

# Empowering Youth through Social Justice: A Mixed Methods Case Study of the Deaf Community Travel Trunk Project

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## Abstract

As part of my honors requirement in my d/Deaf Education program, I crafted a Travel Trunk for humane education focusing on the area of social justice. Within that, due to my own personal connections, I elected for my Travel Trunk to center the Deaf Community. Using the book *Listen*, which details Evelyn Glennie's achievements, the project aimed to instill empathy. Students engaged with Glennie's story through a YouTube video and hands-on percussion activities, including wearing noise-canceling headphones.

The research included pre- and post-surveys in an elementary classroom, assessing perceptions of deaf individuals as well as a field observation protocol. Utilizing a QUAL-quant structure, the project underscores education's role in promoting inclusivity, empathy, and social justice, advocating for initiatives like the Travel Trunk for a more just society.

## Introduction

This project, undertaken as part of my honors contract, aimed to develop a Travel Trunk centered around one of the core strands of humane education: Social Justice. This Travel Trunk contained a carefully curated collection of materials, resources, and interactive lessons designed to captivate students' interest and inspire exploration of critical topics. In this case, the project focused on raising awareness about the d/Deaf community.

I'm enrolled in the Deaf Education program and I approached this project with a deeply personal connection. Having completed the RedRover Reader training, which emphasizes the incorporation of social and emotional learning through literature, I selected the book *Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion* as the centerpiece of the Travel Trunk. This book not only highlights the achievements of a Deaf individual but also aligns with the goal of fostering empathy, kindness, and understanding.

To engage students, an immersive activity was developed. Students were introduced to Evelyn Glennie through a YouTube video, gaining insight into her life and accomplishments. They also had the opportunity to interact with various percussion instruments, including a vibra-slap, maracas, and more. Some students wore noise-canceling headphones to simulate the experience of d/Deaf individuals, enhancing their understanding of how music can be approached in the d/Deaf community.

In addition to the interactive elements, I worked with my mentors to create pre- and post-surveys to measure students' perceptions of the abilities and challenges faced by people within the d/Deaf community. These surveys were administered to an elementary classroom as a selected case study. The data gathered was analyzed using both quantitative descriptive statistics and qualitative coding to identify emergent themes. Additionally, we used a field observation protocol to collect additional data during the lesson.

The project exemplified the power of education to promote inclusivity, empathy, and social justice, and highlights the importance of initiatives like the Travel Trunk in fostering a more just and inclusive society for all.

Figure 1  
Travel Trunk Materials with Image from Sesame Street Episode



## Literature Review

Lee and Pott (2018), focused more on what can affect a person's perspective of a d/Deaf person and how educators can utilize that. The paper opened with establishing a difference between viewing deafness pathologically versus culturally. This point came back with describing the results of the study as it was shown that different courses affect people's perspectives on the d/Deaf community differently. Those who were put in a d/Deaf culture class were more empathetic towards the cultural side, whereas people who just took an ASL course were more medical. Motivations for taking an ASL or d/Deaf-centered class also affected someone's perspective. The proposed solution was to introduce more d/Deaf culture into non-d/Deaf culture classes, especially ASL, to increase positive perspectives about the ASL community. I agree with this proposal, since I saw positive change while presenting with a similar set-up; even though most of the students in my classroom were aware of what it means to be d/Deaf, their perspectives about the capabilities of d/Deaf people changed to become more positive after the lesson.

Finally, Hoffman, D., & Andrews, J. F. (2016) discussed the importance of integrating d/Deaf cultures into d/Deaf classrooms. They described multiple examples set by a d/Deaf Ed school, as they demonstrated d/Deaf customs such as eye contact, storytelling, and joint attention. Although my study does not focus on integrating d/Deaf culture in a d/Deaf classroom, I think this article is a significant tool to show why representing culture is important. Schools pride themselves on being culturally diverse and having representation- yet doesn't integrate different cultures into lesson plans or teaches students about diverse content. Hearing schools/classrooms could look at this article as a place to start with implementing basic Deaf culture elements into their classrooms.

Those who are connected to the d/Deaf community are aware of the academic gaps between students who are DHH and those who are hearing. I saw this gap firsthand in the classroom: the DHH students had a harder time comprehending and completing the written survey compared to the hearing students. Luft, et. al. (2022) discusses various reasons as to why this is the case - focusing on the lack of consistency when approving teachers for the DHH population. The Every Student Succeeds Act, which set high quality standards for teachers, was changed in 2015. Due to this change, there is no national standard for teachers, and each state is responsible for testing teachers based on its own standard. This results in teachers of varying qualifications getting certified, and once certified, may result in inequitable training and/or support.

Figure 2  
Images from lesson



## Methods

### Participants

16 elementary-aged students enrolled in hearing and Deaf/Hard of Hearing Programs at a rural Title-I school in East Texas.

### Data Instrument:

Pre and Post Surveys were given to the students and descriptive statistics noted trends. Post surveys included open-ended questions, which were coded. A field observation protocol was completed by a team, to support interrater reliability.

## Results

### Survey Results

In the end, the results followed the same trend as previous studies. In this portion, I will include one example that directly relates to the research focus. The figure will include results from the pre-survey next to the results from the post survey. The blue bars represent the pre-survey and the red bars represent the post survey.

