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**Lamenting the Discontinuation of the Participation Activities Survey: Using PALS 2006 to Examine the Provision of Educational Programs to Children and Youth with Disabilities in Canada**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the education of children and youth with disabilities in Canada by incorporating an analysis of the Participatory Activities Limitations Survey (PALS) 2006. The primary intent of the article is to show what is potentially being lost in terms of research and access to information now that Long Form Census Surveys have been cut by the Government of Canada. The article uses the case example of access to public education for children with disabilities to show the pivotal role that quantitative surveys such as PALS serve and to raise awareness that similar future research will be difficult to carry out.

**Keywords**

government: research: education: rights: children with disabilities: youth with disabilities: primary education: secondary education: inclusive education

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**Introduction**

Dr. Hanes teaches a course entitled Social Work and People with Disabilities: A Critical Perspective at Carleton University. The course provides a social, political and cultural analysis of disability and the theoretical framework of the course is rooted in what is commonly termed a social oppression or social model of disability. Throughout the 12 week duration of the course a number of topics are covered: women with disabilities; violence and abuse and disability; LGBTQ intersections with disability; disability in a cross cultural context; disability theory; disability and relationships, and other similar themes. Most classes are presented in two segments; segment one is a lecture and segment two includes presentations from people with disabilities. Recently, a student commented that while he appreciated and valued the personal narratives of all of the presenters, he wanted to know more about quantitative evidence which moved beyond the personal accounting from the presenters. As he pointed out "no numbers-- no problems." He was referring to evidence which might be gathered from population studies such as the Participation Activities Limitations Surveys and the earlier Health Activities Limitation Surveys. Dr. Hanes reported to the student that the federal government cut funding for in-depth statistical studies such the long form census which in turn provided the foundation for the Participation Activities Limitation Survey and thus limited possibilities for further detailed quantitative investigation. The following article in some ways addresses the student's question and shows the importance of collecting population data which may be hard to gather in the months and years to come.

This article uses the case example of exploring the educational needs of children and youth with disabilities (Hanes, Schwartz and Werk, 2011) to show the importance of and the need for the continuation of data collection and analytical systems such as the PALS research. Unfortunately, we can only lament the passing of this very important resource.

### **Guiding Principles for the Education of Children with Disabilities in Canada.**

Canadian public schools are legally required to ensure that all students receive free and appropriate education. This includes students with a wide variety of limitations and learning challenges. Canadian public schools educate students who, in previous generations, would have been educated in segregated settings or denied an education entirely. (Statistics Canada, 2007, p.7)

Historically the education of children with disabilities in Canada was based on principles of exclusion wherein children with disabilities were sent to institutional training facilities, put in “special “ schools or placed in segregated special education classes. (Hanes, 1995) While there may be a perception that the most common delivery mechanism of education to children and youth with disabilities is through segregated schools or special education classes the reverse is true as most children and youth with disabilities are educated in regular provincial and territorial school systems. This is not meant to suggest that segregated schools do not exist because they do remain for a very small minority of children and youth with significant cognitive and or physical impairments.

### **Rights Based Focus in Education in Canada**

The paradigm shift from segregated schools to inclusive schools and classrooms is supported through education policies, programs and procedures which are rooted in provincial and territorial legislation. Across Canada, access to education for children with disabilities is

recognized, under provincial and territorial legislation, as a right and in most jurisdictions the delivery of education is based on models of practice incorporating themes of inclusive education. For example, the Ontario Education Act of 1985 provided a framework for inclusive education for children and youth with disabilities. Similar legislation was passed in the province of British Columbia during the late 1980s (BCACL, 2010). New Brunswick implemented inclusive education policies in 1982 and by 1985 these policies were widespread across the province (Porter, 2008). In the Northwest Territories, the first recommendation for inclusive education practices came in the 1982 report *Learning, Tradition and Change in the Northwest Territories*. By June 1995, a new Education Act, Bill 25, was created which made “inclusive schooling a statutory entitlement” (Northwest Territories, 2006). The evidence suggests that all provinces and territories have incorporated rights-based /inclusive education principles based on the notion of “duty to accommodate” which underpins the provision of education to children and youth with disabilities throughout Canada. But, notwithstanding the principles of education rights and inclusion, meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities is not always easy and often times inclusive education and the duty to accommodate are challenged when meeting the educational needs of the child creates undue hardship for teachers, school officials, school boards, other students etc.

