to seek out the support and assistance of other colleagues. Leticia observed that this had been another useful, flow-on impact. She also noted that other colleagues were also benefiting from an improved awareness of accessibility and inclusion.

> I sadly did not have anyone to collaborate with my project in the working group, but I certainly had to go through people like (four colleagues names) and a few others in the business. And (colleague's name) really, really enjoyed being a part of that as well. It opened her eyes and put a few lenses, and she had a lot of learnings in that space as well, so that was really cool as well. – Leticia individual interview

Laura also identified the expansion of working relationships arising as a result of the action research, linking Leon with an immediate colleague of hers to assist with his action research task.

> …my colleague, like I mentioned, did a lot of work to assist Leon in understanding what other Councils are doing in terms of their websites and whatnot. And even just looking at other, obviously bigger Councils and Councils that are in areas where there is higher levels of multiculturalism than what maybe we have experienced. – Laura in individual interview

Michael also identified this flow-on impact for colleagues beyond the project.

> One of the biggest benefits of the project is obviously it had a broad cross-section of staff members, and the number of different projects that it touched on meant that we gave more exposure to a lot of other people across the organisation. So I think getting it on the agenda and a bit of a discussion point, I think it’s really been very beneficial. – Michael in individual interview

6.3.1 Strategy, Optimising Skills and Communication

During the initial workshops, I guided the participants through the typical processes of an action research project, including creating their own action plans to direct their work over the self-directed period of the project. Together, each group identified social barriers that could be addressed, potential ways to address them, and then action plans specifying what they intended to do. Both groups quickly demonstrated strategic thinking and intentions to maximise their efforts. They specified individual tasks that would be undertaken and responsible stakeholders for doing the work. As this process unfolded during the initial workshops, both groups were curious about the other group and enquired early about combining. After the initial workshops, the two groups quickly decided to combine their efforts and formed a larger collective group. They were then able to compare their action plans and formed smaller groups or pairs assigned to certain actions to progress. They met regularly and provided updates on their work. The decision to unite the groups was seen as a logical step to create efficiencies in the work.

> …the reason why we merged the teams is because we realised that there is a lot of stuff that we were working that kind of both groups were working on the same thing, and in order to, instead of just doubling up on the work, we thought we should just merge and then have a more targeted approach to

> what we are trying to – the solutions we were trying to come up with. So I believe that's another reason why we merged groups. – Leon in workshop 2

As a broader group they combined their two groups' individual action plans. The combining of efforts was not only sensible in terms of progressing action, it was also seen as a strategic move to maximise resource allocation.

> I think resource allocations. So we had – you know, there were two lists initially of actions we came up with. As Leon said, there were a lot of synergies between the two, so it just made sense to come together. I think there's 15 or so items, so we needed to sort of be more efficient in how we got the project done. – Michael in workshop 2

Danielle then pointed out that this also enabled them to identify the skillsets of everyone involved and allow participants to capitalise on their skills and areas of interest. The combined action plan was updated to enable them to assign a person's 'skillset match' and 'interested in' on each action.

> …we had the opportunity then to figure out what all of our skill sets were and how we could delegate those across our actions. But Christa also structured it in a way that opened up those actions to peoples' individual interests as well. So in how we resourced those tasks, it was kind of put out to the board, "What are your skills? What do you do in the day-to-day, even though this might not necessarily align with the current role? What do you want to get into? What do you want to have the opportunity to plan?" So we did that as well as part of that process. – Danielle in workshop 2

It was also evident that some time went into strategic considerations around who should be involved in certain actions. Initially, in workshop 1 Group A, Nikki asked if it would be sensible for participants to focus on areas of work which directly related to their remit. Soon though, the group asserted the value of approaching some actions collectively, regardless of their previous affiliation with that area of work.

> I feel like because we're all different departments it's probably easier on us to focus on things that are related to us, otherwise we're going to spend a lot of

> time trying to speak with other departments about things. – Nikki in workshop 1, Group A
>
> …the other side is, if we look at it as a group, we become more accountable to actually doing something. – Michael
>
> That's true. – Nikki
>
> Yeah, and I think there's some of the actions in there… …I think as a group we would have more of an ability to influence that and say, "This is why we're doing it. This is how we come to be knocking on your door," to our architects and stuff like that. If I went there individually, they're probably like, "Go away…" – Jason

Sometimes the decision about who would take ultimate responsibility came down to who would be most likely to be in a position to influence the action's success.

> I think part of the structure that we've had moving forward has been a little bit to do with what access we have to certain managers or executives, and so just kind of leveraging off that as well. So for me personally it made sense for some of the things to sit with me, because I'm having conversations with those people that inevitably make those decisions, or have made those decisions, and being able to I guess create a bit of a conversation with them as to, I guess planting some seeds as to how maybe we could look at things a little bit differently as part of the process. – Laura in workshop 2

In practice, the approach to each action could vary. Sometimes there would be a smaller sub-group working on a single action. At other times a pair of participants, and sometimes actions were progressed individually.

> I suspect it has been a bit of a case by case depending on the project. So there have definitely been some things that I've independently started chipping away at, but then there's also been things that I've been part of a group, like, for example, Christa, Danielle, Michael and I have caught up I think every fortnight to discuss some of the stuff to do around data collection and some of the stuff that's come out of our census information, so that's

> been a group effort, whereas there's been other things that I've been sitting in a group with Gerrard with that Gerrard's looked after his part of that and I've looked after my part of that. – Laura in workshop 2

It seemed that this flexible approach to taking action worked effectively.

> So there was the multiple levels of engagement with the big group ones, and then the silo topics. So yeah, I think that was a definite motivator and worked really well. – Rachelle in individual interview

The participants also took initiative to establish effective communication channels before the initial workshops had concluded. Gerrard instigated the establishment of a Microsoft Team to enable them to share content and set up regular video meetings. Group B, in the following week requested to join the same Team to bring their projects together. The participants also invited me to the team so that I could see their progress and view their action plans. The participants were also strategic in how they went about their communication, ensuring that it was a beneficial experience and not a timewaster.

> …we have a group meeting every fortnight, and then each individual team are meeting to progress their actions, and that seems to happen probably every fortnight from the ones I'm involved with. So there's – yeah, we're – and they're short meetings. The way it's been done is we're doing sort of 15 minute, 20 minute catch-ups. They're productive. They're not one hour talkfests. So it's been quite a beneficial way to run the project, I think. – Michael in workshop 2

Rachelle highlighted the benefit of the smaller breakout meetings in helping her check-in regularly on the specific task she was responsible for and ensure its continued attention among other everyday work priorities.

> So with that, the regular catch ups that we had as a larger group, we also had regular catch ups with smaller groups with the different things we were working on. So Ian and I would catch up, I think it was weekly for a while and then fortnightly, just to check in and see how we were going with it, if we had any updates. And even that was, I think, really great, because it then, it

> brought you back from out of your normal day to day work duties to then just go, “Yeah, great, we’ve got this now. Where am I at? Where’s my head at with this,” you know? So that really helped as well. – Rachelle in individual interview

Leon provided insight into the dynamics in the whole group meetings, emphasising the honesty and openness in communication as being valuable factors.

> …the ones that committed to the end, it was always really positive. All the meetings, people were very open, which I thought was really good. So we would be going into meetings, and people would say, “Sorry, guys, I didn’t do much about it this week” – because I think our meetings were every fortnight – and they were like, “I’m sorry, guys, I didn’t do much in the last fortnight because of A, B, and C,” and people understand because you’re all in the same boat. So the transparency was really good. There was no, “I’ll just pretend that I’ve done a lot… …so I didn’t notice any of that. I noticed that the people that stayed truly committed, and every time that there was a challenge, people were open and say, “I didn’t do it because of A, B, and C, and I will try to make up for it,” or whatever. So I thought that the ones that stayed were truly engaged. – Leon in individual interview

6.3.2 The Positive Influence of a Group Leader

Underscoring the entirety of the collaborative work undertaken in the project was the leadership of one participant in particular. Every other participant credited this person with continually driving the progress of the project. Christa was not in attendance at the mid-term workshop (workshop 2), but it was at this time that the other participants began to express the value of her significant contribution.

> We are at an extreme disadvantage, Katie, because Christa isn’t here today, and Christa has been our absolute champion running this, kicking us in the bum, getting us organised, so in her absence we can praise Christa and what she’s been doing for us. – Danielle in workshop 2

When I enquired with the collective group as to whether they had encountered challenges in group work, I was advised that Christa had again been responsible for leading the group. Some participants indicated concern for what may have happened without a strong leader among them.

> Did you have any problems with the group work? – Katie (Researcher) in workshop 2
>
> No, because Christa's kept us on track. Laura
>
> Yeah, without Christa it might be a different story. – Michael
>
> I agree. I think Christa has done such a great job by keeping us all on track and accountable. – Rachelle

Christa had also been responsible for introducing Microsoft Planner into the group to assist in managing tasks. Several other participants indicated their gratitude for learning how to utilise this technology.

> Yeah, I think – I didn't even really know how to do the card thing that well on Teams, so she's taught us a whole range of things in this process. – Rachelle in workshop 2
>
> …it allows you to have the central task allocation. You can assign deadlines to things, and then you kind of assign people specifically, so if you don't do your task it'll send you an email and be like, "You've got a task due today." It's quite effective. – Danielle

Laura and Leticia explained how Christa's introduction of this tool and her coordination of the group kept them in regular contact and the project progressing.

> Christa has been a bit of a queen in getting all of us on the same page and using Teams, sort of the project, I think it is, area of Teams, so that really – yeah, that meant that we were all keeping on track and regularly checking in. It was definitely hard. There were times where we'd call a meeting and there would have been – like, they were regular. They were fortnightly, so there would have been I think, you know, somewhere between 8 to 12 people expected on the call and there might have only been two or three. So, you know, it was certainly only, "If you can – you know, if you're available, please

> come. If you've got any updates and you can't join, let us know beforehand." But Christa definitely drove the bus, so to speak, on making those catch ups happen and keeping us accountable and keeping us updating our little cards in Teams so that she knew where we were at. – Laura in individual interview

> And I also love the way that she set everything up on Teams, projects with our task cards and, you know, we had to complete those, because that was a really good learning for some of the team members as well just to use Teams in that space. Having the regular catch ups was great because it meant that people would try and action things before the catch up because it made them accountable. – Leticia in individual interview

Rachelle also spoke of Christa's role in ensuring the group communicated and that action was progressing. This, in the context of competing priorities was seen as a crucial behaviour in keeping the project on track.

> …Christa was really great at just getting all the meetings together and checking in and updates and everything, so that was really helpful to keep us on track, because obviously we've got our workload to take care of, and plus we wanted to be on top of the project and be able to deliver and make sure that we were involved as much as possible, but it was really great to have those additional extra meetings throughout to just keep us on track and accountable.– Rachelle in individual interview

Danielle made a similar observation.

> Christa was amazing just keeping us all accountable. Sometimes the hardest thing is just getting a spot in the diary and just committing to touching base with people. – Danielle in individual interview

Michael drew attention again to the potential risks of not having a person like Christa to take a leadership role in the project. This assertion indicates the potentially crucial nature of a group leader in ensuring the success of self-directed work during an action research project.

> Yeah, you know, it always becomes difficult when you have a group of busy people that are in an organisation that keeps telling the world that we run lean, so we're essentially under-resourced. Really the reason we had some successes and were able to progress the project was, to be honest, Christa set up regular meetings and made sure that we were all accountable for our projects, and that really ensured that it stayed on the radar and didn't drop off, and we were able to progress. I think without having that sort of project management aspect that, especially for myself, I would have been focused on other things and it probably would've dropped off my radar, and, you know, I think that's unfortunate. – Michael in individual interview

Christa spoke of her own role leading the group, acknowledging the extra time taken, but also recognising the importance of this coordination. Also evident from her response was her determination to ensure every member had a valuable role and felt included. This behaviour may have contributed to ensuring the participants felt connected in the project.

> Yeah. So I incidentally sort of became the leader for the project group. I'm not sure how that happened. But it was good. So I think that that probably – that did take up a little bit more of my time, just in the sense that I was trying to make sure everyone was organised and felt like they were included in the program, and that they were on projects that they were interested in or able to deliver on, and making sure that they were updating the information so we could see what was happening. – Christa in individual interview

Christa also acknowledged that the group was already highly engaged, and it was not necessary to inspire participants to undertake action.

> Yeah, no, and I think, you know, as I said before, everyone was really invested in the project, so it wasn't like I was trying to herd sheep or anything like that. They were all really well invested. It was just being there to provide that additional support if they had questions, or they weren't sure where to go next. Having that knowledge already about that field meant that I could provide that little bit of additional support in answering those questions. – Christa in individual interview

At the very end of the formal project, in the final wrap-up, Christa indicated her intentions for maintaining the group's momentum.

> Well, I'll let you all get back to your Thursday, and I'll leave you alone for the next month or so, but I'll be coming back in full force next year, so I would recommend you let me know if you don't want me to come after you in the new year. – Christa in final wrap-up

6.4 Excitement and Drive to have an Impact

During the project, many participants made references to the excitement they felt at being involved in a project seeking to have a meaningful impact. This excitement and motivation appeared to stay with participants throughout the project. The factors which have been detailed identified as supporting engagement are thought to have contributed to maintaining this passion and drive. After describing how the action research project would work in Group A's initial workshop, I asked participants how they were feeling and received feedback about their willingness to get going.

> How are you feeling about that process? – Katie (researcher) in workshop 1, Group A

> Excited. – Leon

Contributing to her eagerness, Christa indicated that she thought it was the perfect time for this project because many in-progress projects at council were at appropriate points to interject considerations around accessibility and inclusion.

> Yeah, it probably is like perfect timing for all the changes that are happening internally… - Christa in workshop 1, Group A

My field notes from workshop 1 Group A noted this enthusiasm which also drove participants to begin self-determining the evolution of the project.

> The group were eager participants. I was never left waiting for responses or having to prompt and urge discussion on… …didn't need much prompting once it came to outlining their actions. They all contributed and took on responsibilities. – Field notes from workshop 1, Group A

In the initial workshop of Group B, I also enquired with participants, asking how they were feeling about the project at the end of the day. The dialogue that followed demonstrated enthusiasm and also observations that the day had moved quickly, a suggestion that the engagement had felt productive and satisfying.

> Okay, so how do you feel about going forward? Where are we at, at the end of today? Katie (Researcher) in workshop 1, Group B
>
> Positive. – Danielle
>
> Yeah. – Angelique
>
> Positive? That’s good. Have I exhausted you? – Katie (Researcher)
>
> Kind of. – Danielle
>
> [Laughter]
>
> It’s been a long day, so thank you for staying with me the whole time. – Katie (Researcher)
>
> It went quick. – Danielle
>
> Yeah, it went quick. – Kelsey
>
> Yeah, it did. – Rachelle

Some participants reflected later on the enthusiasm and engagement felt in the initial workshops. For Laura, some of this excitement was due to the presence of those who had also volunteered to partake in the project.

> I was really excited from the get-go just understanding the people that had volunteered to be part of this research project. – Laura in individual interview

Danielle drew attention to the willingness of the participants to firstly, attend the workshops, to experience some discomfort during the activities and discussions, and then move forward with that discomfort to make change.

