PACFOLD and the Prevalence of Learning Disabilities

The purpose of the PACFOLD study is **not** to provide definitive statistics on the number of Canadians with learning disabilities.

The primary objective of PACFOLD is to provide a clear picture of what it means to live in Canada with Learning Disabilities (LD). To date, no other public, private or non-governmental agency has accessed the full range of information available in the national data sets to examine the barriers that prevent the inclusion of Canadians with LD and their families. Nor has any public, private or non-governmental agency used this information to clearly articulate recommendations to help inform policy and program development.

The statistic one in 10 Canadians have LD –has been around for a long time and is the one LDAC continues to use. Why then do the data from the surveys that are included in PACFOLD not support this statistic?

There are a number of reasons.
1. The term "learning disability" is not a term recognized in many households.
2. Parents know that there child is experiencing some difficulty in learning. They want the child to be tested but the testing has yet to be arranged.
3. Some parents are reluctant to talk about their child and LD to a Statistics Canada interviewer and so would not identify their child as having LD.
4. If the child is not diagnosed as having LD and drops out of school, he/she adjusts his/her life to accommodate any learning difficulty he/she has and then believes that there is no longer a problem with learning.
5. Adults who know they have difficulty learning and I believe, even those who have been diagnosed with LD will not self–identify because of the stigma associated with any disability that deals with mental or learning processes. That's why for example the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey ask the question in three ways – did you ever have a learning disability – if yes, did you have it when you were in school and do you have it now. Many who answered yes while in school denied having it now.

So – bottom line – what is the reality? It may be one in ten. For sure it's not as low as the data from the surveys show. The Researchers feel it is somewhere in between but until the general population understands what LD is and what it is not **and** when the general population understands that people with LD just learn differently **and** the perceived stigma associated with self-disclosure is removed, we will probably continue to get low figures in surveys.

Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities provides a foundation for future studies in Canadian data surveys.