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# Stop fearing blindness! Visually impaired people reflect on the ethics of sighted prospective teachers simulating visual impairment

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## Stop fearing blindness! Visually impaired people reflect on the ethics of sighted prospective teachers simulating visual impairment

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### ABSTRACT

Disability simulations have developed as a popular professional development tool to help increase knowledge and awareness of disability and facilitate pedagogical learning among prospective and pre-service teachers. The aim of this research is to explore the ethics of sighted people simulating visual impairment from the perspective of visually impaired people. Participants were nine visually impaired adults who read vignettes narrating simulation experiences of prospective physical education teachers in a university setting before being interviewed about their perceptions of what they had read. Interviews were conducted via telephone, and were recorded, transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis. The themes constructed and discussed in this article from an ethical perspective are: (1) involving visually impaired people in simulated experiences; (2) reinforcing negative attitudes about visually impaired people; (3) tensions involving touch for pedagogical purposes; and (4) adapting activities and grouping pupils in relation to 'ability'.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

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physical education;  
teacher education;  
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visual impairment

### POINTS OF INTEREST

- In this article we explore what visually impaired people say about sighted people wearing blindfolds and doing activities to learn about visual impairment.
- Visually impaired people say that they should be involved in the planning and delivery of the activities.
- Visually impaired people are concerned that if they are not involved, the activities may reinforce negative attitudes about them.

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- Some visually impaired people say that teachers should not use touch to teach visually impaired pupils. Others say that touch is important for supporting learning and preventing injury.
- If touch is used to teach visually impaired pupils, when and how it is used must be decided by the visually impaired pupil and discussed with the teacher.
- Visually impaired people are concerned that grouping pupils in relation to 'ability' may result in exclusion.

## Introduction

Disabled pupils, including those visually impaired, participate less often and experience a narrower range of activities when compared to their age-peers in physical education classes (Haegele and Zhu 2017; Maher 2017) and after school clubs (Haycock and Smith 2011). Experiences like these have positioned physical education as a context where feelings of marginalization can be common for disabled pupils, perhaps more so than any other curriculum subject, with many reporting instances of discrimination and belittlement from teachers and peers (Fitzgerald 2005; Haegele et al. 2020; Holland and Haegele 2021; Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson 2010). Some of the reasons for these disparate opportunities and experiences include inappropriate resourcing and support (Maher and Macbeth 2014), the prevalence of normative and ableist performative cultures in physical education (Evans and Davies 2014), the unwillingness of physical education teachers to modify pre-existing curricula and activities (Haegele et al. 2019), and physical education teachers being inadequately prepared through teacher education for their role as inclusive educators (Maher and Fitzgerald 2020).

Regarding better preparing physical education teachers to teach disabled pupils, teacher education processes have been identified as fertile ground for focusing on the concepts of inclusion and disability, and pedagogical practices that are suitable for disabled pupils (Vickerman and Maher 2018). Thus, Coates (2012) advocates for gaining 'hands on' experience supporting disabled pupils in educational contexts. However, this is not always possible. Special schools, for example, can be difficult to access because there are few in some geographical locations and it can be difficult to quality assure the physical education delivered in some of these settings (Maher et al. 2019). Moreover, it is not uncommon for prospective and pre-service teachers to be kept away from mainstream school classes that include disabled pupils and those with special educational needs because they are deemed 'challenging' for those learning about teaching and learning (Morley et al. 2021). There are also ethical issues associated with sending unqualified 'teachers', many of whom will never have experienced a special school setting or integrated classes, into those spaces to engage in pedagogical

experimentation which will influence the educational experiences of disabled pupils. This has led some (e.g. Leo and Goodwin 2013; Maher, Williams, and Sparkes 2020; Sparkes, Martos-Garcia, and Maher 2019) to use *simulations* to increase knowledge and awareness of disability and facilitate pedagogical learning among prospective and pre-service physical education teachers.