> From my perspective, it felt like mass panic, but I think it was just kind of confrontational for us. As I said, we've not been particularly exposed to these contexts, but I think that people – you could very quickly adapt, if you're willing to. And I think firstly a massive turn-out from Council staff to come to these workshops, that was incredible to see so many people from Council volunteer for something, so that's a triumph in itself. So to me that demonstrates that people are willing and accepting to experience different things and to change their way of how they approach the workplace or their personal lives.
>
> So from the exercises that I undertook with my colleagues, it was like, "Right, let's do this. How do we adapt right now? We've got to communicate things differently. We can't talk. We have to" – I mean, none of us could read the Braille, of course, but we were open to that change. I think that would be more challenging broadly across the organisation, but the fact that the people who wanted to participate were definitely interested in broadening their horizons there. – Danielle in individual interview

Laura, Ian and Leon discussed how this motivation and drive was sustained throughout the project.

> Everyone was really positive. Everyone was really open. Everyone did their very best to offer assistance. – Laura in individual interview

> Quite easy. Everyone had interest and enthusiasm to take tasks on, so yeah, that was fairly easy with the groups that I was involved in. There was no sort of confrontation. There was no anyone that was involved not pulling their weight, so to speak, not contributing et cetera. – Ian in individual interview

> I think that everybody has put a lot of effort in trying to make a difference and to try and make a change, and I was really happy to see everybody really driving together. – Leon in individual interview

Tess and Helen, the Expert Contributors also observed this enthusiasm to have an impact.

> I am confident that the people wanted to do the change, and I do genuinely think those particular individuals will do everything they can to make the change. I don’t know if the correct individuals were at the workshop for the change to actually filter through the whole Council as a whole, if that makes sense. I don’t know whether those people were at those workshops, if that makes sense. If they were, I feel confident that it will be effective change. – Tess (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

Helen discussed all the factors that she observed in the participants that gave her confidence that they would go on to have an impact during the project.

> …The fact that they self-selected, they were potentially there for the right reasons. They work in areas where they thought they could apply this. They were respectful and mostly open within the context of the parts of the session I was in. So I think all of those things add up to a really good start for them to then go away and work on it. The fact that you said the groups have joined together on Teams or whatever other platform and are potentially working together and engaging, I think that’s another good opportunity for peer to peer support as well. – Helen (Expert Contributor) in individual interview

While the participants certainly encountered challenges during their efforts to take action and create change, there was a strong indication that their engagement in the project was so significant that it maintained their interest throughout. The project originally recruited 13 participants to the initial workshops and finalised with 10, indicating a very low attrition rate over eight months. Leon and Jason helped articulate the power of the motivation to stay engaged.

> I think with every task, you know, from time to time I found a little bit overwhelming, because there is so many deliverables, but when you think of the cause, then you go, like, “Yeah, it’s worth accommodating the time for,” you know? It’s something that eventually everybody benefits from. So yeah, that’s my own journey. Yeah, it gets overwhelming from time to time, but it’s not just this. Everything just – you know, it’s just all the deliverables. But yeah, it’s for a great cause, so just we, you know, make it do it. – Leon in workshop 2

> I agree. Look, in terms of the actual work itself, I don't think that there's been any challenges I suppose being motivated for the work. I think everyone's really excited about it. I suppose for me, I suppose just juggling this project amongst other projects is probably the hardest part that I've experienced. But certainly I think everyone's attitude to the actual project itself, yeah, there's no question that people are really excited to do that. – Jason

Angelique expressed her appreciation for seeing the passion of her colleagues channelled into meaningful impact.

> It's been so good to see an organisation make progress, and want to make progress in making sure that our events are accessible, making sure that the work that we're planning for our communities has that lens over everything we're doing. So yeah, I think it's been a massive learning experience for me personally. – Angelique in individual interview

The participants motivation for the project was strong right to the end of the project. By the time of the final individual interviews, the group had already determined a desired direction and plans to maintain the work of the group.

> …it was pretty much unanimous that we all wanted to keep working on at the very least the things that we had established as part of our goals as a group, and so we are in the process – and that's something that I had spoken to my manager about probably two weeks ago now, just around this kind of working group combining with our equal opportunity group that we've got that they meet every month. So there's a number of members of our project group that are already on our equal employee, equal opportunity group.
>
> So yeah, I think for the time being, we're kind of going to all join that group and try and get all of our items that were flagged achieved, and then hopefully create a bit more of an agenda item for that meeting continuously where that's a topic of conversation as to, you know, whether it's new facilities being established or a new process is happening or whatever it might be, that we as a group take on a bit of responsibility, I guess, to make sure that we're asking questions around if certain considerations have been made. – Laura in individual interview

Leon also spoke of the groups' intentions to continue their collective work. He also spoke of the importance of not allowing this work to fall by the wayside.

> …it's really nice, actually. We decided – there is a group of us – that we are going to continue this after we finish with you, because we want to make sure that we bring changes to life. We found a document that was written in, I think it was in the early 2000s, about disability and inclusion with recommendations that we could have implemented by now, and that document was completely lost, and we found it, and we were like, how sad would it be for all those people that worked on this, that spent time on this, and only if they knew that 15, 20 years later, none of that would have been deployed, which was the case. So we don't want to be that same position. We want to be able to make the change. We want to be able to make the difference. So I thought that it was really nice. – Leon in individual interview

Kelsey also spoke about her hope that the group would maintain momentum so as to ensure the knowledge they had gained during the project was not lost. In particular, she hoped the learnings around the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan would be retained and considered during the development of the next plan.

> In that space particularly I'd like to see the process of how the information that we've found is going to be used in moving into the next one, I guess, because I think it's really important that we at least make everyone more aware that the different areas in Council have these roles assigned to them. And a lot of people that I have worked with weren't here when the last one first came out, so it'll be interesting to see from that perspective how we communicate that with everyone that works in Council. – Kelsey in individual interview

Danielle conveyed a similar hope.

> …there's so much that you can learn from what wasn't done. It's not great, but it need not be a reflection on the future one. We can say, "What happened here? What were the barriers, and how do we amend that?" So that's really positive. – Danielle in individual interview

In the final wrap-up, Christa was eager to formalise these the collective intentions into a plan to go forward with.

> Cool. All right, well, I think – anyone else feel free to jump in, but my thoughts are that we can work together as a group to determine how frequently we'd be meeting. I think fortnightly's a bit much moving forward, given that this is, particularly for a lot of you, an additional task to your, let's say large workload that I'm sure you all have, as I do. So we can touch base and see how frequently we think we should be meeting, but I think it'd be useful to pull together a chat aside from the channel we've got in Teams where we can touch base on a more frequent basis if things pop up, questions, concerns, push people along without requiring half an hour every fortnight to do that. It could just be a touch base opportunity. – Christa in final wrap-up

Another intention was to diversify and continue to strengthen the group and its work by broadening its membership.

> And potentially we could look at having – expand the group through (name of company intranet) put an article out and see if anyone's interested in, like, once we post our findings, see if anyone else is interested across the organisation on jumping on board… - Christa in final wrap-up

Michael could see a particular value in this intention for potential new starters with disability.

> …the idea of bringing new people in and engaging with especially new starters into the organisation that may have a disability, so ensuring that there's a group that they can be involved with, and we can keep driving improvements. It's fantastic. – Michael in final wrap-up

As well as the collective work, many participants spoke of their personal intentions to continue their work. Many provided specific details on the projects they would continue progressing. When I asked Rachelle about her future plans, she spoke of only just getting started.

> Lots, Katie, lots. I am going to continue to, like I said, engage with more and more organisations, because I’ve only just started this… - Rachelle in individual interview

For Michael, while he too had very specific intentions relating to his area of work, he also had intentions to continue championing accessibility and inclusion broadly across the organisation.

> …I hope to continue to make noise in the organisation to ensure that we are looking at the inclusion space.
>
> So, you know, I look at my son and myself and go, recruitment is a difficult space for people that are autistic… …experience different environmental and social inputs in different ways. So I would like to really encourage our human resources team to consider things like being much more flexible with how interviews are undertaken, and try to put people in places that they feel more comfortable and can show – well, not that anyone really shows their real self in interviews, but – you know, so putting less emphasis on exactly what is said in an interview and more looking at does this person have the ability to do the job and succeed. – Michael in individual interview

Michael also suggested that he would like to see a similar project rolled out to spread awareness throughout the organisation.

> Look, it was an excellent experience. I would strongly recommend, and, you know, this may be something I need to follow up, is we do look at that sort of – some training, so similar to that first session that we did. I think that was really beneficial for myself and everyone involved, but sort of spreading that a little bit wider across the organisation would be really, really beneficial. You know, you start at the top and you work your way down to ensure that this becomes – that we really go, “We can do better in this space.” It’s really important for our community. – Michael in individual interview

6.5 Conclusion: Engagement

A central component of this research study was to identify factors which enable a large organisation to engage in disability inclusive planning and practice. The results outlined in this chapter provide strong indications of the circumstances which were effective in driving participants to pursue the action research project.

All participants entered the action research project with their own personal motivations for participating, whether that be because of having disabled family members, or past experience working with people with disability. Some participants were driven purely by their desires to ensure their practice was inclusive and wanted to do their best for their customers.

As the project got underway, there arose factors which effectively reinforced the motivation to participate. A combination of factors contributed to developing a sense of comfort, safety and relatability within the initial workshops. The first of these factors appeared to be the early sharing among participants of their motivations for participating. As the workshops progressed, the Expert Contributors and I began to share stories and encourage participation. Participants indicated that our confirmation of there being no wrong things to say, enabled them to feel comfortable to contribute without fear of being disparaged. Participants also utilised this sense of safety to discuss how they could relate to certain aspects of being disabled by the environment or by actions of others. These observations suggested a translation of relevancy to the participants' everyday lives.

Present during the initial workshops, and developing beyond, was the significance of the collaborative work in maintaining engagement with the project. The participants found many benefits to the collaboration, from working with people who had different areas of expertise, to being able to take work outside of their participating colleagues and create new connections in previously hard to reach parts of the business. Within the project itself, the participants demonstrated self-determination in the direction of their project. They devised action plans which they would carry out over the next several months. They improved efficiencies by combining the two initial workshop groups. By doing so, they also capitalised on one another's skills, connections, resources and business areas to tackle each action appropriately. The group identified their fortune in having a natural leader among their ranks who took significant responsibility in driving the project, maintaining communication, accountability and facilitating skill development. Every other member of the group credited this leadership as having a significant impact in keeping the project rolling.

Throughout the project and beyond was an unwavering excitement, motivation and drive among the participants of this action research project. From the initial workshops I found the participants were highly motivated and driven to create action plans without significant direction. The participants maintained this drive and enthusiasm to continue their work beyond the workshops. It was suggested that the way the participants did this was quite remarkable. As well as the factors influencing engagement, it is also possible that the shared passion and voluntary nature of participating in the project could also explain this achievement. As the project concluded, participants indicated that their action was not complete. They indicated numerous intentions to continue their work directly within their business areas, but also, often other broader intentions to keep influencing a culture of inclusivity at council. The groups determined they would also keep meeting as a group to sustain their collective impact.

Chapter 7

Discussion: The Making of Champions

A social interpretation of disability was first conceived more than forty years ago, triggering a revolution to the way disability was understood (Finkelstein, 2001; Finkelstein, 2002). Despite this however, the implementation of Australian social policy continues to evidence a seemingly irresistible tug back to medicalised, deficit-based approaches toward disability. Overlooking, or disregarding early observations and warnings of allowing the National Disability Insurance Scheme to dominate the disability social policy scene (Davy, et al., 2019; Hallahan, 2015), the comparative neglect of policy with the power to protect and uphold broader rights has been felt significantly (Buckland, et al., 2024; Sackville, et al., 2023a). Now, the recent releases of final reports for the NDIS review and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability are considered, and there awaits a determination as to whether similar mistakes will be made again. Will this be the time in history when steps are taken to genuinely uphold and protect the rights of disabled people? Can we look forward to a future where discrimination, exclusion, othering, ableism and sub-par treatment are not regular, anticipated occurrences? And when these abuses occur, will disabled people have access to effective remedies? For any such meaningful change to occur, a social model of disability will need to have a greater presence than within the words of the social policy itself (DSS, 2021; Horsell, 2023), and be utilised to help guide deeper decisions about the fundamental focus, prioritisation and implementation of policy.

While this policy context may seem somewhat removed from the day-to-day operations of government personnel on the ground working to provide community services, facilities and resources, the problems that this broader context highlight appear to have just as significant and relevant impact on this level. While organisations may seek to improve accessibility and inclusion, efforts can be put at risk by a similarly pervasive tug back to medicalised and individualised ways of thinking about and responding to the experiences of disabled people. This is evidenced by such practices as the widespread use of disability simulation activities, and the significant invisibility of disabled people in the development and delivery of disability awareness training. Practices which promote deficit-based understandings of disability and reinforce the voicelessness and invisibility of disabled people can bring about outcomes of outward harm, to sheer ineffectiveness, falling far short of advancing genuine social inclusion (Frawley & O’Shea; Leo & Goodwin, 2016; Opoku & Nketsia, 2021). This research highlights the importance of giving conscious consideration to the methods used during implementation of policy in organisational contexts and applying a critical lens to ensure such practices are effectively upholding the rights of disabled people, while addressing social barriers to participation and inclusion. In this study, I was primarily concerned with policy employed at, what Fisher and Purcal (2017) have conceptualised as a personal level, the area of policy flowing from higher levels of government and organisational policy which influences the attitudes, behaviours and practices of personnel. This research has demonstrated that when personnel are provided with an opportunity to effectively understand the social determinants of disability and the inherent rights of disabled people to have equitable opportunity, they can be empowered to take action to ensure the quality of their disability inclusive planning and practice.

The primary goal of this research was to explore the impact of role reversal activities in shaping understandings of disability and social barriers to inclusion, and in influencing actions taken in disability inclusive practice. Across the following two discussion chapters, the findings, implications and unique contributions of this research are discussed. To analyse these findings, I have revisited literature and drawn upon the contributions provided by the Expert Contributors. Combined, these sources have demonstrated the extent of learning, the original contribution to knowledge, implications for practice and the value of disabled-led research and facilitation. This chapter contributes to answering research questions posed in this study relating to understanding the impacts of role reversal activities within disability awareness training initiatives. Firstly, the thoughts, feelings and behaviours expressed or demonstrated by participants after experiencing the activities have been considered. Secondly, the impact of role reversal activities in shaping understandings of disability and subsequent actions taken to address social barriers were of interest. This chapter also begins to address the final research question of this study by demonstrating the impact of the action research in bringing about growth in capability and knowledge within the organisation. Throughout this analysis, insight is offered by the Freirean approach to problem-posing and critical dialogue applied in the action research. The role of the researcher and fellow facilitators also arose to have particular impact in the research, examined in detail in this chapter. From the early design of this study, I intended to engage fellow disabled people to assist me in facilitating the role reversal activities as Expert Contributors. However, I did not fully comprehend how crucial this decision would be on the outcomes of the action research. The catchcry of, ‘nothing about us without us’ made by the disabled community with seemingly increasing frustration is entirely supported here, and an absolute assertion made that disability awareness training should never be permitted to reinforce our invisibility through our lack of presence in any circumstance.

