

# Changing Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Disability Through Simulation Experiences

Scott Douglas, Ph.D., CAPE, Jennifer M. Krause, Ph.D., & Hillary Franks, M.S.



UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTHERN  
COLORADO

College of Natural and Health Sciences  
School of Sport and Exercise Science

## Introduction

Historically, inclusion has not been successful for all students with disabilities, which may be due to a lack of appropriate teacher training or buy-in (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2012). Past experiences, personal beliefs, and values, across a myriad of educational contexts, are strong determinants of physical education teacher decisions and actions and consistently impact the choice of content, instructional approaches, and implementation of curricula (McMahon & MacPhail, 2007; Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009). Pre-service teachers' (PTs) practices can often be traced back to prior experiences and relationships which have shaped their beliefs and philosophies about teaching and learning (Smith & Schmidt, 2012).

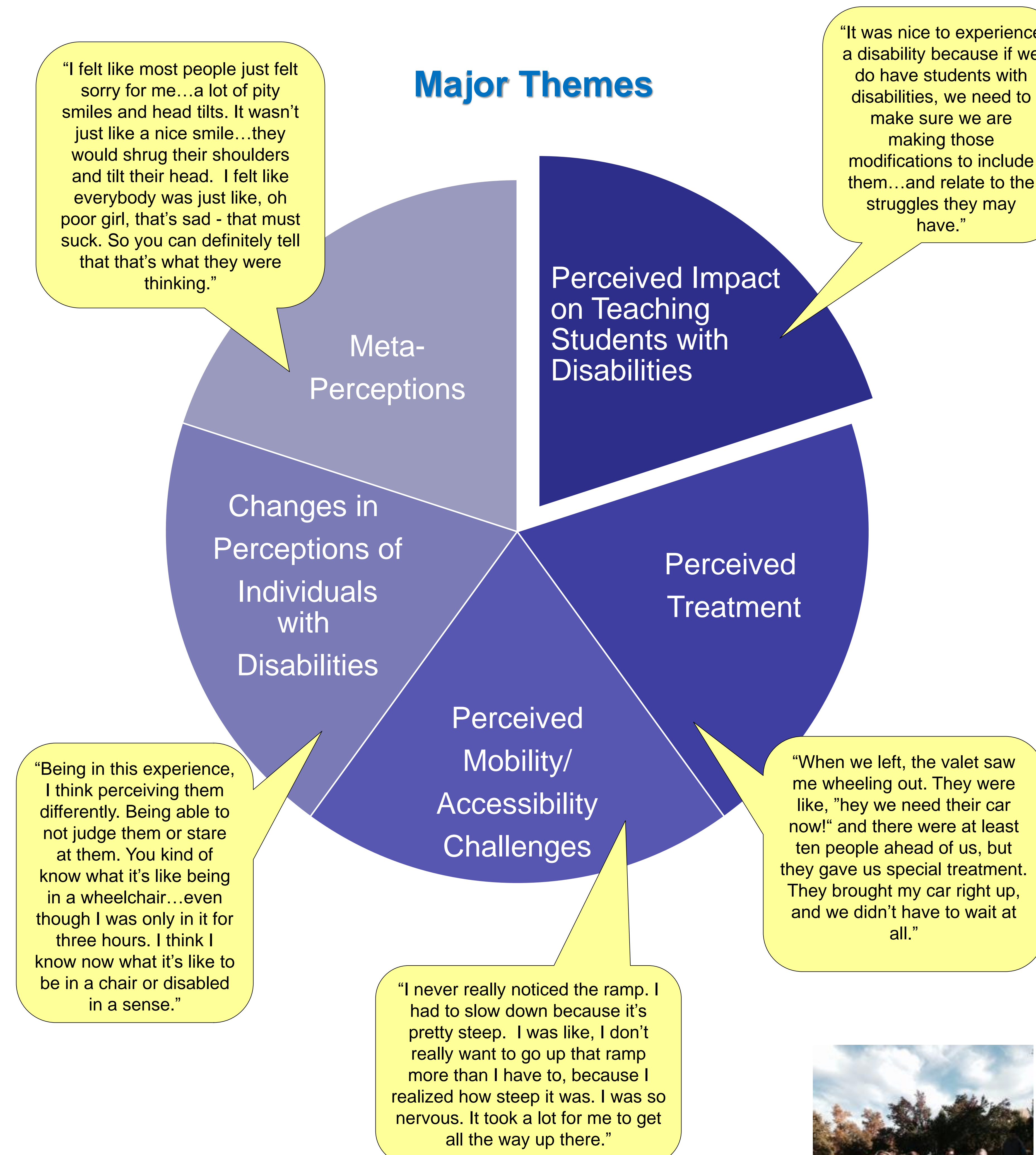
**The purpose of this study was to explore the impact a simulated disability field experience had on preservice teachers' perceptions of individuals with disabilities and to what extent that experience impacted their values and beliefs about teaching students with disabilities.**

## Method

- **Participants:** 10 undergraduate PTs (2 female; 8 male) enrolled in an adapted physical education course.
- **Procedures:** PTs completed two pre/post reflective writing assignments about perceptions of disability, attended a professional sporting event with a standing companion while using a lightweight sports wheelchair, and participated in a focus group interview.
- **Approach/Analysis:** Interpretivism - Narrative Inquiry to investigate "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p.58), thematically analyzed and peer debriefed (Culver, Gilbert, & Trudel, 2003).

## Results

Despite their previous experiences, participant's perceptions of individuals with disabilities were positively impacted by the simulation experience.



## Conclusion

Results of this study suggest the need for PETE programs to include courses and authentic (and unique) disability simulation experiences which equip preservice teachers with the awareness and ability to teach inclusive physical education.

The more confident and proficient preservice teachers feel, the more likely that students with disabilities will receive appropriate and meaningful physical education instruction.

If preservice teachers have previous personal experiences with disability, they may feel more capable of appropriately including students with disabilities in their physical education classes.

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## Contact Us

Scott.Douglas@unco.edu  
Jennifer.Krause@unco.edu  
Hillary.Franks@unco.edu