Simulations form a cornerstone of initial teacher education and continued professional development. They are a pedagogical technique that according to Lean et al. (2006), 'aim to imitate a system, entity, phenomenon, or process' (p. 228). It is common practice, for instance, for pre-service teachers to simulate learning scenarios that involve teaching fellow trainee teachers as preparation for teaching children in schools. To clarify, disability simulations involve non-disabled people using equipment such as wheelchairs, blindfolds, and noise-cancelling ear defenders to cognitively and affectively imagine themselves in the position of a disabled person; to embody the disabled Other, typically for pedagogical purposes (e.g. Maher, Williams, and Sparkes 2020). This practice is anchored in the moral philosophical assumption that we can transcend epistemic chasms through moral imagination (MacKenzie and Scully 2007). Often, this imaginative embodiment will involve those simulating disability exploring natural and built environments to learn about issues relating to 'access' (e.g. Leo and Goodwin 2013), and by either participating in taught sessions while simulating disability, or teaching a lesson to peers, some or all of whom are simulating disability (e.g. Maher et al. 2019; Sparkes, Martos-Garcia, and Maher 2019).

Generally, the findings of research focused on disability simulations are mixed. Some have reported increased awareness of and empathy towards disabled people (Flower, Burns, and Bottsford-Miller 2007), while others have noted important pedagogical learning that occurred during simulated experiences (Maher, Williams, and Sparkes 2020). This research is cast against a backdrop of historic claims made by French (1992) that disability simulations individualise and medicalise disability, and by focusing excessively on problems and difficulties, provide false and misleading information, and inculcate negative, rather than positive, attitudes towards disabled people. This purview aligns with more recent research by Sparkes, Martos-Garcia, and Maher (2019), who found that disability simulations may unintentionally contribute towards the construction of negative attitudes and judgements about disabled people among pre-service teachers. While some research into simulating disability for pedagogical purposes in physical education has included the perspectives of disabled people (e.g. Leo and Goodwin 2016; Maher, Haegele, and Sparkes 2022; Sparkes, Martos-Garcia, and Maher 2019), hardly any (Kiger 1992 being a notable exception) has focused on the ethics of non-disabled people engaging in the process of simulation, and none has focused on the ethics of simulating visual impairment. Given this situation, in this article we explore the ethical dilemmas identified by a group of

visually impaired people regarding the simulation of this impairment by non-disabled sighted people.

## Methodology

### *Researcher positionality*

Our work is informed by the principles of social constructionism that, according to Sparkes and Smith (2008), accepts that material and biological entities exist beyond the person regardless of whether they are aware of them or not but that these entities are not simply 'there' in an unmediated form for actors in the world. Rather, these entities are given meaning by actors as they actively construct their everyday worlds in ways that have consequences for self and others. Therefore, while visual impairment is brought about due to material changes in the biological body that impose themselves on the person, just how this change is given meaning by self and others, along with the consequences that go with this, depends on how the person is positioned in society and the stories made available to them about visual impairment (Whitburn and Michalko 2020). Regarding the socially constructed category of visual impairment, multiple realities therefore exist in relation to each other about how visual impairment is experienced and given meaning by the person with this impairment and others they are involved with in their social world either directly (e.g. family members, teacher educators, fellow students) or indirectly (e.g. government legislation).

In terms of our own embodiment, we, the authors, are white, heterosexual, cisgender men. None of us currently self-identify as disabled. Furthermore, even though all three of us require glasses to go about our daily lives, none of us has a visual impairment as defined in the United Kingdom by National Health Service (NHS) (2018) criteria. Accordingly, we followed the guidance offered by Callus (2019) about non-disabled people researching disability. Throughout the entire research process, therefore, we self-reflexively considered the ways and extent to which our positionality, embodied experiences, and our associated beliefs about visual impairment, might shape our methodological decisions, our interactions with participants, and our analysis of the data.

Our work is located within a critical disability studies framework and underpinned by the principle of 'nothing about us without us' (Charlton 2000). It was vital, therefore, that visually impaired people were an integral part of our research in that we were committed to listening and learning across difference regarding attempts to simulate visual impairment for pedagogical purposes and being constantly aware of Goggin's (2009) and Smith and Sparkes' (2008) view regarding the systematic ways in which the stories of disabled people have previously not been listened to, not heard, and not heeded. In addition, by contributing to the future construction of disability

simulations informed by the perspectives of visually impaired people with a view to better preparing prospective physical education teachers as inclusive educators, we aspire to contribute to enhancing the quality of experience in physical education lessons for visually impaired pupils as well as disrupting normative practices in research framed by an ableist lens. This is part of a wider attempt to empower and emancipate our participants, as advocated by Callus (2019), who encourages us to ensure that disabled people take an active, rather than passive, role in research and practice.