Figure 3  
I think d/Deaf people can enjoy music in their own special way

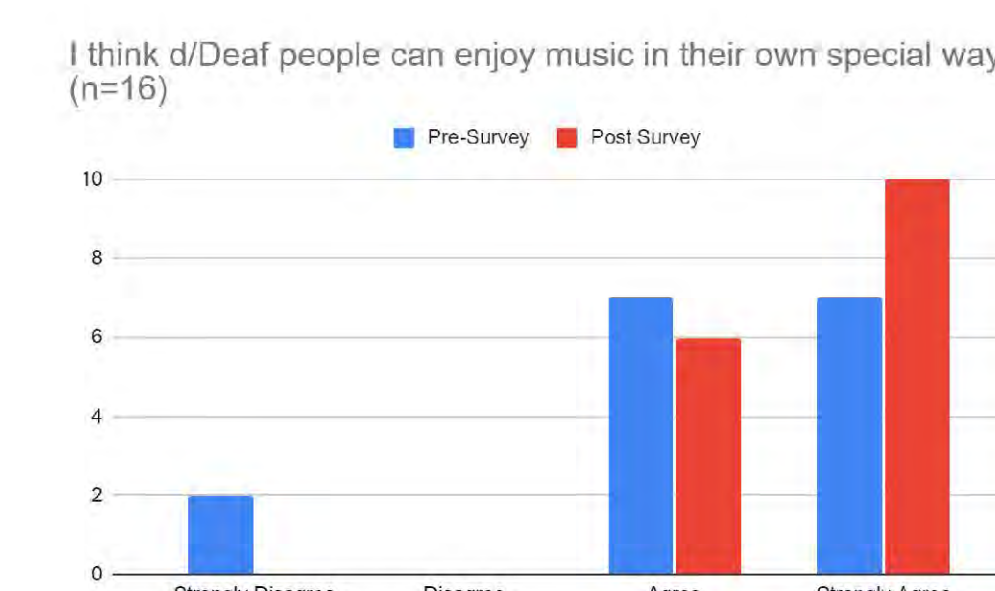


Figure 3 shows a positive shift in student perspectives. In the initial survey, two students 'Strongly Disagreed' that d/Deaf people could enjoy music in their own special way. This shifted to where the entirety of the class either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that d/Deaf people can enjoy music in their own special way.

This data from the survey was reinforced by the open-ended responses found in the post survey. Ultimately, two major themes emerged.

### We Can All Learn (in a Special Way)

Seven of the 16 students expressed that all students can learn. One student wrote, "I learned that anyone can make music." Another stated, "I learned that when you are [d/Deaf] that you can set your mind to anything - and do it!" This was further reinforced by a third statement, "Deafness is not a disability because [d/Deaf] people can learn just like me." The majority of these responses came from the third question in the post survey, which asked the students what they had learned about the d/Deaf community.

An additional eight students refined the perception that we can all learn by adding the caveat *in a special way*. One student wrote, "Deafness is not a disability because everyone is special." Another wrote, "Deafness is not a disability because I think it's an ability." Multiple students touched on the fact that d/Deaf students can feel vibrations and this is best captured by the statement, "I learned it's pretty cool how deaf people can feel music through vibration."

### There are Role Models in the DHH Community

Additionally, students expressed excitement about the identification of people in their community who were engaged in music. One student wrote, "Deaf people can enjoy and make music because they can feel the beat - like me!" Another shared, "I learned that Evelyn Glennie is a role model because she can feel the beat." On a broader note, a student stated, "I learned that music [made by d/Deaf people] exists." And, finally, another student wrote, "Deaf people can enjoy and make music because there have been multiple deaf musicians." This was all exciting to hear, especially the response from one of the DHH participants about their ability to engage with and enjoy music.

### Field Observation Protocols

Three researchers (my mentors and a graduate research assistant) completed their protocols independently and then the results were synthesized to see where overlaps were reinforced or unique perspectives illuminated. Ultimately, all three researchers agreed that engagement was high, specifically with the story. One hearing student spoke up during the reading, "The judges were wrong about the deaf girl not being able to

(cont.) play music. She didn't care [what they said] and did it anyway." Another student, who is hard of hearing, shared, "I was shocked at how fast Evelyn could play the drums!" The researchers also noted that the DHH students were eager to answer questions from their classmates about being d/Deaf and that the classmates were respectful of their contributions. One of the d/Deaf students shared, "My mom plays the drums. She sits down and plays. I can't play the drums [but I can feel it]." Another high frequency action that was noted by the three researchers was that hearing students enjoyed accessing the noise canceling headphones during the vibration instruments activity.

Less frequent, but still common, for the researchers were that students were eager to use the ASL signs they learned during the lesson and that the students were engaged in the Sesame Street video. Two researchers noted that a few of the hearing students in the back of the classroom began the lesson disengaged. However, as the signs were taught, researchers noted that these particular students were all invested in attempting to replicate and use the signs as they appeared in the reading. Also, the necessity of having the sign language interpreter there was noted by two of the three researchers.

Finally, one researcher noted student engagement with the instruments. The students had been playing around with various vibration instruments. A d/Deaf student was asked what she thought about the instruments and she responded, "It felt like music. I felt the beat, the rhythm." Another student signed, "I've never done this before. I lost my hearing when I was two and I don't remember listening to music before then." A hearing student was also excited to try the instruments while wearing noise canceling headphones. She said, "I can barely hear you. It was interesting to 'hear' sounds [from the instruments] when it was muted."

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