Each province and territory has similar human rights legislation which covers access to education for children and youth with disabilities. An examination of provincial and territorial education policies and programs indicates that the provision of education to children and youth with disabilities is supposed to be based on standards which include principles such as respect of dignity for the child; duty to accommodate; individualized accommodation; inclusion and full participation; barrier removal. While it can be assumed that not all children and youth with

disabilities have their educational needs met in a respectful and inclusive manner, it does appear at least at the legislative level, that provincial and territorial standards are directed at meeting the educational needs of children and youth with disabilities. A case in point, is Ontario, where the Ontario Human Rights Commission emphasizes that, notwithstanding physical, intellectual, emotional or social difficulties, children and youth with disabilities are people first and as such they must be educated in a dignified and respectful manner and the Code further asserts that dignity and self-respect are damaged when people with disabilities are left out or left behind or when their social role is diminished. In terms of individualized accommodation, the aim here is to meet the specific needs of the individual child in the best manner possible. Accordingly, while it is recognized that the needs of groups of children and youth with disabilities must be addressed, the specific educational needs of each individual must also be accommodated as “cookie cutter” approaches and “one size fits all” methods are deemed inappropriate.

The duty to accommodate is a core principle of the legislation and for many school boards there is a need for *removing barriers*: The Ontario Human Rights Code recognizes that many of the existing schools in Ontario were constructed at a time when accessibility and inclusion were not priorities and when children with disabilities attended segregated schools or they were taught in segregated classes. As a consequence, even to this day, many schools remain inaccessible to the disabled community and renovations are required. Importantly, the Code, while stating that there is a “duty to accommodate”, observes that accommodation might create “undue hardship” for educational institutions as they attempt to provide equal access for children and youth with disabilities; the Code holds that the potential for undue hardship overrides the duty to accommodate (2004, p.11). This element of undue hardship often becomes a barrier in and of its self and can limit the educational opportunities for children and youth with disabilities.

Notwithstanding the imposition of “undue hardship” responses to accommodation and barrier removal the evidence suggests that all provinces and territories protect the education of all children including children with disabilities and similarly, evidence suggests that provincial and territorial Education Acts have identified the philosophy of inclusive education as the basic value underlying publicly-funded education for children and youth with disabilities. Provincial directives state that instruction is preferably provided in regular classrooms in neighborhood and community schools with appropriate accommodation for the learning needs of all children and youth with disabilities. For example, in Alberta, the report entitled *Shaping the Future for Students with Special Needs: Review of Special Education in Alberta* clearly states that “[m]ost Alberta students with special needs are placed in regular classrooms in their communities” (Alberta, 2000, p.3). Similarly, a 2008 Nova Scotia special education policy document identified the basic right of all students to full and equal participation in education as per the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Likewise, the 2006 Northwest Territories *Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling* outlines the change in philosophy from providing education for children and youth with disabilities in segregated settings to recognizing that all have a “fundamental right to participate in education programs in the regular classroom” (2006, p.2). Around the same time, the Manitoba government released a document entitled *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services* (2006) which explicitly outlines standards and policies for the local school divisions including that they “develop new inclusive education policy to ensure compliance with existing constitutional and provincial human rights legislation and with provincial legislation, regulation, policy and guidelines...(and) ensure that inclusive and appropriate educational principles are considered when creating new policy, and that the policy is inclusive of all persons, respects the rights and needs of all persons, avoids unintended

negative outcomes and reflects the goals of equity and fairness for all" (2006, p.8). Inclusion and full participation of children with disabilities within educational systems is thus recognized as a priority by most provincial and territorial governments and these governments have stipulated protocols for inclusive design, barrier removal and accommodation.

It should be noted that the actual "on-the-ground" approaches to inclusive education may vary quite significantly between provinces and territories, between school boards within each province, and even across schools within the same boards of education (Porter, 2004; Crawford, 2005, as cited in Burge et al., 2008). Across Canada, the spectrum of inclusive education appears to represent a continuum from full inclusion of all children and youth with disabilities, with support and learning needs provided in an integrated classroom setting, to separate classes for children and youth with disabilities within the same facility, to a mix of the two models. Notwithstanding this continuum, the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in the same classroom setting as nondisabled students appears to be the priority.