### ***Participants***

Participants were recruited from a cohort of visually impaired individuals in the U.S. whom Justin had a prior relationship with from a previous study. Following university ethical clearance, an email invitation, which included the purpose, time commitment, and eligibility criteria for the study, was sent to prospective participants by Justin. Those who expressed an interest were then invited to complete telephone interviews. Nine participants (aged 21–34 years; seven women, two men) agreed to do so. Each participant experienced a congenital visual impairment, with participants experiencing a range of impairments including complete blindness and low vision. This range of impairment enabled us to construct a rich tapestry of knowledge about people who have a variety of embodied experiences with visual impairment. Of the participants, seven self-identified as being Caucasian, and two as Asian American. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect identity.

### ***Data collection***

Justin sent the participants the two vignettes described earlier to read at their leisure (for full text see, Maher, Williams, and Sparkes, 2020). The vignettes were constructed from the reflective diaries of teacher educators in the UK who had used blindfolds and specialist glasses to simulate visual impairment among their sighted prospective physical education teachers for pedagogical purposes. These vignettes included the stories of the prospective physical education teachers as they performed two roles during the simulations: (1) they taught learning activities to others simulating visual impairment, and (2) they experienced being taught while simulating visual impairment.

Participants were given the choice of the vignettes being sent as written texts or audio files. All chose the former as they had computer software packages that either enabled them to 'read' text or 'read' text to them (text-to-audio). A semi-structured interview was conducted by Justin with each participant in which they were invited to share their views of what

they had read in the vignettes about the utilisation of simulations as instructional tools for prospective physical education teachers. Questions ranged from asking participants to broadly describe their perspectives on the vignettes (e.g. What are your thoughts about the story you read?) to those asking about their views on specific elements of the story (e.g. What are your thoughts about sighted prospective teachers removing blindfolds when they felt 'scared' and/or 'uncertain?'). In addition, participants were asked to share their views on the ethics of attempting to simulate visual impairment with prospective non-disabled and sighted physical education teachers. Given the geographic spread of the participants, telephone interviews were used that lasted between 45 and 86 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### **Data analysis**

The interview data were subjected to thematic analysis by Anthony. This approach was used to identify patterns of meaning across our qualitative dataset as advocated by Braun, Clarke, and Weate (2016). Accordingly, Anthony went through the transcripts and tagged with a code each piece of text that had relevance to the research questions informing the study that included those that focused on ethical issues. Anthony then moved to identify the key themes that various codes clustered around in terms of being a central organising concept in explaining how the participants perceived the possibilities and problems of simulating visual impairment for pedagogical purposes with prospective non-disabled and sighted physical education teachers. Once done, this thematic analysis along with the interview transcripts were sent to Justin, who had expertise in the field of disability studies, as part of a process of peer debriefing that involved them reviewing and assessing the transcripts in relation to the key themes identified by Anthony and the data used to support these. Following this, Anthony and Justin reflected upon the process involved and confirmed the key themes identified in the data. Finally, the key themes and supporting data along with interpretations of them were sent to Andrew in the role of a 'critical friend' (Sparkes and Smith 2014) whereby they acted as a theoretical sounding board to challenge analytic decisions and encourage reflection upon, and exploration of, alternative explanations and interpretations of the data. In this role, Andrew was also able to generate the self-reflexivity required of their colleagues during the analysis of the data to enhance the quality of the study in relation to the goodness criteria advocated by Richardson (2000) and Tracy (2010).

These analytical steps described above in relation to the reflections of our participants on the ethical issues involved in simulating visual impairment resulted in the construction of the following themes: (1) involving visually



impaired people in simulated experience, (2) reinforcing negative attitudes about visually impaired people, (3) tensions involving touch for pedagogical purposes, and (4) adapting activities and grouping pupils in relation to 'ability'. In presenting these themes below we provide multiple and detailed quotations from the participants in our study. This strategy was chosen as it meets the authenticity criteria of 'fairness' articulated by Lincoln and Guba (2000) that requires participant views, perspectives and voices to be apparent in the text. Likewise, this strategy also provides the 'polyvocality' and 'thick description' required by Tracy (2010) to enhance the credibility of our findings.