7.1 Developing the Understanding

Experiential learning activities are utilised to facilitate the development of new understandings, attitude changes and to allow learners to practice their responses to situations (Lewis & Williams, 1994). I employed role reversal activities in the current study with the intent of exploring their potential influence on understandings and attitudes toward disability. The thoughts and feelings experienced by the participants on this journey to understanding was the first focus of my analysis. Initial responses to the role reversal activities ranged between confusion and frustration at having been confronted with barriers to participation, to anxiety and panic about not understanding what was happening or how to deal with the scenario. In the former example, there was a suggestion of a confusion so fundamental, that participants did not understand why they were experiencing these barriers or recognise them as part of the training. In the latter example, the anxiety and panic responses were indicated due to feeling overwhelmed and uncertain about how to manage the assigned activity while navigating these impenetrable barriers and being aware of the risks in the fictional scenario if the activities were not completed appropriately.

After having moved past the immediate responses to the role reversal activities, participants reflected on the impact of these experiences. there came expressions of feeling confronted, shocked, ignorant and feeling that they had taken their privilege to move around and communicate without barriers for granted. This was especially the case for those who initially had not recognised the barriers for what they were. Freire (1970) suggested that in order to inspire a response significant enough to cause intellectual development and subsequent action, problems needed to be posed so tangibly that learners are genuinely and deeply challenged. The response to role reversal activities appeared to have been successful in stimulating such a reaction. Participants in Matthews, et al. (2011) also expressed that the representation of barriers through role reversal was far more powerful than being told about communication difficulties, however, the same depths of emotional response are not explored in detail. These findings from both the current study and Matthews, et al. (2011) appeared in stark contrast to that of perceiving disability simulation activities as a light-hearted game (Leo & Goodwin, 2016). The emotional responses of feeling confronted and understanding privilege which arose in the current study appear uniquely reported as a result of disability awareness type training. Given that these responses have not been noted before, attentiveness and debriefing toward such feelings in further role reversal activities seems advisable. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I have outlined how I and the Expert Contributors responded to and supported participants throughout the activities and their learning.

Originally, I had considered that in order to bring about effective comprehension of the impact of barriers, the immediate responses to the role reversal activities should ideally be similar to responses of disabled people when confronted with barriers to participation and inclusion. I soon realised this had likely not been the case, but that replicating those feelings was evidently not necessarily what was required to influence understanding. Tess, one Expert Contributor considered that some experiences of frustration indicated by participants may indeed be similar to those of disabled people. However, this was the only observation made of a comparable immediate response. The feelings participants indicated they felt upon confrontation with the role reversal activities were largely reflective of responses felt when a situation is unfamiliar and challenging. The anxiety or panic felt by some participants led them to experience a kind of fear or paralysis that caused them to find it difficult to problem-solve the activity. When later analysing this particular response, some participants considered it was due to a complete unfamiliarity with experiencing such barriers. Helen, the other Expert Contributor also drew attention to this response, her observation serving to reinforce that these experiences had pushed some participants out of their comfort zones, away from known responses to activities. The feelings expressed by the participants upon experiencing the barriers are therefore likely significantly different to those emotions experienced by many disabled people who are, unfortunately not unfamiliar with the arising of barriers. However, the value of the unfamiliarity arose as a significant finding and that which assisted to bring about the state of critical problem-posing that Freire advocated (1970). It seemed the movement of participants from a state of comfort enabled their effective consideration of a scenario different to their own, leading to new understandings.

Critically, it appears that the initial confrontation and subsequent recognition of privilege assisted to lead participants to an appreciation of the impact of these barriers. They spoke of feeling left out or excluded; being concerned they would misinterpret important information; not being able to participate or gain access; and having to invest emotional energy into problem-solving a solution to work around the barriers. These responses, which demonstrate very specific and accurate understandings of the impacts of social barriers are markedly different to those which have been expressed by participants of disability simulation activities. In such scenarios, participants appear less likely to recognise and reflect on any impacts of barriers at play, and are more likely to express, or indicate they would expect disabled people to feel such emotions as, lonely (Peterson and Quarstein, 2001), limited (Leo & Goodwin, 2013), hopeless or embarrassed (Nario-Redmond, et al. (2017) or less capable (Silverman, et al., 2015). In the current study, as the workshops progressed, and participants began exploring barriers and their contributing problems further, responses arose that suggested dismay and recognition that processes, policies and behaviours resulted in inappropriate or unacceptable outcomes. These responses are also distinctly different to those noted after disability simulation activities such as relief for not having a disability (Leo & Goodwin, 2013; Peterson & Quarstein, 2001); viewing disability as limiting or frightening (Leo & Goodwin, 2013); expressing depressive ideas about disability (Clark, et al., 1995); and feeling frightened of becoming disabled (Nario-Redmond, et al. 2017).

In reported examples of disability simulation activities, responses of participants most often seemed to demonstrate individualistic thinking toward the impact of disability (Leo & Goodwin, 2013; Nario-Redmond, et al. 2017; Peterson & Quarstein, 2001). Responses are based on likely inaccurate and short-term experiences of impairment (French, 1992) which appear to focus participants primarily on the impact of an impairment. In contrast, in the current study, it appeared that the demonstration of social barriers where participants had their physical access restricted and their right to accessible information and communication denied through my inflexible attitude led participants directly to appreciate the impact of these exclusionary practices. Some participants specifically referenced the phrases that I used during the role reversal activities, chosen to demonstrate a lack of concern for finding an accessible solution as particularly powerful in influencing their recognition of how it felt to have the responsibility of solving the problem directed back on the person experiencing discrimination. Rather than the response to the role reversal being directed inward, toward a contemplation of impairment or limitation, the response is projected outward, inspiring a recognition that these barriers are not the fault of those experiencing them. The feelings arising and responses provided after role reversal activities demonstrated recognition and understanding of the social model of disability as described by Finkelstein (1989) and Oliver (2013). If disability awareness training seeks to assist learners to develop understandings of disability in line with the social model of disability, role reversal activities have demonstrated promising potential.

7.2 One More Time for those at the Back, 'Nothing about us Without us'

The experiential learning in the form of the role reversal activities provided participants with a powerful opportunity to appreciate circumstances they did not ordinarily encounter. Participants reflected on the link between feeling the impact of the physical or attitudinal barrier and the development of insight and empathy. However, notably, participants expressed that it was not the role reversal barriers alone which had led to their increased understanding. Many made specific mention of the value of disabled people leading the role reversal activities and the proceeding phases of dialogue and reflection. I, and the other disabled Expert Contributors shared personal stories and experiences of encountering barriers to participation. Given all of us have experienced a variety of physical, information, communication and attitudinal barriers challenging our participation and inclusion throughout our lives, we were able to construct and discuss those experiences with a high level of accuracy and detail. This is a particular unparalleled insight offered by our experience as disabled people (Watharow & Wayland, 2022). As participants engaged in dialogue we encouraged, validated or expanded upon the participants' observations, often linking back to personal experiences yet again. Many participants identified the impact of this storytelling as being a powerful way they came to understandings and found meaning in the content explored. Participants reported that as a result of learning from our lived experience, they developed more nuanced understandings of what disability is; the types of accessibility that should be considered; the significant impact of seemingly small barriers; and helped to complete their comprehension of the social model of disability. The way this dialogue unfolded and the understanding it succeeded in developing is highly reflective of a approach influenced by Freirean theory and practice (1970). As facilitators we did not simply deliver information but provided the opportunity to explore experiences and barriers together.

The impact of this storytelling and dialogue proved quite profound in this study. Appearing as a major point deserving of reiteration in the member checking exercise undertaken after my initial data analysis, participants emphasised the importance of the sense of safety that this dialogue had created. Gill, et al. (2018) and Baum (2021) drew attention to the importance of fostering a sense of safety in the delivery of DEI training due to the possibility of learners confronting fears and challenging existing biases. As previously noted, participants of the current research did indeed indicate confrontation and the recognition of previously underappreciated privilege. In Nelson, et al. (2010) and Wallerstein and Bernstein(1988), a sense of safety was created by the facilitators sharing their stories of vulnerability, discrimination or violence. Similarly, in the current study, our facilitation as disabled people was reported to assist in increasing familiarity with disability and enabled the exploration of potential stigmas and taboos. Participants also advised they appreciated our openness to share stories and to allow their own vulnerable exploration of challenging topics without judgement or ridicule. The importance of this sense of safety was also important later in the action research when participants were taking action. They had indicated that taking action to improve accessibility was also surrounded by fear in case they went about the task the wrong way. Recalling our advice that all efforts to enhance accessibility and inclusion were appreciated, they were able to go forward with more confidence to act. Some participants shared experiences of their disabled family members, or came to identify themselves as having a disability during the dialogue. It appears that there was a value in our disabled facilitation in developing this trust and affinity with these particular participants, enabling them to feel comfortable to share their experiences (Kitchin, 2000; Watharow & Wayland, 2022). Some participants also drew attention to their sense of safety being enhanced by the mix of their respectful, open and collaborative colleagues in the room. These findings validate the importance of the disabled-led facilitation, storytelling, reassurance, encouragement, as well as supportive and respectful fellow learners in creating safety, and hence the ability to engage in effective learning and action.

It is well established that in order to gain the engagement of learners, and to bring about successful outcomes, fostering relatability and relevancy to their personal and professional lives is important (Charles, 2005; Moriña, et al., 2020; Nafukho, et al., 2017). From a Freirean perspective, this relatability needs to be established through posing problems in a way that connects with the learners' particular preoccupations, hopes and doubts. In the instance of this current study, our facilitation as disabled people made the content relevant and relatable, and it became notable that the sense of safety that the workshop environment fostered enabled participants to express this relatability. Participants provided a number of examples that demonstrated they were considering experiences in their own lives and then relating to the impact of barriers that disabled people experience in similar scenarios. In some cases this meant they had a new respect for the extra anxiety or complexity barriers would add to the situation. In others, some found an area of comparability in their own experiences of non-compliance with social norms, seeming to confirm the truth and relevance of the social understanding of disability. The voicing of these relatabilities enabled the participants to receive confirmation and validation of their observations. These findings offer an important contribution to the problem of indifference or ambivalence that has been noted as causing a barrier to the advancement of DEI practice (DCA, et al., 2021; Davis, et al., 2016). Learners must be provided with meaningful connections to the topic of learning, but to be permitted and encouraged to express these discoveries also seems crucial in reinforcing the relatability between all people. The social barriers under consideration are no longer incomprehensible, distant problems only applicable to others, but become things that all people can relate to in various ways.

Disabled-led disability awareness training and disability inclusion initiatives have been found to achieve superior outcomes (Davy, et al., 2019; Rotenberg, et al. 2022). Further, programs which have facilitated mere contact between disabled people and training participants have reported learners subsequently rethinking stereotypical beliefs and better understanding barriers to participation and inclusion (Bogart, et al., 2019; Hayward, et al., 2021; Carballo, et al., 2021; Kim & Roberson (2022; Wang, et al., 2021). The findings of the current study not only reiterate these findings but help to illustrate exactly why there are these enhanced outcomes when disabled people lead disability-related initiatives. On a very practical level, the physical, information and communication barriers employed were based on the lived experiences of disabled people, down to the finest details such as needing to walk past smelly garbage to access an accessible entry. The phrases and behaviours I used to demonstrate attitudinal barriers when participants interacted with the activities were all repeated from instances when they had been directed toward me. For example, having access needs dismissed or the responsibility for managing them directed back to the disabled person; instances of discrimination disregarded or downplayed; and being forced to hurry to complete a task despite not having an acceptable accessible way to complete it. Here, it is possible to see the direct value of the disabled identity in providing an unmatched level of insight, influencing the accuracy and completeness of the representations facilitated (Tregaskis & Goodley, 2005; Watharow & Wayland, 2022). This authentic representation, applied alongside a sound pedagogical approach to learning (Freire,1970) appear to all have contributed to the participants' development of understanding of disability and social barriers. Our disabled identities and experiences brought particular strength to the elements of problem-posing, storytelling and dialogue, creating safety, relatability and relevance to a learning situation focused on understanding the social determinants of disability.

Once again, the value of disabled-led development and facilitation of disability awareness training is clear. Quite apart from recommending this value is capitalised upon to ensure quality outcomes, I challenge the seemingly implicit belief present in much literature consulted in the literature review of this study reporting on the undertaking of disability awareness training, which inferred it is acceptable that disability awareness training is developed and presented by people who are not disabled. I gained this impression through a distinct absence of mentions of disabled people being involved in its conduct. It is cautioned that the proliferation of disability awareness training conducted on behalf of disabled people can lead to the development of harmful programs, disability simulation being one such, now pervasive example (Leo & Goodwin, 2016). History has demonstrated that significant mistakes are made when disability-related policies, programs and initiatives are developed and rolled out on behalf of, rather than by or in partnership with disabled people (Frawley & O'Shea 2020; Opoku & Nketsia, 2021). It is for all these reasons collectively that I assert the importance of observing past mistakes and ensuring disability awareness training is always developed and delivered by those who are disabled.

As anticipated, my identity as a disabled researcher, and the contribution of the Expert Contributors also had an influence on the way this research was carried out and how the results have been understood. This is discussed here as both a strength of the research, but also in qualifying the positionality from which the data analysis was undertaken. While our experiences as disabled people undoubtedly shaped the way the role reversal activities were developed and delivered, our understanding and analysis over the responses provided by the participants will have also been influenced by this lens (Kitchin, 2000). For example, when observing the participants' responses to the barriers, I and the Expert Contributors were able to immediately ascertain the comparability between these responses and that of ourselves when confronted with similar barriers in our everyday lives. Further, my identification and analysis of the participants' understandings of the social model of disability were easily apparent to me, given my own immersion in this model of living each day. These insights will have helped reduce the risk of the disabled experience being misunderstood or misrepresented (Kitchin, 2000). Additionally, I, and the Expert Contributors occupied several roles outside of the research, including customers of local councils; former employees in local councils; professionals in other organisational settings and in the disability sector; advisory board members; and users of funded disability support services. It became clear that the insight gained from these roles provided us with a broad appreciation for the various ways disabled people are impacted by barriers, as well as the challenges for organisations in responding to these barriers (Gupta, et al., 2023). In action research, the impact of our disabled identities and multiple roles contributed credibility to the integrity of the study and its outcomes due to our ability to ensure both perspectives of the participants and the disabled experience were represented (Stringer, 2007).

7.3 Problem-Posing Barriers

On the journey of understanding and moving toward acting, the action research moved into a phase of exploring where and how barriers existed in the participants' environments. Shortly after experiencing the role reversal activities and watching the animated video of Finkelstein's analogy of the upside-down world, played to complete the illustration of the social model of disability, participants began recognising and expressing their observations of barriers present in council, and more broadly. At this stage they demonstrated having entered a phase of problem-posing critical dialogue (Freire, 1970), which is also the 'look' component of action research where participants examine the current situation (Stringer, 2007). In this phase, the importance of the group dialogue was observed as valuable for providing multiple perspectives, experiences and pieces of knowledge (Stringer, 2007). The participants' observations were posed as questions, reflections and multi-way exploratory dialogue. The observation of a problem tended to begin by one person mentioning a potential barrier, and collectively, they discussed and understood the elements of the problem. I and the Expert Contributors were heavily involved at this stage, the observation and unpacking of a barrier often sparked from a story or experience shared by one of us. As Elsey and Lathlean (2006) found, the presence of outsider voices in the action research, bringing experience of the problems under consideration brought new awareness. Participants identified several barriers and contributing problems including problematic emergency evacuation procedures; inaccessibility of council chambers for wheelchair users; chosen furniture in the workshop room; and the height of gates on children's playgrounds. All of these barriers were identified to have complex antecedents leading to their existence, such as, an unawareness for the need to consider accessibility; an incomplete or inadequate consideration of accessibility and human rights; or the requirement to balance safety risks with accessibility. It was here that the group truly began to understand the complexities and causation of the barriers that lead to serious problems.