### **Inclusive Education**

For many, inclusive education is quite straight-forward and basically refers to children and youth with disabilities being part of the mainstream educational system. However, inclusive education is much more than mainstreaming and integration and it can be argued that neither reference is synonymous with inclusive education. Simply put, an inclusive education for children and youth with disabilities basically means that the education of children and youth with disabilities is offered as part of the regular educational system. Although appearing to be relatively straightforward the concept of inclusive education remains contested and some discussion is required. Some argue that inclusive education exists in name only and many children

and youth with disabilities who attend regular public schools are not always “included” in the day to day activities of the school nor are children and youth with disabilities involved in after school or weekend activities with nondisabled classmates. But the point is also made that children with disabilities are often included and as such inclusive education from a programmatic and policy point of view, is much more than what is traditionally referred to as mainstreaming and integration. In the context of this article inclusive education is more about the delivery of education systems as opposed to the actual lived experiences of children and youth with disabilities. And while this is a limitation requiring further research, this does not necessarily disavow for an investigation into the types of educational programs existing for children and disabilities across Canada as was done in this research.

Jorgenson, Smith and Nisbet (2006) differentiate between three education modalities of mainstreaming, integration and inclusive education. *Mainstreaming*, they contend “is the practice of having children and youth with disabilities receive most of their education in separate classes, although most of their school day is spent in the general (regular) classes” (Jorgenson et al., 2006, p.2). In mainstreaming, while there is some opportunity for interaction between disabled and nondisabled students, children and youth with disabilities are brought into the regular classroom to participate in activities such as art, music and physical education. The authors conclude that it is as though the children and youth are more like “visitors and the focus is on social interaction” (Jorgenson et al., 2006, p.31).

Educators such as Peters (2007), state that inclusive education is both a rights-based philosophy and a model of practice. From a philosophical standpoint, the argument is made that all children and youth have a right to a decent education and all children have the right to an equal opportunity to reach their maximum capabilities. Inclusive education, according to

Jorgensen et al. (2006), is defined as the practice of educating all students in general education classes, "even students with significant disabilities, with support provided to enable both students and teachers to be successful" (p.2). A similar point is made by Peters (2007) who suggests that inclusive education recognizes the value of the person, regardless of disability and is based on respect for the individual. According to Peters:

...inclusive education means more than physical integration, so that in addition to accessible classrooms and facilities, children and youth with disabilities must be afforded adequate instructional support systems. These supports may include flexible curriculum (for some students), adequately prepared teachers, and a welcoming school community culture that goes beyond tolerance to acceptance. (Peters, 2007, p.99)

In short, inclusive education represents a significant paradigm shift from segregated and institutional educational practices to practices wherein children and youth with disabilities are part of the school and classroom culture and they are accepted as students with potential. Inclusive education recognizes the importance of individual needs as well as institutional uniqueness. Simply put, inclusive education recognizes that even children with similar impairments will have unique educational needs. The flexibility of inclusive education can be seen as one of its strengths. It offers opportunities to support individual educational needs as well as opportunities to reflect the potential of institutions. And, in the Canadian context, this flexibility is very important as each province and territory controls education and each local school board oversees the implementation of provincial and territorial education policies and programs.

On its own the above overview of provincial and territorial legislation as well as a presentation of the literature pertaining to inclusive education highlights important themes relating to the education of children and youth with disabilities in Canada but, the authors feel

that this overview is somewhat restrictive and hence an application of the PALS data, 2006 is included. The following section provides the empirical evidence that is missing in policies, programs and legislation and the evidence could not have been completed without the use of quantitative data retrieved through the PALS. In many ways the section is aimed at addressing the student's observation "no numbers.... no problem."

The federal government has chosen not to fund future long form census surveys and it is the authors' observation that such a decision will significantly hamper future quantitative research in the area of disability. The Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) was a post-censal survey that collected information about persons with disabilities whose everyday activities were limited because of a health-related condition or problem. That is, potential PALS respondents were identified on the basis of their responses to the 53-question 2006 Canadian Census questionnaire. The 2006 Census questionnaire contained filter questions that enabled analysts to identify people with disabilities. If people completing the census indicated that they and or a family member had a disability they were then followed with a telephone interview questionnaire which provided data for the Government of Canada. Access to information is vitally important in today's rapidly changing world and the importance of the long form census as an entry point into information to people with disabilities is well noted. For all intents and purposes, PALS basically became the census of Canadians with disabilities and the last such "census" took place between November 2006 and February 2007.