## Findings

### *Involving visually impaired people in simulated experiences*

A key concern for our participants revolved around the ethics of not involving visually impaired people in the delivery of simulated experiences. Mirella, for example, suggested:

I think the absence of people with visual impairments is something that is oddly missed out on quite a bit in general. A conversation between the people training to be physical education teachers and people with visual impairments.

This purview was echoed by Amelia, who suggested that visually impaired people are often absent from discussion about them and about issues that affect them:

A lot of times that's what happens with everything. On the things that affect us [visually impaired people]. They don't come to us. They don't get us involved. It's like those people I read about [in the vignettes], they just assumed it must be difficult to be blind or that we don't want to be blind or visually impaired because they are simulating it. That's not how we feel. If they could talk to someone who's going through it [visual impairment] and find out that it's not that bad.

Samantha, too, emphasised the importance of visually impaired people being involved in the simulations. For her, this would help participants to manage the emotions they experience during simulated experiences:

At the beginning of a simulation, if the person who is conducting this simulation explained that students are going to be simulating visual impairment, but I have someone here with a visual impairment. I think that would be very beneficial because then the people who are actually having the simulation happen to them can ask questions beforehand instead of just automatically jumping to conclusions like "Oh God, I can't do this." Or "Oh, I'm so scared I have to lift up the blindfold." I think that if they're able to ask the questions at the beginning then those fears can be dissipated.

Interestingly, Toby, who was also a teacher of visually impaired pupils, hinted at the negative perceptions that may be developed about visually

impaired people by people experiencing the simulations in the absence of the disabled Other:

If I didn't have a visual impairment myself, I don't think I would be comfortable with doing that without somebody with some visual impairment being in the room. Not having a visual impairment if you're blindfolding everybody, I wouldn't be comfortable doing the simulation as somebody that's trained without having somebody with blindness in the room because I might be misinformed on something as well. I think that that humility when you do these trainings is super important. So doing the simulation like this without including people with visual impairments is kind of dangerous because you can come to this conclusion that being blind sucks.

### ***Reinforcing negative attitudes about visually impaired people***

One ethical reason for involving visually impaired people in the simulated experiences, according to our participants, related to their concerns that prospective physical education teachers would develop and/or reinforce negative attitudes toward visually impaired people. For Amelia, this was especially crucial if prospective physical education teachers did not have previous experience interacting with visually impaired people:

So because they're [sighted students simulating visual impairment] not getting that full perspective they could be thinking "Oh this must be what all blind people feel like and go through." Then they don't really ever encounter a blind person or anyone with vision loss so they're just going off the simulation. It could really negatively impact their views of people with those conditions.

Brooklyn was very critical of the simulations because, according to her, they could create ignorance and fear about visual impairment while focusing attention on disability rather than capabilities:

I think those simulations promote ignorance and fear of blindness. It's more harmful than helpful, I think. And you know, it creates a negative image for blind people. Again, it makes them [prospective teachers] focus more on the disabilities than abilities and capabilities.

During Amelia's interview, she discussed how the negative perceptions, which may be developed using simulation, can influence societal attitudes and the wider experiences of visually impaired people:

When people hear the word blind or hear that someone is blind they're like "Oh my gosh what would I do?" Then their fears are projected onto the [visually impaired] person that's trying to get a job or the person that's trying to get a position. It really makes society the way it is, doing these type things [simulations]. It's why people are the way they are because of that fear.

In this respect, Emily talked about how simulations like the ones used by physical education teacher educators had influenced a person's views towards her:

Based on personal experience, I've had people who have gone through those simulations and have come up to me and actually said they'd hate to be blind. I wasn't surprised because that's sort of a visceral reaction of fear to say, "oh my gosh, if I, you know, lost my vision, I would rather be dead" or, you know, something, something very negative like that because people just don't know how to cope.

Here, it is important to note that some of our participants were obviously upset when they read that prospective physical education teachers said they would hate to be blind:

That actually was the thing that made me the most upset to hear because just one experience of being blind shouldn't make you hate or not hate it. You know, it's not like, you know, at least those people had a way to quote unquote go back to being able to see. So for them to say they would hate to be blind. Wow. That was one of the saddest things I ever heard (Samantha)

Reading that made me feel really sad and it makes me understand why society has these feelings. Again, they're [those simulating visual impairment] not getting the full picture of it, they're just getting hit with it basically. It does make me feel sad because we're none of those things. We're not useless. It's just sad (Amelia).