There were some barriers which gained particular attention from the participants during their problem-posing exploration. Becoming aware of the unemployment problem impacting disabled people in Australia, and hearing stories of employment discrimination experienced by the Expert Contributors, participants began exploring what barriers may prevent disabled people applying for and being successful in positions at council. They identified multiple potential components to the problem, including, long and complex application requirements; unclear communication during recruitment; rigid and unified job application requirements; psychometric testing; and the pre-employment medical. Analysing these problems individually in discussion with me and the expert Contributors, participants considered that they could cause job applicants considerable anxiety, confusion, inaccessibility, and ultimately deter or exclude people from lodging applications. Becoming aware of the barriers to employment, they also began to consider how people may come to fear discrimination and may avoid disclosing their disability in an application or once on the job. The dialogue surrounding employment indicated an understanding for the impact of barriers on disabled people, but also demonstrated that given the opportunity, participants could identify structural and attitudinal barriers in their organisation’s recruitment methods that could lead to negative outcomes such as those found by Darcy, et al., (2016) and detailed in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Sackville, et al., 2023c).

When problem-posing employment-related barriers, participants soon came to consider what they knew about existing employment rates of disabled people within their organisation. They concluded they were unaware of how prevalent disability may be, collectively uncertain if data was collected recording employment rates of disabled people. In general, it is not a given that organisations collect this data (Davies, et al., 2023). The participants in the current study considered even if it was, it was likely to be flawed by inaccuracy due to fears of disclosing disability. Here participants had identified another persistent and multifaceted problem in progressing disability inclusion initiatives. Disability is often less prevalent among DEI efforts (Davies, et al. 2023). This lesser focus may be impacted by the lack of understanding for the prevalence of disability, as well as compounded by an invisibility of disability in the workplace because of underrepresentation (Davies, et al. 2023; DCA, et al., 2021.

Participants of the current research, having identified a number of barriers to employment and organisational inclusion, had confronted some of the most pervasive, complex and largely unchanging areas of disability inclusive planning and practice experienced by local councils and further afield. In my recent review of the achievements of NSW local Councils' first generation DIAPs under the *Disability Inclusion Act* (2014), I found that, among all areas of disability inclusive planning and practice, councils struggled most bringing about meaningful employment outcomes (Butler, 2023). Unclear from the findings of that study were the reasons for this seemingly enhanced difficulty in making headway comparable with other areas of disability inclusive planning and practice. The current study helped to suggest potential reasons for this disproportionate difficulty. Firstly, the sheer volume of organisational policy the participants explored as being involved in employment and employee relations suggests likely difficulties in making changes to interconnected, impenetrable, long-standing practice. Secondly, the review of such policy requires the careful consideration of the presence of ableism and discriminatory practice, as well as the recognition of any biases toward employing disabled people (Antonopoulos, et al. 2023; Meltzer, et al., 2020). The difficulty of addressing both the volume of the policy, plus examining it for ableist tendencies is likely underscored by the underrepresentation and resultant significant invisibility of disabled people in organisational settings. Just as the conduct of disability awareness training is negatively impacted by the invisibility of disabled people, the same is suspected in this scenario. Positively, this study indicated that participants were able to efficiently and effectively identify barriers to employment when facilitated and supported by disabled people in problem-posing, critical dialogue. This finding demonstrates the efficiency in which organisational problems and their potential causations and impacts can be identified when the appropriate opportunity is provided.

Another barrier which received particular attention during problem-posing dialogue was the gap between meeting standards and producing optimally accessible facilities and services. Fisher and Purcal (2017) discussed three levels of policy initiatives which advance the inclusion of disabled people, government, organisational and personal. They identified that the best outcomes are achieved when these three levels of policy are applied and operate in combination (Fisher & Purcal, 2017). The analysis of this problem effectively identified an example of the consequences when these three levels of policy do not support one another. While councils are generally very careful to ensure the meeting of standards (government level), such as those stipulating requirements for mobility and circulation, there were a number of examples discussed where meeting standards alone had fallen short of providing an optimally accessible and inclusive experience. Participants identified this was likely due to community engagement practices which were not effectively capturing the customer experience information that was needed. Participants identified that organisational policies for collecting community consultative data were not sufficient, and when they were in place, they typically contained multiple barriers which made it challenging for customers to provide feedback that could then be utilised. Additionally, participants identified that council staff were often unaware of the council's Access and Inclusion Reference Group made up of community members who could be engaged to provide input over council projects. The weak implementation of organisational and personal policies meant that there were instances of facilities being delivered largely without the important insight of disability lived experience. This had resulted in instances of the council needing to later retrofit and make adjustments once the problems had been identified by community members. This finding serves as a prudent confirmation of Fisher and Purcal's (2017) finding and provides direction toward a solution which could improve outcomes. With organisational policy ensuring more inclusive and complete community engagement, and personal policies providing education to council staff to ensure the organisational policies are upheld, stronger outcomes in optimal accessibility could be achieved.

As a result of the problem-posing critical dialogue, participants of the current study were able to identify multiple barriers which could impact the inclusion of disabled people, as well as deeply analyse and identify their components. Such critical dialogue and demonstrated comprehension of the determinants of social barriers appears to be entirely unreported in the conduct of disability simulation training. Despite reporting participants having had an opportunity to debrief after experiencing role reversal activities, it is also not reported in Matthews, et al. (2011), which was the only comparable example of role reversal activities in an educational setting found. However, such deep critical reflection is a typical component of Freirean based programs, such as in González, et al. (2007) where participants engaged in problem-posing critical dialogue over health problems in their community, identifying multiple contributing environmental factors. These findings suggest that role reversal activities benefit from being complemented by an opportunity to engage critically in problem-posing dialogue in order to advance deep reflection and understanding of the complexities contributing to social barriers. Once again, the importance of this process being led by disabled facilitators was illustrated, as it contributed depth and insight into the identification of barriers and their components.

7.4 Influencing for Inclusion

As Freirean informed action research, the ultimate intention of the study was for participants to utilise their newly enhanced understandings, knowledge and progress to taking action to address identified problems (Freire, 1970; Stringer, 2007). This is the ultimate praxis, a meeting of theory and practice (Freire, 1970). While participants of the current study demonstrated strong understandings of the social model of disability as a result of the role reversal activities and accompanying critical dialogue, a true indication of their learning came with the actions they took later to advance inclusive behaviours and practice. An outlined expectation of participating in the action research was that participants would identify actions they could take in their organisation to make improvements to accessibility and inclusion. A significant component of the initial workshops was dedicated to a process of action planning. What emerged however were actions and behaviours above and beyond the nominated tasks participants devised in their action plans. The action research approach enabled me to see and understand behaviours and actions carried out by participants several months after the original workshops. At these later phases of the study, participants often reported that along with their shift in perspective, their practice had been influenced. There were reports of constant reflections on the accessibility of their practice, the projects they worked on and the environments they were among. This newly developed critical lens gave them the ability to spot access problems and to take action accordingly. These actions included such examples as making changes to the way work had traditionally been undertaken and realigning the importance of accessibility as a priority over aesthetics. However, the influence of their developments in understanding and knowledge were not only directed at their own practice. Participants reported influencing that of others. For example, repeating the rollout of the role reversal activities to others to replicate the same learning experience; advocating for the recognition of access problems; and walking alongside others as they engaged in their own problem-posing of barriers. Effectively, many participants had adopted roles of champions or allies for inclusive practice.

It is well established that champions and allies play significant roles in successfully advancing DEI practice in organisational settings by promoting, influencing and gathering support for action and change (Dawson, et al., 2019; Gould, et al., 2022; Gill, et al. 2018; Hansen, et al., 2021; Quardokus Fisher, et al., 2019). In the current study, the action research provided a platform from which participants developed awareness, knowledge and motivation to not only improve their own practice through action, but extend their influence to others around them. The participants' actions as champions successfully brought further players into the broader effort to advance inclusive practice. There were examples spoken of where participants had recruited additional staff to help them on their projects. As a result they reported these staff also gained new understandings for the importance of accessibility and inclusion. At the end of the action research, participants advised they had no intention to stop their work. Some indicated they would be continuing their efforts as champions, advocating for accessibility and inclusion within their own areas of work and beyond. The group were also intending to maintain their original action research group, turning it into an ongoing working group. Their next indicated task was to invite more staff to become a part of it. Similar impacts have been seen in other Freirean aligned studies. For example, participants have taken action by gathering further support for change through coalitions (González, et al., 2007), achieved legislative change (Rogers & Singhal, 2003); and influenced the behaviours of others through further education (Nelson, et al., 2010; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). In all of these examples, those engaged in the original problem-posing and critical dialogue took action and influenced the behaviour of others. The results of the current study demonstrate that the Freirean approach was impactful in developing personal perspectives, and in so doing brought about behavioural change so significant the actions taken were beyond what was expected. This finding not only supports the continuing power, validity and value of a Freirean approach in influencing a meaningful praxis leading to the addressing of inequity and exclusion, it also demonstrates an important learning which can be applied to the conduct of disability inclusion initiatives.

7.5 Engagement: An Indicative Limitation, or a Strength to be Capitalised on?

This action research saw a high level of participant engagement, to the extent of participants evolving into champions for accessibility and inclusion. Throughout the study, I observed high levels of commitment and enthusiasm to connect with the project, devise actions and later to take action, review action and try again. As a 32-week (eight-month) long action research study, it did call for prolonged engagement and interest. Among the original 13 participants, only three dropped out of the research. One advised they were stepping away from the study after the initial workshops. Another advised their work commitments had become too great around the mid-way workshop. The third simply disengaged from the study before the final interviews and never formally advised of their withdrawal from the study. Overall, the study fostered high engagement and low attrition.

A number of participants engaged with the research with existing motivations gained from personal, family or professional experience with disability. As is a requirement of research, their participation was entirely voluntary and informed. These factors will have certainly influenced some of the high level of engagement, particularly at the outset of the research, and as such, raises what could be seen as qualifiers or limitations on the outcomes of the study. It could be asked, how can this research claim to hold potential for influencing the disability inclusive planning and practice of organisational personnel if the participants' involvement was pre-motivated and entirely voluntary? After all, it could be argued that those who really need to develop and change their practice were not in the room, able to simply bypass the possibility of engaging with the research. One of the greatest challenges to DEI practice is a significant ambivalence or indifference toward engaging in and supporting such initiatives (DCA, et al., 2021; Davis, et al., 2016). This criticism is indeed, on the surface, valid, however, I argue that the scenario of the current study actually serves to illustrate important findings in the conduct of DEI initiatives.

Existing research has shown that there are risks inherent in obligating the undertaking of DEI training. Being mandated to engage with the training can result in personnel resentment, or else, causes the training to be perceived as a tick-a-box exercise (Baum, 2021; Gill, et al., 2018). Neither outcome is conducive to positive impacts and outcomes following the training. Freire (1970) argued that learners must feel the problems that they are engaging with are relevant and relatable, inferring that there must be some inherent interest in engaging with the initiative. Those who voluntarily participate in DEI initiatives are likely to have ascertained a personal or professional interest and positive benefit for participating (Hurtz & Williams, 2009). In the current study, a small group of personnel identified such interest and benefit and, feeling motivated to participate they engaged with the study. Among similarly motivated participants, they were able to progress their learning in a safe, supported, respectful and encouraging environment, where all were united toward a similar goal to have an impact. In this instance, the voluntary engagement in the study meant that participants all brought with them an eagerness to be involved in action and change, as well as supporting others to do so.

Importantly, this eagerness and motivation led to the participants' actions of going forward to bring others into the change effort. This eventuality illustrates the value of the motivated and engaged participant in becoming a champion and effectively engaging others. As Fujimoto and EJ Härtel, 2017) proposed, one group of people passionate about workplace diversity can help bring others into the movement of change. They went on to hypothesise that this method of developing capability for action and change could, in time impact a whole organisation (Fujimoto & EJ Härtel, 2017). I also suspect that with further, regular, voluntary opportunities to engage new participants in similar learning opportunities, as well as the continual influence of organisational champions, the influence on disability inclusive planning and practice could be profound. Champions are likely to have an impact on their colleagues who are indifferent or ambivalent to disability inclusion by persistently raising its importance in various work settings. These findings have led me to conclude that voluntary participation which brings with it increased motivation, engagement and eagerness for change was a strength of the current study. While relying on voluntary participation and gradual influence through the action of champions is likely to take time, it seems its overall impact on disability inclusive planning and practice is positive and effective.

7.6 Drawing Conclusions

When I first employed role reversal activities within disability awareness initiatives as a Disability Inclusion Officer in a regional local council more than eight years ago, I knew they demonstrated something powerful. At the time, I knew they assisted me to illustrate barriers to participation and inclusion and effectively moved discussions into considerations of how to reverse the barrier and make the situation more inclusive. What I didn’t contemplate so fully at the time was the significance of the immediate responses upon confrontation with the barriers. Responses of indignation and confusion I can now understand to be a pivotal component in making the role reversal activities so demonstrative, powerful and effective. At the time, I also had little understanding for the importance of my own involvement in the activities. Having lived as a disabled person my whole life, I realise that I can at times underestimate the significance of this identity in the production of disability awareness type initiatives. This study has demonstrated how the disabled identity as researcher and facilitator of the activities truly underscored every impact, every finding and, illustrates an important final recommendation to move forward with.

I formulated two research questions in this study seeking to discover the impacts of role reversal activities. The first, research question one, aimed to consider the thoughts, feelings and behaviours experienced and demonstrated by those who encounter role reversal activities. The second, research question two, strove to understand how role reversal activities would lead participants to understand disability, and whether these understandings would then contribute to their taking actions against social barriers. The immediate responses of confusion, frustration, panic and anxiety were largely indicative of responses to a situation that is unfamiliar and challenging. Due to the novel nature of these experiences, participants expressed feeling confronted and becoming aware of the privilege that many take for granted to be able to move around an environment, access information and communicate with others without obstacles in their way. These realisations directly led participants to articulate the impacts of the barriers resulting from the role reversal activities. They recognised the likelihood of being excluded; reducing opportunities to participate; opening up risks of misunderstandings; and having to invest time in problem-solving a way around the barrier. While the participants' initial responses were likely different to the feelings that would be experienced by disabled people when encountering barriers, the resultant outcome demonstrated very strong and accurate understandings of social barriers in the lives of disabled people.

From this point, participants were able to identify and analyse barriers that existed in their organisation and further afield. They demonstrated the ability to identify the antecedents of barriers, providing insights into the elements that would need to change to reduce or remove the barrier. The unpacking of these barriers came at the point of the study where the participants were deeply within a phase of problem-posing critical dialogue, facilitated by myself, and the Expert Contributors. Later in the action research I was able to understand how participants had used their newly developed understanding and knowledge. As well as working to progress their group action plan, participants had developed into champions for disability inclusive practice. As well as working on their own practice, they had started influencing others to do the same. In considering the circumstances which had led to these positive outcomes, significant conclusions became clear. Firstly, participants drew attention to the fact that their ability to gain these understandings, and later to act was intrinsically influenced by our facilitation as disabled people. The experiences we shared, the openness in our storytelling, and the sense of safety and reassurance we created all contributed. This demonstrates that the role reversal activities alone were not responsible for the entirety of the learning, development of understandings and the ability to take action. The role reversal activities acted as a mere tool to begin the explorations and to establish efficient recognition of the impact of barriers. The Freirean inspired problem-posing critical dialogue, facilitated by disabled people was essential in solidifying those initial understandings, and progressing the depth of learning which would equip participants to become champions for change. Therefore, I conclude that the role reversal activities should be seen only as a component contributing to the overall outcomes, and that their use should be accompanied by a sound opportunity for learners to engage in problem-posing, critical dialogue led by disabled people.