While one of the primary purposes of this section is to provide a sketch of the educational experiences of children and youth with disabilities the other intended purpose is to show the importance of having access to data. The focus of this report is on children aged 5 to 14 who were identified by their parents or guardians as having one or more disabilities on the 2006

PALS and who were attending school in 2006. For the purpose of analysis, three distinct types of education were defined based on responses to the child questionnaire:

1. Regular education, child did not attend any special education classes;
2. Part-time special education, child attended some special education classes and some regular classes;
3. Full-time special education, child attended only special education classes.

The data analysis begins with a survey of the numbers of children and youth with disabilities in school and continues with a presentation of other important data such as types of impairment, degree of impairment, ages of children and youth, and gender.

**TABLE 1: PALS 2006 CHILD SURVEY, IN SCHOOL AND NOT IN SCHOOL, CHILDREN AGED 5-14, BY DISABILITY CATEGORY**

	Original Categories	Percentage Reporting This Type of Disability	Revised Categories	Percentage Reporting This Type of Disability
All Categories	174,810	100.0	174,810	100.0
Hearing	20,030	11.5	20,030	11.5
Seeing	16,680	9.5	16,680	9.5
Speech	78,240	44.8	78,240	44.8
Mobility	23,160	13.2	23,160	13.2
Agility	37,240	21.3	37,240	21.3
Learning	121,080	69.3	121,080	69.3
Developmental	53,740	30.7	53,740	30.7
Psychological	60,310	34.5	60,310	34.5
Other			6,290	3.6
Chronic	116,340	66.6		
ADD			47,680	27.4
Autism			18,180	10.4
Other Chronic			14,320	8.2
Other Medical			88,360	50.5

Source: Calculations by the authors from PALS 2006.

The PALS findings indicates that while children with disabilities represent a wide variety of diagnosis and impairments the actual number of children with disabilities is quite low in comparison to the overall population of Canadian children of the same age group. “In 2006, 4.6% of Canadian children between the ages of 5 and 14 had one or more disabilities “ (Statistics Canada, 2008, p. )” (Statistics Canada, 2008) Moreover, the largest category of children with disabilities was children with learning disabilities who numbered just over 120,000 children or about 70% of the total population of all children with disabilities.

**TABLE 2: TYPES of IMPAIRMENT**

	All Children, Aged 5-14	Regular School, All Regular Classes	Regular School, Some Special Education Classes	Regular School, All Special Education Classes	Special Education School
Full Sample	1	.5659	.2693	.08227	.08255
Independent Variables					
Hearing	.1143	.5481	.2221	.1099	.1199
Seeing	.09026	.4692	.2394	.1540	.1374
Speech	.4461	.4204	.3015	.1504	.1277
Mobility	.1259	.5184	.2127	.1471	.1218
Agility	.2109	.4242	.2723	.1655	.1380
Learning	.6958	.4468	.3441	.1101	.09909
Developmental	.3043	.3636	.3034	.1759	.1571
Emotional/Psychological	.3433	.4029	.3131	.1376	.1464
Other	.06239	.6737	.1837	.06332	.07925
ADD	.2746	.4168	.3719	.1122	.09904

Autism	.1033	.4091	.2377	.1722	.1809
Other Chronic	.0794	.4696	.2632	.1474	.1198
Other Medical	.5008	.5799	.2368	.09238	.09095
Speech and learning	.3852	.3934	.3141	.1607	.1318
ADD and learning	.2701	.4136	.3727	.1141	.09953
Other medical and learning	.3301	.4281	.3172	.1297	.1249

Findings show that approximately 84 % of Canadian school aged children and youth with disabilities between the ages of 5 to 14 are enrolled in educational programs provided either through regular classrooms in regular schools or with some special education classes within regular schools and both of these methods of delivery fall within the range of what is recognized as being inclusive education. Considering these findings it can be noted that very few children with disabilities are educated in totally segregated classrooms and schools. In fact, regardless of type of impairment it appears that most children and youth with disabilities are educated through inclusive education programs. For example, while children and youth with sensory impairments, including hearing and sight impairments, made up a relatively small portion of the disabled child and youth population, almost 77% of children and youth with hearing impairments are enrolled in inclusive education programs and almost 90% of children with visual impairments are in inclusive education programs. Similar observations can be made about children and youth with learning disabilities, who like hearing impaired/ Deaf children and or visually impaired children also received their education through regular classrooms in regular schools or in part time special education classes within regular schools. Even in populations such as those with developmental disabilities or emotional and psychological impairments and those with attention

deficit disorders which are often considered difficult to serve the majority of these students were in inclusive education programs.