### ***Tensions involving touch for pedagogical purposes***

Views relating to the use of touch as a pedagogical tool differed among our participants. Most were concerned about the ethics of touch and its actual pedagogical value and so questioned whether they should be used by teachers. Kayla, who worked with children who have experienced sexual abuse, expressed her concerns as follows:

The only thing that struck me, that worried me, was the use of touching a lot on people's bodies. I'm fairly touch averse, personally. My job is working with kids that were sexually abused. When you add disability to it, the number, like if the one in four girls, one in six boys in the general population, that number goes way further up for kids with disabilities. So touching can be really triggering. It can be helpful for the blind, but it also can put somebody very much on edge. When I have people showing me [using touch] where to go without telling me they're going to put their hand on me first, I like elbow them.

Emily suggested that she appreciated how touch may be beneficial but would not want it used on her:

So the hands-on tactile teaching, having people touch other people, that caught my attention personally when I read the stories. I personally wouldn't want that, but I could see how that could be beneficial. But yeah, that just stuck out because I thought to myself, I wouldn't want that but other people may find that helpful.

According to Toby, a teacher of visually impaired pupils, other options should first be exhausted before the use of touch is considered and he emphasised the importance of visually impaired pupils feeling like they are in control:

They [the prospective teachers in vignettes] used touch when verbal directions didn't work. My feelings were that they probably weren't using verbal descriptions appropriately. They weren't trained on how to provide verbal description for people with visual impairments. Therefore, it didn't work and then they jumped into touch which is almost the opposite of what I would do. I want to provide the students with visual impairments with the most control in the situation and grabbing an elbow, both hands on shoulders, and so on, are things that we tell people not to do as a professional.

Conversely, Rachel, who is also a teacher of visually impaired pupils, was very supportive of the use of touch by teachers. During a discussion about prospective physical education teachers using a tether to guide each other, she emphasised the importance of physically touching a person for ensuring health and safety when working with people who are completely blind like herself:

So one example that they [prospective teachers] talk about is using a tie to hold onto the blind child instead of touching their hand. I can see where they're going, not wanting to hold their hand. I'm kind of on the fence about this one so I can understand why they don't want to hold hands. But at the same time, I think it's important to hold onto the child rather than using a tie. Let's say the child falls, you're not going to be able to catch them with a tie. The child's just going to fall whereas if you're holding onto them, you can help catch them.

Amelia, who is also completely blind, was another supportive of its use but stressed the importance of teachers being appropriately trained in its use and that pupils know how teachers intend to use touch and give consent:

Touch is everything to someone like me. You have to know the proper way to do it and I think one of the really important things to do is to make sure the teachers ask before they touch. "Can I touch your hand? Can I touch your arm?" They need to always ask before doing anything. Some of us can't see at all, so that's a crucial thing.

Mirella developed this point by suggesting that touch and its use should be based on a conversation between pupil and teacher:

Touch can be kind of tricky because, you know, you don't want to invade someone's personal space. I do think that touch can be very helpful and that's something that the students and teachers should have a conversation about so that the teacher can know, you know, how comfortable the student is with that and what they need to do (Mirella)

### ***Adapting activities and grouping pupils in relation to 'ability'***

Our participants expressed concerns over the ethics of prospective physical education teachers experimenting with and discussing with a class how learning activities might be adapted as part of a process of grouping pupils

in relation to ability in physical education. In this respect, Kayla expressed concerns that modifying activities would place undue and unwanted attention on a visually impaired pupil from other pupils:

Once you make the change to a lesson for the kid with the disability and that is known to the whole class, that's socially isolating the kid. When you change the activity and everybody having to feel like, "oh shit, we have to do things for them". You're causing social issues for the [visually impaired] kid as well.

Like Kayla, Emily talked about how activity modification could impact negatively on the visually impaired pupil's relationship with age-peers. She was especially concerned that it may result in bullying, which is something she has experienced in physical education:

If I think of the physical education teachers sort of didn't ask the student about equipment modifications, maybe the student wouldn't want to participate because they'd feel like "I don't want to be a spectacle here type of thing". You know, we're [visually impaired people] bullied if we can't do it [the learning activity] because the other students are like, "oh, we got to do this adapted version. We can't play the normal way".