In conducting this research and employing the role reversal activities, I did need to consider some risks and potential adverse implications. I developed the role reversal activities out of the knowledge that disability simulation activities had been found to be harmful and inconducive to positive behavioural change due to their alignment with the medical model of disability. Therefore, working in alignment with Finkelstein's (1989) analogy of the upside-down-world, I developed the role reversal activities to affiliate with the social model instead. There was a risk that the activities would fail to hit the mark and reinforce harms like that of disability simulation. However, the data provided by participants and the Expert Contributors gave no single indication of any such harmful impacts. Again, this result is likely owing to the disabled-led facilitation and the extensive opportunities participants were granted to understand the social model of disability, to debrief and reflect following the role reversal activities. There could indeed be a risk of harm if the role reversal activities are rolled out independent of these other factors.

There were some other cautions associated with my use of the Freirean approach. In using Freire's (1970) pedagogy, I was exploring a new way in which to apply the framework to inspire change. Freire originally asserted that the pedagogy should not be used toward those who may be part of groups who have historically been responsible for oppression. He argued that this could bring about results of false-generosity and paternalism (Freire, 1970). These outcomes would certainly be misaligned with the goals of the research. However, I hoped that given the passage of time and subsequent significant empowerment of the disabled community, alongside the research and learning activities being disabled-led would mitigate this risk. During the study, there were no suggestions which I observed that suggested disingenuous responses as a result of our action research. Freire also cautioned that in the application of his pedagogy, those who are oppressed should never cause oppression of others (Freire, 1970). I was very aware of this caution and ensured that in the conduct of the role reversal activities participants had ample opportunities to debrief, to understand the activities and to feel empowered rather than remain confronted. In the phases of the research that followed, participants indicated that the sense of safety and security fostered during their involvement was significant. This indication appears to have alleviated any risk of harm, and enabled participants and facilitators alike to move forward in compassion, an outcome which Freire hoped for in the use of his pedagogy (1970).

The participant engagement that this study was able to inspire came as one of my most significant personal learnings associated with this research. In the initial workshops I observed the participants become so thoroughly connected with the subject matter, their participation became more self-directed and interactive rather than transactional. At the time, I reflected that I had not yet seen such powerful engagement in any of my prior facilitated workplace diversity, equity and inclusion training programs in a professional setting in my career thus far. As I worked to analyse the data, I came to understand the elements that contributed to the profound engagement that I observed. This included the impact of the role reversal activities; the sense of safety developed among myself, the Expert Contributors and the participants; the relatability and relevance of the subject matter; and the disabled facilitation which connected participants so completely to the learning. Apart from the production of the current research findings, these discoveries went on to immediately influence my practice rolling out similar disability inclusion initiatives.

Another research question that this chapter began to answer, research question four, sought understanding of the impacts in organisational knowledge and capability that were observed as a result of an action research study seeking to improve disability inclusive planning and practice in a large organisation. While I anticipated there would be an impact on the organisation as a result of the participants' actions undertaken under their prescribed group action plan, the additional actions they took as champions were significant. The understandings and increased knowledge participants became equipped with enabled them to influence the organisation's broader capability in disability inclusive planning and practice. As they engaged their colleagues in learning about disability; challenged existing organisational practice; and recruited more people to become involved in inclusive practice, their impact grew beyond the action group itself. The immense impact, and further potential demonstrated by this finding also led me to another discovery. Participants had engaged with the action research on a voluntary basis, all bringing existing motivations for participating. This scenario demonstrated the value of an engaged, supportive, safe and united group in progressing the aims of the action research. It illustrated the value of voluntary participation in effectively establishing and growing an organisation’s capability for disability inclusive planning and practice. Unlike initiatives which may obligate involvement and result in resistance, this approach showed that a gradual influence of passionate people can gently and productively develop engagement in others.

Chapter 8

Discussion: Optimising for inclusive planning and practice

When all NSW local councils were first mandated to maintain a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) under the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (*Disability Inclusion Act, 2014*) I was optimistic about the outcomes this obligation would surely bring (Butler, 2023). However, as I began to observe the implementation of this policy from the perspectives of professional and researcher, I came to realise that a legislative obligation would not bring about quality outcomes alone. As a result of my professional experience as a Disability Inclusion Officer in a local council, I had come to an understanding that in order to implement disability inclusion initiatives, I also needed to navigate many organisational structures and complexities. As a researcher, I began to see that local councils seemed to have more success in some areas of their DIAPs than others. While local councils were reporting strong outcomes in areas such as built and digital accessibility, event and program inclusivity and achievements in education and awareness raising, the outcomes in advancing the employment of disabled people were very poor (Butler, 2023). In the previous chapter I discussed how, in the current study, it appeared there was an exceptional amount of policy, organisational complexity, as well as required attitudinal change surrounding recruitment and employment, and I proposed that perhaps these factors were disproportionately influencing such disappointing outcomes.

As always, my observations are also influenced by my disabled identity. Fundamentally, my hopes for the legislative change were linked to my own yearning for the improved recognition of rights and increased accessibility and inclusion in communities, for me and my fellows. As a disabled resident of my own local government area and visitor to others, I have experienced and observed the outcomes of DIAPs. I have seen improvements, but I have also been frustrated by significant inaccessibility, puzzling decisions, handballing of responsibility and slowness in remedying identified problems. From a customer perspective alone, these accessibility problems appeared easy to fix, however, given my other insights, I suspected their resolutions were bound up in organisational complexities. As a disabled researcher undertaking this very study, I have also been confronted with a significant inaccessibility problem in gaining an initial understanding of NSW local council DIAPs. In chapter 1 I discussed a desktop review I undertook of 96 current DIAPs, leading to the discovery that local councils demonstrate a strong value of personnel training to influence disability inclusive planning and practice. To undertake this review, I battled with extremely poor screen reader inaccessibility among the majority of the DIAPs consulted. I am not qualified to undertake a digital accessibility audit, nor did I have the time to devote to systematically record my accessibility findings. However, I did note that very few were what I would consider properly screen reader accessible, with elements such as heading structures, well-formatted tables and Alt text labelled images and diagrams. I was left with an uncomfortable realisation that the legislative requirement to maintain a DIAP was not powerful enough to ensure councils were proactive in ensuring the very document which spoke of their commitment to disability inclusion was actually accessible to disabled people. As a result, I felt there was a suggestion of a serious shortcoming in organisational capability and commitment.

Owing to the experiences and observations from my multiple perspectives, I have deduced that so much of the success of the legislative requirement to maintain a DIAP seems to depend on the organisational factors of influence in individual local councils. In this study, I therefore sought to better understand what factors are conducive or harmful in advancing disability inclusive planning and practice. This consideration holds significant importance if local councils are to be supported in bringing about quality outcomes under Disability Inclusion Action planning. The action research design of the current study provided an ideal opportunity to explore the complexity and intricacies of an organisational context. In this study, participants identified factors of influence both before, and during phases of taking action. In the latter case, there were some cases of their actions effectively impacting and changing problematic or harmful factors. This second discussion chapter continues to analyse the findings of this research while drawing on learnings from existing literature, theory and methodology. It addresses the third research question posed in this study seeking insight into the organisational factors that impact the outcomes of disability inclusive planning and practice. The chapter highlights how the Freirean pedagogy, and the action research methodology were instrumental in making these discoveries. Further, the chapter continues to address the fourth, and final research question of the study, seeking insight into the impacts in organisational knowledge and capability observed as a result of the action research approach.

8.1 Protecting the Progress of Disability Inclusive Planning and Practice

Within the initial workshops of the study, participants worked through two phases of a three-phase action research cycle (Stringer, 2007). After thoroughly ‘looking’ at the current situation, in this case, barriers in the way of participation and inclusion, participants moved into a phase of ‘thinking’ about where they would go next to address the identified problems (Stringer, 2007). This phase of action research allowed the participants to explore and understand the make-up of circumstances impacting their area of investigation more completely (Stringer, 2007). During this investigation, participants identified potential problems and factors that would be relevant come time for them to act, meaning that they were informed and better able to predict and respond to challenges (Butler, et al., 2008; Stringer, 2007). From a Freirean perspective, participants were still in the depths of critical dialogue (Freire, 1970), and it was here that organisational contexts became especially relevant. One of the first queries I put to participants at this stage was the current status of the council’s DIAP. At the time of these workshops, the current DIAP was a mere couple of months out from its expiry in June 2022. This query led to some important findings. The participants’ awareness of the current DIAP was extremely limited. Some participants knew only vaguely of the DIAP, others were completely ignorant of its existence. A similar discovery was made when the Access and Inclusion Reference Group’s activities were raised. Awareness for the existence and activities of the Group were patchy. This limited awareness meant that participants were mostly unaware of any responsibilities under the DIAP and were not utilising the expertise of the Access and Inclusion Reference Group to its best extent. It is important to note that the staff who volunteered to participate in this research are likely to have been among the most interested and engaged in disability inclusive practice, yet they demonstrated this limited awareness.

As their critical dialogue continued, participants gave consideration toward attitudinal perspectives which they considered to have an impact in influencing disability inclusive planning and practice. There was an observation made that disability inclusion generally seemed to attract less prioritisation when compared with other important organisational and social matters, both within their council and further afield. In the case of the council, and the current DIAP, it was raised how initially, enthusiasm for the development of the DIAP had been strong, with council personnel motivated and driven to have an impact. However, over time, with other pressing matters weighing in, its importance and prioritisation had faded. Participants also identified that there could be significant fear of change and disruption brought about with such initiatives, a concern particularly relevant to a local government setting where organisational change was common and unsettling. Participants also considered there could be an element of concern for the higher financial cost of disability inclusion initiatives, when compared to the likely lower expense of including other marginalised groups. These observations made by participants provide important insight into the attitudinal perspectives which could be present and having a detrimental impact in advancing progress.

The general limited awareness of the council's existing initiatives to advance disability inclusive planning and practice, as well as the existence of attitudinal barriers toward the adoption of disability inclusion practice, appeared to be indicative of an absence of known protective factors for the influence and success of DEI initiatives. The alignment and integration of DEI strategies and policies with other corporate strategies and the organisational environment plays an important role in influencing the success of DEI initiatives (Dawson, et al., 2019; Gill, et al. 2018; Jones, 2016). Specifically in the case of local governments and the implementation of DIAPs, strategic integration with the local government Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework is important for driving progress of DIAPs by ensuring the engagement of appropriate council stakeholders and by incorporating initiatives for inclusion into operations (Dawson, et al., 2019). Evident in the findings of the current study was a lack of this strategic integration between the DIAP and other planning tools that the participants used to undertake their work. Without this integration, it was all too easy for actions of the DIAP to be left out of relevant and intersecting work, and ultimately, to become significantly overlooked. Perhaps critical in contributing to how this problem had originally arisen, participants noted that the current DIAP had been developed by a contracted service, and they felt this had contributed to a lack of strategic incorporation, organisational buy-in and knowledge for the plan. Strategic integration also relies on the actions of leaders adequately prioritising and incorporating goals around disability inclusive practice into the core of their practice (Buengeler, et al., 2018; Dawson, et al., 2019). In this case, it appeared that there may be insufficient leadership support driving the genuine integration of disability inclusion activities into everyday business.

It seems that some of the most powerful agitators for disability inclusion are those people working from within their organisation promoting, influencing and driving disability inclusive planning and practice (Dawson, et al., 2019; Gould, et al., 2022; Gill, et al. 2018; Hansen, et al., 2021; Quardokus Fisher, et al., 2019). Where the implementation of a DIAP is concerned, these players may be members of leadership, specialist disability inclusion officers, human resource staff, disabled staff and other invested champions and allies (Dawson, et al., 2019). These people, from their various positions in an organisation effectively act as protective factors, keeping the disability inclusion agenda safe from falling off the organisation's radar by maintaining its visibility and relevance. As this chapter has begun to demonstrate, properly integrating and implementing disability inclusive planning and practice can be complex work, requiring careful navigation of organisational factors and attitudinal barriers (Dawson, et al., 2019). In the case of the current study, it was evident from early in the data collection that such players in the council were few. The council did not have a designated disability inclusion officer, nor appear to have many active champions or allies actively promoting and influencing action under the DIAP. It is therefore understandable how the DIAP lacked prominence in the minds of personnel.

Among those recognised for influencing the success of disability inclusion initiatives, are disabled people themselves, either as individuals or as part of an employee resource group (Dawson, et al., 2019; (McNulty, et al., 2018). In the current study, attention was also drawn to a seeming lack of presence or influence from these staff. When one of the workshop groups problem-posed how other marginalised groups seemingly manage to achieve greater recognition and action toward the honouring of their rights, compared to disabled people, it was suggested that the volume of advocacy from marginalised groups themselves appeared to contribute to the prioritisation of their cause. Given disabled people are some of the most underrepresented marginalised groups in organisational settings (Davies, et al. 2023; DCA, et al., 2021), it seems likely that disabled people have less of an opportunity to have their advocacy efforts heard. The validity of this theory is evidenced by the lesser focus toward disability even within DEI practice (Chalfin, 2022; Davies, et al. 2023; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). With a significant invisibility of disability, and the absence of these voices advocating for change, it is perceivable that disability-related inclusion initiatives could easily fall from consciousness and prioritisation in an organisational setting.

The absence or shortfall of protective factors, in the instance of the current study meant that disability inclusive planning and practice was struggling to gain traction and visibility. The problem-posing critical dialogue of participants provided multiple insights into how the limited strategic integration, championing of implementation and visibility of disability had contributed to the current scenario. Participants discussed how information about disability inclusion initiatives had not been well communicated by their organisation, leading to limited knowledge. They also identified that where knowledge was held about disability inclusion initiatives it was at high risk of being trapped or lost due to natural staff turnover and siloed ways of working. Without sufficient prioritisation and integration of disability inclusive planning, there was no evident method for ensuring that information was shared and protected. Participants also discussed how the DIAP and other related disability inclusion initiatives were currently not included in their organisation’s induction program. This demonstrated a further absence of prioritisation of these important organisational obligations, allowing new starters to progress in their roles without a complete understanding of their relevant responsibilities. These findings highlight resultant problems which occurred when insufficient organisational structures and supports were in place to support the conduct of disability inclusive practice.

In the previous discussion chapter, I discussed the identification of barriers discovered by participants which could have negative impacts for disabled customers and prospective and actual employees. I unpacked an example where government, organisational and personal policies evidently lacked coordination, resulting in a gap between meeting prescribed standards and maximising accessibility and usability. It is here that this same coordination is relevant, but on a broader level. Fisher and Purcal (2017) identified that disability inclusion initiatives tend to have better outcomes when government, organisational and personal policies work well together. In consideration of the implementation of the DIAP, it is evident how this finding of Fisher and Purcal's (2017) is again relevant. The government policy set out a legislative obligation for NSW local councils to maintain a Disability Inclusion Action Plan, a requirement that the council was meeting (Disability Inclusion Act, 2014). However, there appeared to be shortcomings in the organisational policies established by the council to effectively integrate the DIAP with the organisation's strategic practice. Further, there were insufficient personal policies working to develop personnel awareness, engagement and buy-in to support its implementation throughout the organisation. It is therefore possible to see how the impact of legislative change cannot hope to reach its fullest potential without these secondary levels of supporting policy.