**TABLE 3: DEGREE OF IMPAIRMENT**

	All Children, Aged 5-14	Regular School, All Regular Classes	Regular School, Some Special Education Classes	Regular School, All Special Education Classes	Special Education School
Overall Severity Index					
1. MILD	.3416	.7349	.2194	.01544	.03028
2. MODERATE	.2396	.6122	.2896	.05148	.04674
3. SEVERE	.2365	.4806	.2955	.1194	.1045
4. VERY SEVERE	.1823	.2987	.3024	.1999	.1990

53% of children with disabilities fell into the mild and moderate categories. Of those children with mild disabilities, 95% of them were in some form of inclusive education. 73% were in regular schools – regular classes and 22% were in regular schools and in regular classes with some special education classes being provided. 90% of children and youth with moderate impairments were also in inclusive education settings. For this population there was a slight shift from regular classes in regular schools (61%) to some special education classes within regular schools (29%). It should be noted that even in categories of severe and very severe impairments the majority of these children and youth were in inclusive educational programs. PALS data showed that almost 50% of children and youth with severe impairments and 30% of those with very severe impairments were educated exclusively in regular classes in regular schools. Additionally 30% of those with severe impairments and very severe impairments attended regular

classes in regular schools with some special education. Across this spectrum of severity of impairment it is evident that the vast majority of children and youth participate in some form of inclusive education.

**TABLE 4: AGES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

	All Children, Aged 5-14	Regular School, All Regular Classes	Regular School, Some Special Education Classes	Regular School, All Special Education Classes	Special Education School
Age (years)					
5	.0577	.7514	.1458	.03207	.07071
6	.0851	.7113	.1984	.03241	.05793
7	.08807	.5383	.2763	.07328	.1122
8	.07863	.5526	.3168	.08735	.0433
9	.1114	.6399	.2129	.0544	.0928
10	.1138	.5617	.2570	.1071	.07418
11	.1295	.4408	.3500	.09995	.1093
12	.1166	.5713	.2834	.0688	.07652
13	.1016	.5482	.2716	.1111	.06907
14	.1176	.4806	.3049	.1177	.0968

PALS data shows the incidence and diagnosis of impairment increases with age. It is quite likely that many young children, especially those with Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorders often go undiagnosed until they begin school or attend day care activities. Table 4 shows that regardless of age whether the children are young

(ages 5-9) or older (10-14) the vast majority of these children and youth are enrolled in educational programs within the regular school system. And, the PALS data suggests that most of the children and youth are in regular classes within regular schools and a smaller portion are in some special education classes within regular schools. Only a very small percentage of the children and youth ages 5- 14 were in segregated total special education classes or in segregated special education schools. As the children get older there is some fluctuation in the numbers of children and youth exclusively learning in regular classrooms. As children and youth get older there are fewer children and youth only in regular classes in regular schools and there is a doubling in the number of children and youth attending some special education classes within regular schools. This finding is likely attributed to age as it is difficult to make some diagnosis when the children are young.

**TABLE 6: GENDER**

	All Children, Aged 5-14	Regular School, All Regular Classes	Regular School, Some Special Education Classes	Regular School, All Special Education Classes	Special Education School
Male	.6334	.5580	.2845	.08137	.07614
Female	.3666	.5795	.2430	.08384	.09364

The PALS data reflects contemporary findings pertaining to the numbers of boys and girls with disabilities in that the number of boys with disabilities for the age group (5- 14) is significantly higher than the number of girls with disabilities. Even though the population of boys with disabilities is higher than girls with disabilities there is little difference in the proportion of boys and girls with disabilities attending regular classes in regular schools. 84% of

boys with disabilities were in either regular schools and regular classes or they were in regular schools with some special education classes. Similarly 82 % of girls with disabilities attend either regular classes in regular schools or some special education classes within regular schools. PALS data does, however, show that in the population of children 5- 14, there were more girls enrolled in regular school classes and more boys in special education programs.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

“If you deny disabled people educational opportunities, then it is the lack of education and not their disabilities that limit their opportunities.”  
(World Bank, 2003, as cited in Peters, 2007, p.106)