In this respect, Amir advocated for activity modification but suggested that it should be done in a way that does not impact negatively on the learning of other pupils:

I don't know how to do it, but you have to find out A, what are the modifications and adaptations needed? B, Why are they needed? And then you need to figure out how to implement them without impacting play for those who don't need the modifications.

Many of the discussions during interview about activity modification developed into conversations about grouping pupils in relation to ability to minimise the impact of adaptations of other pupils. Here, Mirella was conflicted about this approach mostly because it might make visually impaired pupils feel excluded:

I'm kind of conflicted on that because in one way, I do think it probably makes the most sense as far as having to adapt an entire activity to just one student. But then at the same time, it is separating them from a group of non-disabled or non-impaired, students. That could still feel uncomfortable and bad that you're being separated from this group.

Brooklyn was entirely against 'ability' grouping, first questioning how ability in physical education is determined, before saying that it may contribute toward pupils developing negative attitudes towards visually impaired pupils:

No, that's a bad idea. I mean, who determines that ability? Just because some teacher decided that you have this much vision, therefore you should be able to do this. He has this much vision you cannot do this therefore you have to do something else. No. I see an issue with that. That's kind of in my mind promotes a hierarchy... you know how kids are, they can be mean to each other. "Oh, I can do this and you cannot do that. I can do it a bit better therefore I am better."

## Discussion

For our participants, it was vital that visually impaired people were involved in the delivery of simulated experiences. This purview aligns with historic and seemingly yet to be realised guidance offered by both French (1992) and Kiger (1992). Ethically, there were notable concerns expressed about sighted people endeavouring to embody a visual impairment without the disabled Other facilitating, or at minimum being involved in the construction of, that experience. In this respect, participants discussed how their notable absence from these simulations was indicative of their exclusion from wider societal and educational discussions about issues and decisions that impacted their lives directly. This is tied to normative, paternalistic practices whereby decisions are made for disabled people through an able-bodied lens based on the moral philosophy that it is for the greater good (Campbell 2009; Hutzler 2008). The practical difficulties of involving visually impaired people in all simulated experiences aside, our participants advocated the 'nothing about us without us' approach (Charlton 2000) as a moral philosophy of empowerment. Empowerment here means that visually impaired people are at the centre of decisions about simulated experiences of visual impairment, and that their expert knowledge as embodied disabled beings influences the construction of disability simulations. Indeed, when it comes to the embodiment of visual impairment, it is visually impaired people who have expert knowledge (Leo and Goodwin 2013), not non-disabled, sighted, prospective teachers or teacher educators.

Some of the participants suggested that their presence would help teachers to process the emotions they experienced and potentially disrupt feelings of fear, pity, and disgust that Hughes (2020) believes are the major building blocks of the emotional infrastructure of ableism. Speaking of fear in relation to how disabled people are perceived by others, Hughes argues that 'a negative and aversive reaction to the presence of disability is, in part, fear about the precariousness of one's own being and the vulnerabilities of our ephemeral flesh' (p. 91). It would be interesting to know the influence of the gaze of the disabled Other on the ways prospective teachers experience and talk about simulating visual impairment. Here, there are perhaps ethical and moral dilemmas (Weinburg 2009) governing courses of action: unethical to exclude visually impaired people from simulations and unethical to expect sighted people to talk openly and honestly about simulated experiences of visual impairment to visually impaired people. This is perhaps problematic given that open critical discussions about embodied experiences are crucial for embodying (pedagogical) knowledge (MacLachlan 2004).