These problems may not only be detrimental to progressing disability inclusive planning and practice. Such a scenario may also have an impact on personnel of an organisation. A current concern regarding the successful uptake and implementation of DEI efforts is indifference or ambivalence toward diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practice (DCA, et al., 2021). Ambivalence or indifference toward DEI practice may be indicated by personnel neither supporting or opposing their organisation engaging in DEI practice, or, lacking an unawareness for DEI initiatives their organisation may be undertaking (DCA, et al., 2021). In the current example, there were multiple factors at play which could reasonably be found to influence a lack of awareness or indifference toward disability inclusive practice. Among personnel participating in the action research who had an interest in disability inclusion, their knowledge of relevant initiatives was very low. This suggests that these factors would have been impacting the awareness of others in the organisation still more significantly. This situation could also pose a risk to the engagement and loyalty of personnel. Personnel generally enjoy a greater sense of belonging and feel more engaged and motivated within an organisation whose leadership demonstrates a value of inclusion (Alshaabani, et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2021). In particular, it is important to consider how this silence may impact those personnel who have a vested interest in these initiatives. Without clear avenues for involvement and engagement in disability inclusion initiatives, potentially motivated and enthusiastic personnel may miss opportunities to contribute to work they may find personally meaningful and impactful.

8.2 Arising, Evolving and Changing Organisational Factors

A core characteristic among all forms of action research is its focus on empowering and respecting the power of those in the centre of any given social situation to be able to understand and take action against problems that impact them (Boog, 2003; Brydon-Miller, et al. 2003). As the current study progressed, it was observed how these two functions of understanding and acting became intrinsically linked and dependent on one another, bringing about an immense depth to the discoveries and outcomes. While problem-posing critical dialogue (Freire, 1970) allowed participants to identify a number of factors influencing their organisation’s disability inclusive planning and practice during the initial action research phases of ‘look’ and ‘think’, once they began ‘acting’, many more became evident. From this point, participants began to encounter different and new factors of importance. Other factors that they were already aware of became more prevalent and understandable. Of most interest, participants began to influence and change some problematic factors as a result of their action. The way these discoveries evolved demonstrated the cyclical nature of action research in practice (Stringer, 2007), as it effectively enabled participants to continue deepening and strengthening their approach as they revisited phases of ‘look’, ‘think’ and ‘act’ (Stringer, 2007).

During the initial workshops each group composed their own action plan. After leaving the workshops, the original two action research groups combined and consolidated the two original plans. As they set about the first phase of taking action, they began encountering different or new factors responsible for having an impact in disability inclusive planning and practice. In the development of actions during the initial workshops, participants had nominated actions based on their understandings of barriers at play, but also with an element of strategic consideration. Some actions were chosen for their timeliness or time critical nature given the current status of other projects which would intersect with the area of action. Others were referenced for the perceived ease and speed in which the action could be completed. However, the participants soon came to understand that there were many factors at play influencing in these seemingly easy or timely actions, making them some of the most difficult to carry out. Often an action was not as timely as first thought as the complexity of intersecting projects either meant that the time had passed to interject extra considerations, or participants were required to wait until another element had fallen into place. These factors impacted the actions seeking to review recruitment policies and processes, including consideration of the pre-employment medical and psychometric testing. This action was stalled by the introduction of a new recruitment system. As such, the participants working to influence progress in this domain needed to pivot and redirect their attention into more incremental changes. Similarly, actions which had originally seemed like quick wins were wrapped up in layers of unexpected complexity in the form of organisational policies and rules. It was these actions that tended to cause participants the most frustration and led them to need to engage in further action research cycles as they encountered barriers and needed to readjust their approach. While these additional barriers were frustrating for the participants, their discovery ultimately contributed to uncovering new knowledge. These examples provided insight into some of the complexities which are often invisible to customers and community members who might be frustrated by a seeming lack of action and stalling in improving accessibility and inclusion. These occurrences again demonstrated the value of strategic integration of disability inclusive planning (Dawson, et al., 2019; Gill, et al. 2018; Jones, 2016) to avoid scenarios where these actions need to be inserted at a later date, or else arise as problems that require a quick fix.

In the initial workshops, participants discussed the impact of prioritisation and organisational buy-in on the outcomes of disability inclusive planning and practice. Once taking action, they continued to understand the relevancy of prioritisation and buy-in in influencing the success of their action. Their understandings were furthered by the discovery that the priorities of individual leaders were also important in determining success. Perhaps varying depending on the different areas and teams of the local council the participants worked within, some participants indicated they had experienced a high-level of support, prioritisation and buy-in to their efforts. Contributing to this receptiveness was a current positive attitude toward change or an interest and investment in the potential impacts of the action. In one instance, it was clear to see how an executive leader valued DEI as a core component of their leadership, as they supported one of the participants to gain budget and approval to progress their action and incorporate it within an existing process (Buengeler, et al., 2018). Other participants however experienced less favourable buy-in to their action. A number identified that for their teams and leaders there were too many other competing projects and actions demanding time and attention, making it difficult to elevate this area of action to a point of prioritisation. The issue of time was one which also affected the participants themselves, as they worked to progress the action plan. Many were working to carry out action on top of their usual workloads, rather than having these actions recognised as core, incorporated business with recognised time allocation. This was also seen by some participants as an indication of lack of leadership buy-in to the action research. This finding is suggestive of an absence or insufficient incorporation of DEI values within the leadership of other managers and leaders in this local council (Buengeler, et al., 2018). Collectively, these findings continued to confirm and further the understanding that leadership support, prioritisation and organisational buy-in are all factors which can heavily influence the success or otherwise of disability inclusive planning and practice.

The central purpose of practical action research is to identify and address problems (Dustman, et al., 2014; Stringer, 2007). As participants engaged in action, there emerged demonstrations of the significant impact of the action research in influencing and changing some organisational factors which were originally identified as causing detrimental impacts on disability inclusive planning and practice. Some of the actions chosen during the initial workshops and appearing in the final consolidated action plan were developed with the specific intent of addressing organisational barriers identified during the day. Concerned about the limited organisational knowledge surrounding the DIAP and what this may suggest about its implementation, participants devised an action to thoroughly review the existing DIAP and understand its current status. A secondary component of this action was to raise organisational awareness of the DIAP through a communications campaign. These actions were later identified as beneficial in addressing the originally identified problem of limited knowledge of the DIAP among personnel. The communications were also seen to positively impact organisational and leadership support and buy-in to the action research activities. Other changes occurred as a secondary consequence of the participants' actions. For example, in order to undertake many of the devised actions, participants were working collaboratively with one another, and also needing to reach out to further stakeholders across business areas of the council. These actions were reported to have a positive impact in breaking down organisational silos which had previously been indicated as detrimental to progressing work.

During the initial workshops participants identified that if requirements to consider accessibility and inclusion are not incorporated into planning tools and processes local council personnel need to use to guide their work, they simply will not be considered. Indeed, existing literature has already clearly identified that the integration of DEI policy with organisational strategy is a critical factor in determining its success (Dawson, et al., 2019; Gill, et al. 2018; Jones, 2016). In the current study, some participants made it their goal to begin to influence this integration. The ultimate strategic integration in local government is achieved through incorporation of policy and plans into the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (Dawson, et al., 2019; Office of Local Government NSW, n.d.). While the participants could not hope to influence this complete strategic integration of disability inclusive planning and practice within a 32-week period, a number of their actions made significant strides in initiating positive progress. The participants succeeded in introducing an accessibility checklist within the existing community facilities auditing tool; and instigated an initial update to the development control plan to enhance accessibility requirements. Other participants instigated action which would eventually serve the purpose of making strategic integration possible at a later time. By undertaking a review of the current DIAP participants were able to identify ways the next could be better incorporated. Other participants focused on addressing the identified problem of a shortfall in reported data on the prevalence of disability in the local government area. This action was undertaken with the view that with an appropriate awareness of the prevalence of disability, future planning would be enhanced and better supported. These findings demonstrate the immense resourcefulness and determination of the action research participants in working to incrementally address a very large and systemic protective organisational factor. Their actions demonstrated how quickly and effectively a problem of limited strategic integration can begin to be addressed.

The previous chapter discussed in detail the significant impact of the action research participants becoming champions of disability inclusive planning and practice, influencing the actions and behaviours of others. I raise this once again only to demonstrate how these actions, occurring as a result of the participants going about their action helped to address an identified organisational problem, and introduce to the local council an important protective factor which is known to support and enhance disability inclusive planning and practice (Dawson, et al., 2019). As identified in the initial workshops, the local council appeared to have few champions or allies invested in driving disability inclusive planning and practice. As the study developed it seemed that participants strove to take up these unofficial positions. As discussed in the previous chapter, participants went above and beyond what was anticipated or expected of the action research and started influencing barrier recognition and positive perspectives toward disability inclusive planning and practice among their colleagues. However, in carrying out the intended actions under the action plan alone, they also had the effect of driving support and buy-in to the overall mission. By reaching out to colleagues beyond the action research group to assist in complementary or supportive tasks or to seek approval or budget, there were impacts of building organisational awareness, spreading responsibility and others getting involved. The spread of influence is a recognised benefit of action research (Guertler, et al., 2020; Stringer, 2007) and an intention of Freire's (1970) pedagogy. This eventuality demonstrated how the fundamental activities alone of action research assisted in introducing an important factor which contributes to protecting the success of disability inclusive planning and practice.

8.3 The Power of Collaborative Action Research

The action research methodology (Stringer, 2007) and the Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1970) utilised in this research together relied on group-based learning, collaboration and action, and it is these features of the methodology which have contributed a great deal to the quality and depth to the study. As a Freirean informed action research study, the benefits of a collaborative approach were evident from the initial workshops. Eikeland (2012) asserted that group learning had value in allowing participants to test ideas while also learning from one another, while Guertler, et al. (2020) and Stringer (2007) have observed that the diversity of a group contributes to the effective contemplation of complex problems. In the current study, this was seen played out in action. Participants observed one another respond to the role reversal activities, and soon while problem-posing barriers and organisational factors, they were able to benefit from one another's experiences and knowledge to formulate understandings. Later participants further emphasised the benefit of the study in bringing together personnel from various business units of the council. It enabled diverse learning, to see where projects could link together across business areas and provided the opportunity for participants to find others with aligned ideas and interests.

After the initial workshops, the action research participants began to demonstrate great leadership over the project. They began making strategic decisions to maximise the effectiveness of their collective work. Firstly, they determined the communication methods they would utilise to stay connected and in regular contact. After completing the initial workshops, they decided to combine the two original action research groups and consolidate the two action plans. Once combined, the participants capitalised on their collective resources, wisdom and influence by strategically identifying their skills, interests and areas of organisational influence and broke-up and assigned tasks of the action plan accordingly. These particular qualities of action research appear to offer new understandings to the strategic benefits which can be gained as a result of collaborative action research. While some participants worked on their actions individually, others worked in smaller groups or pairs. To ensure the project stayed on track, regular catch-up opportunities remained planned throughout the duration of the study. Participants indicated that the collaborative work was not only beneficial in progressing the project itself, but it also contributed to their ongoing engagement. Many of the participants were highly passionate and driven which appeared to be conducive to creating these productive and inspiring collaborations. The power of this collaboration for enhancing engagement also appears underreported in literature examining action research in organisational contexts.

Among the action research participants, a strong group leader emerged. The group leader was highly credited among all participants for effectively bringing together the participants, maintaining their engagement, scheduling catch-up activities and keeping planned activities on track. The emergence of a group leader in this study presented an interesting question. Would the action research have had such strong impacts and outcomes without this presence? Certainly, Stringer's (2007) articulation of action research seems to call for a much greater presence of the action research facilitator than I could feasibly undertake. I was primarily connected with the participants only at key times in the action research, leaving the participants during significant periods of independent work in between the data collection points. In this component of the study design lay a significant risk. As most participants were carrying out action on top of their usual workloads, it would have been easy for other pressures and priorities to swamp the activities of the action research. Indeed, participants confirmed that without the group leader, they suspected their collaboration would have suffered and the actions associated with the action research would have lacked prioritisation. The group leader also explained how they consciously ensured that all participants felt included and had meaningful roles. This behaviour seems to have contributed to the overall quality of the engagement and collaborative work. It seems that the group leader had a strong role in helping to coordinate much of the success brought about by this study, and by doing so, has demonstrated the importance of a leader being present within an organisational collaborative action research study. This finding serves as both an important learning and caution to others undertaking similar action research studies. This finding also suggests the value of research facilitators identifying a group leader to safeguard the continual progression of the study while they are physically not in attendance.

I embarked upon this study aware of a potential limitation in its conduct. As an entirely voluntary research project, I would not be able to determine the membership of the action research group and as such, could not influence the inclusion of personnel with decision-making authority or budgetary control responsibilities. Elsey and Lathlean (2006) found that their study was negatively impacted by a lack of decision-making authority. While the action research participants in their study were able to effectively identify problems, their ability to take action and influence change was limited (Elsey & Lathlean, 2006). In the current study, four of the participants were of coordinator level, which made them likely to be leading a team and occupying middle-management positions. Other participants either occupied officer or graduate level positions. The study did not recruit any senior management or executive leaders with the more significant levels of decision-making power. There were some indications that a lack of leadership in the action research group did impact the appropriate prioritisation of actions among other organisational projects, causing participants to need to reevaluate their approach and target actions more directly aligned to their sphere of influence. However, as already explored, participants managed to influence significant change, agitating from their lower-level positions. These outcomes suggest that an absence of participants in leadership roles need not be an immediate predicter of lack of influence in action research. Perhaps contributing to their successes, the study had received executive leadership approval to proceed, and the participants strategically asked for their action plan to be endorsed by executive leadership after the initial workshops in the hope that this would assist in gaining buy-in and support. As already discussed, the collaborative, supportive and engaged nature of the action research group was also of significant benefit to the outcomes of the study. It is possible that if the action research study had attracted higher levels of management and leadership, the comfort and ease of connection among the group members may have been different, as the group may have been challenged by unequal power and hierarchical structures (Stringer, 2007).

8.4 Theory Meets and Enhances Practice

Practical action research is inherently inductive in how it seeks to discover new solutions to problems (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Jacobs, 2018). In doing so, practical forms of action research may apply existing theoretical concepts to understand their value in a practical context, or the study may create new theory as a result of the action (Cassell, & Johnson, 2006; Friedman, et al. 2009; Huxham & Vangen, 2003; Jacobs, 2018; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008). In the current study, both practices were at play. I constructed a unique theoretical and methodological framework by combining the upside-down-world analogy (Finkelstein, 1980), Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed (1970) and a practical action research study design (Stringer, 2007). The application of a Freirean approach within and action research methodology is certainly not a unique occurrence, as Freire’s pedagogy has long been observed within more participatory forms of action research (Boog, 2003). However, by adding Finkelstein's upside-down-world analogy (1989) to the study, I was effectively experimenting with a new combination. Despite the highly illustrative power of Finkelstein's (1989) analogy in exploring the social model of disability, its use in disability awareness training appears to be limited (Mathews, et al., 2008).