PALS, 2006 reports that of the approximately 164,000 children with disabilities attending school in Canada approximately 69,000 of these children were between the ages of 5-9 and approximately 95,000 children were between the ages of 10- 14. Within the age 5- 9, 43, 590 were enrolled in regular education programs and in the 10- 14 age group 49,170 were enrolled in regular education programs. The number of children with disabilities enrolled in special education programs was 24,850 for the age group 5- 9 and the number of children with disabilities between the ages of 10- 14 enrolled in special education programs was 49,170. Interestingly, the majority of children in both age groups attended “special education” classes part time. For the age group 5-9 there were 16,100 in part time special education classes and 8,750 children with disabilities participating in full time special education programs. Similarly, for the age group 10-14 there were many children with disabilities in part time special education programs than there were in the full time programs. For example, there were 27,990 in part time programs and 17,770 children with disabilities in full time programs. Statistics Canada (2008) further reports that of the age group 5-9 approximately 65% of the children with disabilities attended regular classes with approximately 25 % attending part time special education classes

and about 10% attending full time special education classes. For the age group 10- 14, Statistics Canada (2008) reported that just over 50% of this group attended regular classes, close to 30% were in part time special education programs and approximately 20% were in full time special education programs.

PALS 2006 indicates that most children and youth with disabilities live in four provinces: Ontario (40%), Quebec (18%), British Columbia (13 %) and Alberta (12%). In all provinces and territories the vast majority of children and youth with disabilities are being educated in inclusive settings. It ranges from 72.6% in Quebec to Prince Edward Island with 97%. The four provinces with the majority of children and youth with disabilities have inclusion rates of 92% (British Columbia), 83% (Ontario), 78% (Alberta) and 73% (Quebec). Consistent with Table 5, provinces and territories which are primarily rural have very high rates of inclusive education for children and youth with disabilities. For example, Prince Edward Island with 97%, Saskatchewan with 94% and Northwest Territories with 98%.

PALS, 2006 suggests that Canadian educational systems do attempt to provide well rounded educational opportunities for children with disabilities and for the most part the education is provided through inclusive models of education. As noted earlier, education in Canada is a provincial and territorial responsibility and the education of all children, including those with disabilities, falls under legislation and policy initiatives undertaken by the 10 provinces and 3 territories. While there may be differences in the manner in which education is offered from one province and territory to the next, all children with disabilities have some form of education or training available to them. Obtaining an education, however, can be a complex process involving a number of provincial and territorial government ministries, including family and youth services, social services, health services and education authorities. Despite these

various complexities empirical evidence from the PALS 2006 data suggests that the vast majority of children and youth with disabilities are in some form of inclusive education.

Over the past several decades, there has been significant growth in the integrated school system within Canada. Canadian public schools are legally required to ensure that all students receive free and appropriate education. This includes students with a wide variety of limitations and learning challenges. Canadian public schools educate students who, in previous generations, would have been educated in segregated settings or denied an education entirely. In many cases, children with activity limitations or disabilities can receive adapted classes and proper accommodations in a local school as opposed to having to travel great distances to attend a special school. In each province and territory there exist educational policies that define which children receive special education and how these children have their unique educational needs met by the school system. These policies vary among the provinces and territories, but throughout each runs a common thread of ensuring that appropriate services exist for children with disabilities.

In the final analysis, notwithstanding the differences and the complexities which exist from province to province and from territory to territory, the findings from this study show quite clearly that regardless of impairment the vast majority of children with disabilities are educated in some form of inclusive education program and very few are in totally segregated classes and or segregated schools. This article also shows the importance of having disability data sets available as they provide very detailed statistical information about people with disabilities regardless of their age, gender or socio- economic status. Moreover, data sets such as PALS do show their importance as they can and do provide much needed evidence which can then be used

in research, policy development, program development, advocacy work, and potentially legislative change. One has to wonder why such important research as PALS will no longer be carried out- skeptics might conclude that where there are no numbers there are no problems.

### **Future Research**

The authors recognize the limitations of this article in that it focuses on a discussion of quantitative data but our primary intent is to show that notwithstanding its limitations, data sets such as long form surveys do play a significant role in researching issues relevant to people with disabilities. Furthermore, the authors note that the data sets provide an excellent foundation for longitudinal comparative analysis and they provide an excellent foundation on which to carry out qualitative research wherein the voices of people with disabilities are present. The authors suggest that there is a need for such comprehensive research and an excellent example is provided by Crawford (2008) Unfortunately, future quantitative research such as that carried out under the auspices of the PALS will be difficult to pursue as the federal government of Canada no longer sponsors the long form census which provided important data sets and contact information for researchers which carried out the 2006 PALS. Considering this situation it is important that academics and researchers interested in the needs of people with disabilities advocate that the government re-instate the long form census and PALS.

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