The main reason given by our participants for involving visually impaired people in the simulated experiences related to concerns that sighted prospective teachers would develop negative attitudes towards visually impaired people. This would be especially problematic if they had no prior experiences interacting with visually impaired people and thus based their belief on

simulated experiences alone. For most of our participants, this would reinforce hegemonic ableist tragedy discourses of disability which focus on suffering, dependency, fragility, unhappiness, and loss (Reinders 2000). These serve to politically marginalise and morally exclude visually impaired people in neoliberal societies that privilege citizens who demonstrate autonomy, self-determination, productivity, and prosperity. Experiences like these are reflected in current PE practices, where visually impaired individuals have abundantly reported experiences of exclusion or being 'pushed to the side' by their teachers due to perceptions of inability or fragility (Haegele et al. 2020; Haegele and Zhu 2017, Sparkes, Martos-Garcia, and Maher 2019). It is important to consider that unfavourable experiences like these may have played a role in constructing the opinions of our participants about the teaching practices they read about in the vignettes. For example, Kayla's, Emily's and Amir's viewpoints toward activity accommodations, and the outcomes associated with those accommodations, were based on reflections of their own experiences within physical education contexts.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that research by de Laat, Freriksen, and Vervloed (2013) suggests that when non-disabled students interact with disabled people the attitudes and understanding of the former toward the latter are greatly improved. This is crucial given that those teachers who have positive attitudes toward teaching disabled pupils are likely to be more inclusive educators (Morley et al. 2021). The presence of visually impaired people may also prevent, as Sparkes, Martos-Garcia, and Maher (2019) found, students claiming the last, conclusive word on visually impaired people, by assuming to know and understand the embodied experiences of visually impaired people. This came through the vignettes when prospective teachers discussed the lives of visually impaired people. There are obvious ethical issues at play here, tied to symbolic violence, of the non-disabled 'I' telling the disabled Other: 'that they should not be who they are, or that they fail to understand who they ought to be' (Frank 2004, 115).

The vignettes described how prospective teachers experimented with touch as a pedagogical tool during the simulations. This entailed touching arms and shoulders to gain attention and holding arms, wrists, and shoulders to guide those wearing blindfolds as they moved through space during simulated activities. Many of our participants, in this regard, were touch-averse and identified the ethical issues associated with this pedagogical practice. There was mention of the association between touch and sexual abuse. While we of course must be mindful that touch may act as an emotional trigger for those who have experienced sexual abuse, we would caution against, as Öhman and Grundberg-Sandell (2014) have, teacher actions which are nothing of the sort being interpreted as sexual. A blanket ban on using touch for pedagogical purposes as a self-protective measure would, according to Öhman and Quennerstedt (2017), impoverish teaching and learning

experiences in physical education especially. This could even be considered unethical given, as mentioned by some of our participants, the health and safety issues of visually impaired people engaging in dynamic and interactive forms of movement in physical education and other spaces in schools. More generally, as Hardman, Bailey, and Lord (2014) note, touch is essential in activities such as gymnastics to improve performance and prevent injury. A key point threaded through all discussions about touch behaviours related to the importance of touch practices—the ‘whether to, when to and how to’—forming the basis of a discussion between teacher and pupil. Ethically, teachers should not initiate touch without the knowledge or consent of the pupil. Moreover, specific touch strategies should be negotiated with and agreed upon by the pupil because only they know what they are comfortable with and what may help support their learning. These points should be part of a teacher’s moral philosophy and associated commitment to disrupting normative autocratic approaches to teaching and learning (Freire 1993) by placing visually impaired pupils at the centre of pedagogical decisions.

Pedagogically, activity modification is often unquestionably identified as an example of best practice vis-à-vis so-called ‘inclusive physical education’ (e.g. Vickerman and Maher 2018). While adaptation is tied to responding to the needs of learners, which is arguably morally good, all our participants discussed the ethical issues and dilemmas of activity modification and grouping pupils in relation to hegemonic ableist views on ‘ability’. There were concerns expressed among participants that changing activities to suit visually impaired pupils could place undue and unwanted attention on a visually impaired pupil; that is to say, they could be subjected to the able-bodied gaze where judgements are made about how the bodies of visually impaired pupils look and move when compared to normative expectations. As a socio-ethical process (Shakespeare 2006) this could, according to our participants, result in visually impaired pupils being marginalised and assigned outsider status. A few of our participants had experienced this, which ultimately resulted in them being bullied. Indeed, subjective experiences of marginalisation and bullying are commonplace in research examining physical education experiences from the viewpoint of visually impaired persons (Haegele 2019; Haegele and Zhu 2017). Other participants echoed comments made by prospective teachers and captured in the vignettes that, ethically, any changes to learning activities should not impact negatively on the learning and development of other pupils. This aligns with research conducted by Morley et al. (2021) where teachers identified a ‘moral duty’ they had to both disabled and non-disabled pupils. There is a need here for teachers to adopt utilitarian ethical principles (Hutzler 2008) to ensure that neither visually impaired or sighted pupils are unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged because of pedagogical actions.