Throughout the present, and the previous chapter, many examples have come to the fore illustrating the effective ways these three concepts worked together to enhance the conduct and outcomes of the study. Applying Finkelstein's (1989) analogy through the application of role reversal activities at the beginning of the action research, participants were presented with very tangible illustrations of problems they would soon begin to address. The powerful nature of these demonstrations appeared to have been particularly helpful in moving participants into an active phase of problem-posing critical dialogue (Freire, 1970). During this phase they were able to identify barriers of concern, within and further afield than their local council. They then succeeded in identifying a number of organisational factors which may contribute to the exacerbation of barriers. As participants began to act, they were supported by the collaborative style of the action research, strategically enhancing their approach. As they took action, they began influencing the involvement of others, effectively spreading the impact of the action research and bringing about change (Freire, 1970). The 'look', 'think' and 'act' cyclical phases of the action research (Stringer, 2007) provided participants with a structure to work within and enabled them to continually evaluate and review their approaches. As a combination of this theoretical and methodological framework, this study saw participants develop deep, critical understandings and effectively bring about significant changes, improving the way their organisation undertook disability inclusive planning and practice.

8.5 Drawing Conclusions

In concluding this discussion chapter, it feels prudent to return to my original motivation for undertaking this study, discussed in chapter 1. Australian social policy calls on all levels of government to realise the rights of disabled people. Inherent to this obligation are the actions of personnel who make up these government organisations. I considered that in order to effectively bring about the necessary change needed to truly influence the realisation of rights, opportunities and inclusion, more attention needs to be granted to the organisational capability of these government organisations and their personnel. I therefore set about this study to investigate what methods could effectively assist large government organisations to excel in disability inclusive planning and practice. A crucial component of this investigation was to understand the factors within organisations that were either conducive or detrimental to inclusive practice. As a former local government professional, researcher and disabled person, I had observed a number of disparate occurrences which suggested the significance of organisational factors in influencing disability inclusive planning and practice. While I navigated complexities in my professional role; drew attention to disparities between some areas of inclusion practice gaining more attention than others in my research; and observed shortcomings in the delivery of inclusion initiatives in my personal life, I lacked a complete understanding of the organisational factors which drove these eventualities. I knew enough to suspect that in order to bring about quality outcomes in the current action research study, participants would need to uncover the organisational factors at play in their own organisation. With this knowledge, they would be better informed and equipped to act.

The third research question of this study aimed to uncover what organisational factors impact the outcomes of disability inclusive planning and practice. The phases of ‘look’ ‘think’ and ‘act’ of the action research framework (Stringer, 2007) alongside the problem-posing critical dialogue of Freire’s pedagogy (1970) effectively facilitated the discovery of these factors in a progressive fashion throughout the study. As they identified these factors, participants came to understand their impact, and in some cases were able to effectively influence those factors recognised as being problematic. To start, as participants began problem-posing in the initial workshops, they identified current factors influencing inclusive practice. At this stage the impact of insufficient strategic integration between the DIAP and other organisational strategy became evident, demonstrated by a lack of organisational awareness for the plan and prioritisation of disability inclusive action. Further, participants noted that the organisation had limited champions present in the organisation driving disability inclusive action. Later in the action research, it became clear that the participant’s actions had effectively influenced these particular problematic factors. Many participants adopted roles of champions, effectively spreading awareness and engaging others in action. Many participants also managed to make changes which began the process of improving strategic integration of disability inclusive planning within other organisational strategy. These outcomes demonstrated the significance of action research in effectively identifying factors of importance, and facilitating positive change and development toward problematic organisational factors.

Participants also gained a new appreciation for some of the complexity that can accompany work to enhance disability inclusive planning and practice. Actions which had originally seemed easy or timely were found to be influenced by multiple other projects, rules, circumstances and priorities. The discovery of these complexities either led participants to begin tackling the unforeseen additional components of the action or revising their action and attempting something else. It is notable that one of the few actions devised by participants with an intent to address the underrepresentation of disabled people within the local council was impacted by these complexities. The participants had explored the absence of disabled voices in organisational settings, presuming that this invisibility could contribute to lack of presence and prioritisation in planning and practice. Further, they considered barriers to employment in such organisations which exacerbate this invisibility. As such, participants wanted to review their local council's recruitment processes of pre-employment medicals and psychometric testing to identify and reduce potential barriers to employment for disabled people. This action however was made impossible to pursue due to the competing priority of delivering a new recruitment system. Rather than the introduction of the new system being seen as an ideal opportunity to address the identified need, the additional component appeared to have been a consideration deemed appropriate to delay. The immense problem of discrimination in employment, worsened by the persistent failure of any Australian social policies in making substantial improvements in decades (AHRC, 2016; Buckland, et al., 2024; Sackville, et al., 2023c) is one which has surfaced many times throughout this thesis. The findings of the research have also highlighted how the resultant lack of representation of disabled people in organisational contexts is having further detrimental impacts in disability inclusive planning and practice. The findings here have demonstrated how powerfully and effectively organisational factors can derail an attempt to address this problem. This action research was not successful in influencing this particularly stubborn problem, which suggests a need for a more significant and leadership supported approach. This finding also provides important insight when considering how employment could be effectively approached and influenced from a government policy level. These broader strategies may need to take greater account of the organisational factors on the ground which can be detrimental to achieving progress.

Factors of organisational prioritisation and buy-in evolved to have increasingly significant impact as the participants pursued their actions. These factors either had positive or negative impacts depending on the individual leaders the participants were working under. Where leaders viewed the action as a priority, the change was seen as a positive prospect and resources and time allocated to address it. Where the actions did not receive the same prioritisation, there was no additional time permitted to give attention to the action research activities within the participants' standard workload. In the former scenario, it was evident what a powerful positive bearing this leadership support had in influencing the success of action. In the latter scenario, participants needed to work to ensure their action remained within their focus while their existing workload challenged the prioritisation of actions. It is in these findings that the cruciality of leadership prioritisation (Dawson, et al, 2019) in the advancement of disability inclusive planning and practice is reiterated.

In answering research question three, these findings have also contributed to addressing the fourth and final research question posed in this study, working to understand what impacts in organisational knowledge and capability can be observed as a result of an action research approach seeking to assist a large organisation improve its disability inclusive planning and practice. As a significant outcome of this action research study saw participants identifying and addressing organisational factors, the resultant outcomes have demonstrated immense organisational learning and the development of capability. In identifying organisational factors of importance and relevancy to disability inclusive planning and practice, the participants have effectively increased the capability of their local council to both capitalise on those factors which are conducive to positive change, and address those which are detrimental. In continuing to answer the fourth research question, conclusions can be drawn from the findings relating to the collaborative nature of action research. By coming together as a group, sharing observations, knowledge, resources and support, the action research group effectively demonstrated an example of organisational capability development. The combining of skills and knowledge effectively created a more powerful collective presence which was influential and effective in bringing about change and development elsewhere in the organisation. Here the direct benefits of action research are seen for its strength in mobilising and empowering a group of personnel. Finally, the unique theoretical framework developed to support the conduct of this study was instrumental in fostering learning in a safe and supportive environment, enabling participants to go forward and utilise and spread their learning within the organisation. Personnel did not have to be a participant in the action research to benefit from the increased knowledge and capability that the study brought about.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: Implications for Practice, Recommendations and Future Directions

NSW local councils are legislated to engage in disability inclusive planning and practice through the maintenance of a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) (*Disability Inclusion Act*, 2014). However, this obligation alone cannot possibly guarantee quality outcomes. The full realisation of this policy seeking to advance the inclusion of disabled people relies on each local council taking appropriate actions to proactively uphold rights by enhancing accessibility and inclusivity of policies, processes and service delivery. In undertaking this study, I sought to understand what methods or practices effectively assist these large government organisations to engage in quality disability inclusive planning and practice. Specifically, my attention was drawn to considering how the personnel within these large local councils could be supported through capability development to carry out meaningful action and practice.

I had grown concerned with the popular method of delivering disability awareness training utilising disability simulation activities based on reinforcing deficit-based medical understandings of disability. This method typically requires learners to imitate a physical, cognitive or sensory impairment while attempting to go about everyday tasks. Contributing to my concern was a finding that the majority of NSW local councils plan to deliver disability awareness training under their DIAPs, but generally do not specify what method they will be using to conduct the training. As disability simulation has become so prevalent as an accepted experiential learning method within disability awareness training, I considered that it would be a likely choice that councils would gravitate toward. I therefore sought to examine an alternative method, which, if successful would help learners understand disability from a social model perspective and lead them to be able to identify barriers and make change. This role reversal method, only documented a handful of times before, aims to replicate physical, information, communication or attitudinal barriers as they are understood from a social model of disability.

To undertake this research, I utilised a practical action research methodology (Stringer, 2007), combining its use with Vick Finkelstein's (1989) upside-down-world analogy and Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed. The resultant study design allowed me to explore research questions examining the thoughts, feelings, behaviours, learning and actions arising from the role reversal activities; the organisational factors that influenced disability inclusive planning and practice in a local council; and, overall, the impact the action research approach had in influencing organisational knowledge and capability for disability inclusive planning and practice. The insights gained from this study, addressing these questions are fully detailed and analysed across the two preceding discussion chapters. As I conclude this thesis, this chapter will provide implications for practice, recommendations and suggestions for future directions based on the key findings of the research.

9.1 The Potential of Role Reversal Activities

Participants entered this study welcomed by barriers challenging their participation and inclusion. The confrontation caused by the barriers, arose as being a critical component in initiating the learning that would follow. The responses of participants, as they went on to analyse the activities demonstrated they had developed clear understandings of the social model of disability and appreciated the impact of barriers in the lives of people who experience them. With this understanding they were effectively able to move on to identifying other barriers which may exist within their own local council and further afield. As the study progressed, the full impacts of the role reversal activities were seen in the actions of participants as they took on roles of champions, influencing others to understand and act to break down social barriers. The role reversal activities alone, however, cannot be given full credit for these impactful results. Foremost, the strength of the learning experienced was attributed to the fact that the activities and the preceding dialogue was facilitated by disabled people. By openly sharing and exchanging stories we fostered a sense of safety, relatability and relevancy, all of which contributed to allowing vulnerable exploration and learning; building trust; and deepening empathy. This dialogue was a feature of the Freirean (1970) approach applied throughout the study and also provided the invaluable opportunity of time to process, debrief and reflect. These steps are essential to ensure that participants are not remaining in a phase of confrontation and are allowed the opportunity to develop a complete understanding.

The efficacy of role reversal activities has been considered with other supporting factors in place, and as such, I recommend that they are only carried out with these essential components alongside, delivered as just one component of a larger disability awareness training package. They are a tool to provide experiential learning and must be followed by a significant opportunity for debrief and reflection. This phase of reflection is also where participants can apply their learning to situations they encounter, begin to identify circumstances and factors impacting barriers and identify potential inclusive solutions. Critically, this entire process must be designed and delivered by disabled facilitators, able to ensure the accuracy of the demonstration; help the participants to make sense of the barriers; explain the social model of disability through storytelling; and willingly create a safe space for vulnerable exploration and learning.

Future research and application of role reversal activities may seek to further develop and test the repertoire of suitable role reversal barriers. In doing so, caution should always be exercised in ensuring the barriers are truly replicating a social barrier and not inadvertently imitating an impairment. There is a risk as this practice is adopted by others that the role reversal activities could become blurred with disability simulation activities and reinforce messaging, which is now recognised as incorrect, harmful and not conducive to positive actions. Any person implementing role reversal activities should ensure they have a strong understanding of the social model of disability. Further research may seek to investigate the impact of role reversal activities in other organisations, or among different target groups, such as among children, community groups or volunteers. Research investigating the impact of role reversal activities is recommended to ensure the study design allows for medium or long-term data collection, so as to properly understand the impacts of the activities once participants have had time to apply their new understandings.

9.2 The Importance of Prioritising Disability Leadership and Representation

As has already been noted, the involvement of disabled people as facilitators of the role reversal activities proved an essential element in ensuring the depth of understanding and learning experienced by participants. Apart from this most clear enhancement to learning however, my presence as a disabled researcher, and that of the Expert Contributors had many more benefits that the data analysis helped to highlight. Firstly, the construction of the role reversal activities were based entirely on lived experience, ensuring their accuracy. Secondly, in observing and analysing the responses of participants to role reversal activities, we were efficiently able to determine the comparability between their experiences and ours. I also felt that I was well positioned to be able to determine if the participants were demonstrating an accurate understanding of the social model of disability. I and the Expert Contributors also brought with us diverse understandings and knowledge of disability, beyond our own experiences and were careful not to present our own realities as the only experience of disability. The absolute cruciality of these components to our facilitation arose as I came to understand that historically, there appears to have been little objection made to the appropriateness of non-disabled people delivering training about us and our lives. As such, highly inappropriate practices, including disability simulation training techniques have prevailed for many decades causing immense harm, while likely doing little to bring about meaningful action toward the realisation of rights and inclusion. Further, this research discussed the significant invisibility of disabled people in organisational settings and in the agenda of diversity, equity and inclusion work. This invisibility was found to negatively impact the prioritisation and progression of disability inclusive planning and practice.

These findings lead to a number of recommendations for future practice and research. Foremost, non-disabled people should respectfully step away from the design and delivery of disability awareness training. The design and delivery of disability awareness training completed by anyone except disabled people must be recognised as posing an unacceptable risk, while also taking away from the immeasurable benefits of disabled facilitation. Organisations, when seeking consultants or employees to undertake the delivery of disability awareness training should take care to ensure their engagement of suitably qualified and skilled disabled facilitators, working from a social interpretation of disability. Disabled people engaged to deliver training should be cognisant of the need to not only represent their own experience of disability but be aware of and be able to knowledgably discuss the diversity of disability. The invisibility of disabled people must be better recognised for negatively impacting the prioritisation and progress of disability inclusion planning and practice, and as such, organisations should work to increase the genuine representation of disabled people as employees, councillors and committee members as a core and definitive component of their disability inclusion agenda. In order to address this most important priority, the most impenetrable barriers impacting the successful recruitment and employment of disabled people must be given significant attention and resourced with the necessary support, time, prioritisation and leadership required to make effective change. Future research may follow the progress of any such practice which seeks to succeed in addressing and elevating the representation of disabled people in organisational settings to allow the learnings to be captured and proliferated. Much research exists surrounding the employment inequalities experienced by disabled people, it is time that this research is better recognised and utilised to shape positive change.

9.3 Participation in Change Making and The Spread of Influence

This action research study relied on voluntary, self-nomination to recruit participants within the host local council. I witnessed significant engagement, motivation and passion among the research participants. 10 of the 13 participants remained highly engaged with the study throughout its 32 weeks. While carrying out the actions devised during the initial workshops, they also became influential champions of disability inclusion. Their impact in spreading knowledge, understanding and action was significant. Some of their actions as champions were carried out to progress their actions, where they engaged further stakeholders to assist with activities, or else sought approval or resourcing. Other behaviours as champions however were unanticipated and highly positive outcomes of the action research. Many participants began to influence the learning of others by helping to spread awareness for the impact of barriers impacting disabled people within their council and further afield. Apart from the success of the research activities in effectively fostering engagement, all participants brought with them existing motivations and interests to the study. This could have been perceived as a weakness or limitation of this study, as its voluntary participation meant that recruitment would not capture those disinterested in disability inclusion, who would perhaps benefit from the educative opportunity most. However, as the analysis evolved, I came to determine that this demonstration was one of the study's greatest strengths. Owing to this high level of engagement, participants were united in their goal and were able to learn in a safe, supportive, respectful and encouraging network. This eventuality may well have been different if participants were obligated to participate against their will and may have negatively affected the supportive group dynamics.