## Conclusion

In this study we engaged in the ethical self-reflection advocated by Goodwin, Johnston, and Causgrove Dunn (2014) to avoid our professional practice becoming merely technical, preventing us from making judgements about whether simulating disability is well or poorly done, or even morally right or wrong. Hence, we aimed to explore the junctures at which practical problems and possibilities of simulating visual impairment become ethical concerns from the perspectives of visually impaired people. For our participants, there were ethical concerns with the utilisation of such activities, where sighted people endeavour to embody a visual impairment, especially when visually impaired people did not have an active role in constructing and/or facilitating that experience. Accordingly, the presence of a visually impaired individual may have several notable influences, including assisting prospective teachers in processing emotions they experience during simulations, as well as reducing hegemonic ableist tragedy discourses of disability which focus on suffering, fragility, unhappiness, and loss (Reinders 2000) associated with being visually impaired. In this way, it is logical to suggest, as Kiger (1992) did, that co-constructing and facilitating simulation activities with disabled people may alleviate some ethical tensions expressed by disabled and non-disabled people. In addition, the participants pointed specifically to ethical issues associated with simulation activities teaching prospective teachers about the use of touch and activity modifications as 'inclusive' strategies. In these instances, the participants noted that, in alignment with observations by Slee and Allan (2001), learning about and implementing these pedagogical strategies may, while well-intended, unintentionally reinforce inequities and contribute to forms of exclusion. Again, this assertion continues to support the involvement of disabled people in the construction and facilitation of simulation activities, so that these practices are used in an ethical manner. That is, to support the health and safety of visually impaired persons, rather than contribute to their marginalisation. Idealistically, simulations may have the potential to help fulfil the role of educational activity during the teacher education experience that can help enhance 'inclusive' pedagogical practices (Vickerman and Maher 2018) when hands-on experiences are not feasible. Further, simulations that have been shaped and/or supported by disabled people may work to reduce marginalising and belittling experiences in physical education contexts for visually impaired pupils, which are commonplace (Haegele et al. 2020; Haegele and Zhu 2017). There is therefore a need for teacher educators to co-construct simulated experiences with disabled people, and for future researchers to explore (1) what the process of co-constructing disability simulations entails; and (2) the influence of these co-constructed simulations on the personal and professional development of prospective teachers.

To end, we are left with the question: should non-disabled teacher educators use disability simulations with non-disabled pre-service teachers? The answer, unfortunately, is not straightforward. If we follow French's (1992) lead, then the answer is a resounding 'no'. However, nearly all the participants in our—albeit small-scale—research focused on how disability simulations could be improved, particularly through the embodied presence of visually impaired people, rather dismissing them entirely. In fact, some participants had experienced disability simulations and emphasised their value. For them, and for us, disability simulations do have the potential to facilitate important pedagogical learning in physical education, as claimed by Flower, Burns, and Bottsford-Miller (2007), Sparkes, Martos-Garcia, and Maher (2019), Maher, Williams, and Sparkes (2020) and Maher, Williams, and Sparkes (2020). What is perhaps needed, together with a careful consideration of how to plan and deliver disability simulations in an ethically appropriate manner, is a change in perspective. We argue that teacher educators, teachers and researchers need to move away from thinking about and referring to these simulation activities as 'disability' simulations. Rather than claiming to simulate disability to authentically and empathetically live and embody it, if that is even possible, teacher educators should work with visually impaired people and use equipment such as blindfold and visual impairment glasses to facilitate pedagogical learning that may be of value when teaching visually impaired and sighted pupils. In other words, sighted people are not simulating disability; they are using specialist equipment for pedagogical purposes only. After all, something needs to be done to increase the knowledge, skills, experience and confidence of pre- and in-service physical education teachers for teaching visually impaired pupils (Haegele 2019), and this approach when combined with knowledge about models of disability, conceptualisations of inclusive education, and the environmental, social, and individual barriers to inclusion, together with hands on experience working with visually impaired pupils (Vickerman and Maher 2018), may support that endeavour.

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