Given these findings I have come to recommend that a learning experience such as this, remains an activity for voluntary participation in practice and research. The components of role reversal, problem-posing, critical dialogue and taking action are activities reliant on engagement and openness to learn. The activities also tend to demand a level of vulnerable exploration, setbacks, failure and resilience inherent in continually repeating the cycles of action research to progress development. It seems unlikely that mandatory participation, without a level of existing motivation could foster comparable levels of engagement and commitment. I suggest that future research could test my hypothesis that when a learning experience such as this action research is rolled out gradually over many months and years, capturing a small group of motivated, voluntary participants in each intake, the impact over time in progressing disability inclusive planning and practice within an organisation would be immense. In each intake, participants would spread their influence as champions, slowly developing interest and motivation in others. This interest may then lead to further voluntary participation.

9.4 The Impact of Action Research for Identifying Barriers and Solutions

In this study, I employed a practical action research approach (Stringer, 2007) and complemented it with the theoretical concepts offered by Finkelstein (1989) and Freire (1970). The overall study therefore was built on the action research pillars of 'look', 'think' and 'act' (Stringer, 2007), but enhanced with additional techniques to strengthen and deepen the learning and action. This is believed to have been a new and unique approach applied in action research. The approach created a safe and engaging environment for learning which enabled participants to discover a vast amount of information, effectively developing the capability of their organisation to improve its approach and success in disability inclusive planning and practice. Foremost, the participants were able to identify social barriers at play within the community and council. They were also able to analyse the components of the barriers and find the antecedents that may have led to their formation. With this knowledge, they were able to begin considering how to address such barriers. The participants then moved into exploring the local council context, uncovering and discussing factors within which may have been impacting the success of disability inclusion, including limited strategic integration and prioritisation; siloed working; insufficient communications and awareness, few champions and non-apparent representation of disabled people.

As participants began to take action, working from their action plan, they learned about further organisational factors which impacted their efforts including competing projects, unanticipated complexity, rules and policies surrounding actions which had originally seemed timely to address, or easy quick wins. Participants also discovered the value of leadership support, the importance of time to devote to the actions, and the benefits of the collaborative, supportive nature of their own action research group. While they engaged in action, many participants began to address factors which were previously identified as problematic, including improving the strategic integration of disability inclusive planning; increasing communications; breaking down silos between business areas to enhance working relationships and progress; and proliferating awareness and the importance of disability inclusive planning and practice through their actions as champions. In successfully identifying, encountering and developing all these factors of importance, the action research approach has proven itself as an invaluable tool in advancing disability inclusive planning and practice in an organisational setting.

These findings lead to a number of recommendations for practice. Firstly, organisations, and in particular local councils can learn directly from the discoveries of this research and begin to address factors which may be impeding disability inclusive planning and practice and strengthen those which are conducive to positive development. While the central aim of action research is not to be generalisable, many findings could feasibly be seen to apply in similar organisations. It is likely for example, that working on elevating disability inclusive planning and practice to a status of priority; integrating it within other organisational strategy; and building disabled representation and seeking out organisational champions will likely have highly positive outcomes. Alternatively, however, organisations may see the benefit of engaging personnel in a similar action research approach, or comparable group-based action learning process to work on discovering the factors of importance specific to their organisation. The benefits of undertaking this process within an organisation, rather than acting on the findings alone from this study are significant. Personnel can benefit from the learning brought about by the role reversal activities, problem-posing critical dialogue and practical experience of taking action. Their connection as a motivated, engaged group will bring about immense strength in collective influence. Their actions as champions, influencing and bringing others into the movement of change and development will become invaluable contributions to advancing disability inclusive planning and practice.

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Appendix A - Prevalence of Disability Awareness Training and Education Actions in NSW Local Council Disability Inclusion Action Plans

To understand the extent of NSW local councils' intentions to deliver disability awareness training to their personnel, I undertook a desktop review of all available Disability Inclusion Action Plans (DIAPs). These DIAPs were sourced during two different phases of data collection. During the first in September and October 2022, many councils had not yet produced a second generation DIAP. The second phase of data collection in February 2024 allowed me to source newer DIAPs since released. Records reflect the date when the DIAP was originally downloaded.

Intentions to deliver disability awareness training

Number issued in coding	Findings	Number of councils
1	Council DIAPs specifying actions to undertake disability awareness training for personnel	73
2	Council DIAPs with non-specific actions referencing education about disability or inclusion for personnel	3
3	Council DIAPs with no reference to undertaking education or training	20
4	Councils with no current DIAP found	32
	Total councils with a current DIAP at 09 February 2024	96

Findings associated with NSW local council DIAPs

Council	Finding	Date accessed
Albury City Council	1	24 Sept 2022
Armidale Regional Council	1	03 Feb 2024
Ballina Shire Council	1	03 Feb 2024
Balranald Shire Council	3	25 Sept 2022
Bathurst Regional Council	1	25 Sept 2022

Bayside Council.	1	03 Feb 2024
Bega Valley Shire Council	1	25 Sept 2022
Bellingen Shire Council	1	25 Sept 2022
Berrigan Shire Council	3	25 Sept 2022
Blacktown City Council	3	25 Sept 2022
Bland Shire Council	4	03 Feb 2024
Blayney Shire Council	1	03 Feb 2024
Blue Mountains City Council	1	03 Feb 2024
Bogan Shire Council	4	03 Feb 2024
Bourke Shire Council	1	27 Sept 2022
Brewarrina Shire Council	4	03 Feb 2024
Broken Hill Shire Council.	1	27 Sept 2022
Burwood City Council	1	28 Sept 2022
Byron Shire Council	1	28 Sept 2022
Cabonne Council	1	03 Feb2024
Camden Council	1	03 Feb 2024
Campbelltown City Council	1	03 Feb 2024
City of Canada Bay Council	1	30 Sept 2022
Canterbury-Bankstown City Council	1	28 Sept 2022
Carrathool Shire Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Central Coast Council	1	30 Sept 2022
Central Darling Shire Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Cessnock City Council	1	30 Sept 2022
Clarence Valley Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Cobar Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Coffs Harbour City Council	1	30 Sept 2022

Coolamon Shire Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Coonamble Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Cowra Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Cumberland City Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Dubbo Regional Council	3	1 Oct 2022
Dungog Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Edward River Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Eurobodalla Council	1	1 Oct 2022
Fairfield City Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Federation Council	1	02 Oct 2022
Forbes Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
George's River Council	1	03 Oct 2022
Gilgandra Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Glen Innes Severns Council	3	04 Feb 2024
Goulburne Mulwaree Council	3	03 Oct 2022
Greater Hume Council	1	03 Oct 2022
Griffith City Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Gunnedah Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Gwydir Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Hawkesbury City Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Hay Shire Council	3	04 Feb 2024
Hills Shire Council	1	04 Oct 2022
Hilltops Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Hornsby Shire Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Hunters Hill Council	1	04 Feb 2024

Inner West Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Inverell Shire Council	4	04 Feb 2024
Junee Council	3	04 Oct 2022
Kempsey Shire Council	1	04 Oct 2022
Kiama Council	2	04 Feb 2024
Ku-Ring-Gai Council	1	04 Oct 2022
Kyogle Council	4	05 Feb 2024
Lachlan Shire council	1	04 Oct 2022
Lake Macquarie City Council	1	05 Feb 2024
Lane Cove Council	1	04 Feb 2024
Leeton Shire Council	1	05 Feb 2024
Lismore City Council	4	05 Feb 2024
Lithcow City Council	3	05 Feb 2024
Liverpool City Council	4	05 Feb 2024
Liverpool Plains Shire Council	3	04 Oct 2022
Lockhart Shire Council	3	04 Oct 2022
Maitland City Council	1	05 Feb 2024
Mid Coast Council	1	04 Oct 2022
Mid-Western Regional Council	1	04 Oct 2022
Moree Plains Shire Council	4	06 Feb 2024
Mosman Council	1	06 Feb 2024
Murray River Council	3	06 Feb 2024
Murrumbidgee Council,	4	06 Feb 2024
Muswellbrook Shire Council	3	06 Feb 2024
Nambucca Valley Council	3	04 Oct 2022
Narrabri Shire Council	1	04 Oct 2022

Narrandera Shire Council	1	04 Oct 2022
Narromine Shire Council	3	06 Feb 2024
City of Newcastle	1	04 Oct 2022
North Sydney Council	1	06 Feb 2024
Northern Beaches Council	1	04 Oct 2022
Oberon Council	4	06 Feb 2024
Orange City Council	1	03 Feb 2024
Parkes Shire Council .	1	05 Oct 2022
City of Parramatta	1	05 Oct 2022
Penrith City Council	1	06 Oct 2022
Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	2	06 Oct 2022
Port Stevens Council	4	06 Feb 2024
Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council	1	06 Feb 2024
Randwick Council	1	07 Feb 2024
Richmond Valley Council	1	07 Feb 2024
City of Ryde	1	06 Oct 2022
Shellharbour Council	3	07 Feb 2024
Shoalhaven City Council	1	07 Oct 2022
Singleton Council	1	07 Feb 2024
Snowy Monaro Shire Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Snowy Valley Council	1	08 Feb 2024
Strathfield Council	1	07 Oct 2022
Sutherland Shire Council	1	07 Oct 2022
City of Sydney	1	07 Oct 2022
Tamworth Regional Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Temora Shire Council	3	08 Feb 2024

Tenterfield Shire Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Tweed Shire Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Upper Hunter Shire Council	1	08 Feb 2024
Upper Lachlan Shire Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Uralla Shire Council	3	07 Oct 2022
Wagga Wagga City Council	3	07 Oct 2022
Walsha Council	3	08 Feb 2024
Walgette Shire Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Warren Shire Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Warrumbungle Shire Council	1	08 Feb 2024
Waverley Council	1	07 Oct 2022
Weddin Shire Council	4	08 Feb 2024
Wentworth Shire Council	1	07 Oct 2022
Willoughby City Council	1	09 Feb 2024
Wingecarribee Shire Council	1	07 Oct 2022
Wollondilly Shire Council	1	09 Feb 2024
Wollongong City Council	2	07 Oct 2022
Woollahra Municipal Council	1	07 Oct 2022
Yass Valley Council	4	09 Feb 2024

Appendix B – Expert Contributors Interview Schedule

As a reflective process, each member of the Expert Contributors Group met with the researcher to discuss their thoughts, feelings, perceptions and observations resulting from helping deliver the role reversal activities. This follow-up allowed Expert contributors to discuss the process.

- How accurate do you think the representations of social barriers were?
- What are your perceptions around how the members of the workshops interpreted and dealt with the role reversal activities?
- What differences if any, did you notice comparing role reversal activities and simulation activities?
- What personal reflections did the role reversal activities bring up for you?
- Were there any differences/indications in the participants in regard to their understanding and empathy of socially derived barriers?
  - What responses/behaviours/language did you notice around their responses?
- Did you learn anything new during the problem-posing and critical dialogue? If so, what?
- Reflecting on how you left the workshop, how confident are you that the participants of the workshop are going to take action and make changes in their organisation as a result of the project?

Appendix C – Personnel Interview Schedule

For local council personnel participants

As a final reflective process, each member of the workshop group met with the researcher to discuss their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, actions and behaviours resulting from the action research experience. This final follow-up allowed participants to discuss the process and be able to open-up more than they may in a group setting.

Researcher notes:

- Reminder of confidentiality and anonymity
- Recording and additional verbal consent
- State for recorder, name, times date

Thoughts and feelings

- How did the role reversal activities make you feel?
- How have these role reversal activities influenced your work?
- How have these experiences influenced your understandings around disability and inclusion?
- What personal questions or reflections arose for you during the activities?
- What did you observe about your colleagues responses to these activities?

Learning and thinking

- How useful was the problem posing dialogue between you and your colleagues and the Expert Contributors group for understanding and addressing disability related barriers, discrimination etc?

Actions

- How did the role reversal activities shape your actions going forward?
- What actions did you take?
- What challenges did you come up against?
- What was it like working with your colleagues after the workshops?
- What will you continue to do?

Appendix D - Summary of Results

Engagement, Investment and Future Intentions

These results speak of the engagement that was present in the project, explore what inspired it, and what the participants made of their engagement.

- The project saw strong engagement among participants, suggested factors leading to engagement, inferred by participants include:
  - The participants' own motivations for being involved
  - The activities in the workshops
  - The story-telling and personal experiences shared by researcher and expert contributors
  - Feeling safe to explore and talk about disability
  - The group dynamics and leadership shown among the group keeping everyone on track and engaged
- From early on the participants showed initiative in how they would keep the project rolling along, with decisions such as merging the two initial workshop groups, using project tracking software and meeting regularly
- There was one clear group leader. Every participant acknowledged this person for keeping the project on track, motivating and encouraging
- Towards the end of the project, all participating members had clear ideas of what they wanted to do going forward beyond the project
- Project attrition was low, 3/13
- The group identified that post-project they wanted to establish an ongoing project group and recruit new members to keep the work going
- Despite challenges, the project was sufficiently motivating to keep going

Impacts, Learning and Influencing

The different stages of learning and recognition of barriers and their consequences saw the development of further empathy, personal changes and impacts in the organisation.

- A range of impacts of the project were found including:
  - Early learning, asking questions, challenging assumptions and existing beliefs, proposing answers, ideas, further critical examinations

  - Identifying barriers, demonstrating awareness of

  - Personal impacts including, having a disability lens over future work, working to influence others with their learning (sharing the activities with others), continuing training and learning, even considering a change in direction in career

  - Organisational impacts, the organisation benefited from the interventions that the group led, the outcomes they brought about, the change they made, the personal focuses on accessibility and inclusivity

- Immediate emotions experienced after the role reversal activities included, confusion, frustration, ‘I don’t have the skills for this!’, left out, problem solving, inconvenienced, ‘is it a test?’, confronted. Shock, panic, anxiety, confusion was most common

- Realising the impact of barriers on people such as missing out, feeling excluded, misinterpretation, preventing productivity, missing important things

- Reflections on the role reversal activities after some time had past, included, empathy, understanding spectrum of disability, reality check, importance of looking beyond own experiences, guilt, realising privilege, and for expert contributor, feeling validation around the accuracy of the barriers and the responses

Understanding, Responding, Planning, Acting

These results illustrate how the group responded to their awareness and began devising methods to address organisational challenges, complexities, contexts.

- Identification of general organisational factors that have or continue to impact disability inclusive practice and progress. Barriers identified ranged from simply a lack of understanding about disability, limited data, other priorities, council siloed action, not being aware of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) and or, Disability Inclusion Reference Group

- The group articulated learning from previous DIAP implementation and devised strategies for more successful implementation of the next, including better internal communications and inclusive culture development. External actions included stronger community engagement

- The participants started to recognise potential challenges after the initial enthusiasm. As they progressed with their actions, they became further cognisant of the challenges, organisational complexities at play. Challenges included getting buy-in, finding time to act, other competing priorities

- Actions the group engaged with included improving data collection about disability, planning controls and auditing of community facilities, employment and recruitment practices, organisational policies and practices, digital accessibility, events and representation. The arising impacts of these actions are likely to be discussed under the previous theme of ‘Impacts, Learning and Influencing’