

Chapter V

Conclusion

Oppression and exclusion are flagged as the causes for the problems faced by the disabled people, not their impairments, according to the proponents of social model. (Chennat 6)

The exploration of disability and inclusion as prominent literary themes highlights the varied viewpoints of individuals with disabilities and contributes to the advancement of inclusivity within society. The promotion of diversity, the questioning of preconceived notions, and the cultivation of a more inclusive social fabric all form integral components of the ongoing endeavour to foster disability and inclusion in literature. Through these efforts, literature holds the power to cultivate a more empathetic society and foster the integration of individuals with disabilities.

Jean Little, a highly acclaimed author of children's literature, has gained recognition for her straightforward portrayal of characters with disabilities. Through her consistent inclusion of disabled characters in her works, she realistically depicts the everyday challenges they face. Within Little's literary works, characters with disabilities are depicted as thought-provoking, pure-hearted individuals who triumph over social and physical obstacles. These characters hold values in education, family, and friendship, experience love and animosity from their siblings, express gratitude to their parents through acts of generosity, adapt to assistive technology, advocate for inclusivity, and require personal space.

The focus of this study centers on Jean Little's select novels that tackle the subject of disabilities. It utilises concepts such as special education, social inclusion, and inclusive education to emphasise the significance of education and inclusivity. Furthermore, the study incorporates the social model of disability to underscore how societal constraints and discrimination impact individuals without impairments.

In the first chapter of this study Canadian literature is extensively examined, with Jean Little positioned as a notable figure within this realm. Little's works are meticulously profiled, focusing on her writing style and recurring themes, particularly disability. The scarcity of literary texts on disability is noted compared to scholarly articles, identifying a research gap. The second chapter analyses *Mine for Keeps* and *Spring Begins in March*, emphasising physical barriers faced by protagonist Sally Copeland. The third Chapter explores *From Anna* and *Listen for the Singing*, highlighting the role of education in overcoming challenges faced by protagonist Anna Solden. In the fourth chapter, Little's autobiographical works are examined, detailing her journey and advocacy for inclusivity amidst social barriers.

The three core chapters interlace to weave the fabric of challenges and prospects. Physical barriers, stark in their material presence, impose limitations through inaccessible spaces and infrastructure, constraining mobility and access. Education, a gateway to empowerment, stands as a pivotal chapter fraught with institutional barriers and misconceptions that shroud the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, often impeding their academic journey. The social barriers, subtler yet profoundly impactful, intricately thread societal prejudices, stereotypes, and systemic exclusions into the everyday experiences of those with disabilities, shaping their narratives through societal attitudes.

In the convergence of these chapters lies the essence of the thesis statement, despite strides in awareness and advancements in accessibility driven by government policies, the enduring grip of disability persists. This study, anchored in the insights drawn from Jean Little's profound works, serves as a guiding light, illuminating the persistent challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. It underscores the critical need for comprehensive systemic reforms, encompassing the dismantling of societal attitudes and the rectification of inaccessible systems. The interconnectedness of physical, educational, and social barriers

unveils the intricate web that perpetuates the universal nature of disability, calling for a concerted effort to effect genuine change, ensuring inclusivity, and equity for all.

Following a meticulous examination and comprehensive analysis of the six primary texts, consisting of four fictional works and two nonfictional works, conducted through the lens of the social model of disability as elucidated in the three core chapters, the researcher has arrived at a multitude of significant findings. These findings offer valuable insights into the underlying themes and messages that Jean Little conveys through her writings, encompassing the domains of disability, education, and society. They serve to illuminate the intricate interplay between these themes, shedding light on the complexities and nuances inherent in Little's exploration of the experiences and perspectives of individuals with disabilities within educational and societal contexts.

Firstly, Little's works emphasise the importance of education and its ability to empower individuals with disabilities. Her characters' experiences illustrate how education can help individuals with impairments gain independence, self-confidence, and social acceptance, allowing them to navigate challenges and become successful members of their communities.

Children with disabilities face unique challenges in accessing education and achieving academic success. Despite the efforts of many organisations and governments to promote inclusive education, children with disabilities continue to face significant barriers in obtaining a quality education. This is because many schools are not equipped to provide the necessary accommodations and support to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

One of the biggest challenges faced by children with disabilities in the education system is the lack of accessibility. Many schools are not designed with accessibility in mind, which can make it difficult for children with physical disabilities to access classrooms,

bathrooms, and other facilities. This can prevent children with disabilities from fully participating in the educational experience and can impact their academic progress.

Another challenge is the lack of support for children with disabilities in the classroom. Children with disabilities often need additional support in order to succeed academically, including individualised instruction, adapted materials, and assistive technology. However, many schools do not have the resources or staff to provide this level of support, which can result in these children falling behind their peers.

In addition to the lack of support in the classroom, children with disabilities may also face negative attitudes and stereotypes from their peers and teachers. This can result in social isolation and can impact their overall academic experience. It is important for schools to promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion, and to provide education and training for students, teachers, and staff to help prevent discrimination and promote understanding of the experiences of children with disabilities.

Despite these challenges, many children with disabilities are able to achieve academic success with the right support and accommodations. There are many strategies and resources available to help children with disabilities succeed in the education system, including inclusive education programs, special education services, and assistive technology.

Inclusive education is an approach to education that aims to provide access to the general education curriculum for all students, including those with disabilities. This approach recognises that children with disabilities have the right to an education and should be provided with the necessary accommodations and support to succeed. Inclusive education programs typically involve collaboration between regular and special education teachers, and can provide children with disabilities with the opportunity to participate in the same activities and lessons as their non-disabled peers.

The significance of education in the lives of all individuals is well-established, but it is especially crucial for children with disabilities. The *National Council of Educational Research and Training's* position paper, "Education of Children With Exceptional Needs," discusses effective access, modes, and models of education for children with disabilities. According to the paper, education is a powerful tool for social change that can bridge the gap between different sections of society and initiate upward movement in the social structure. Parents of children with disabilities play a vital role in supporting and trusting the schooling process to ensure their children receive an education.

Schools provide an environment for learning and education and are often a child's first encounter with society outside of their family. This enables them to form social connections and engage in interactions. Jean Little's works often include elements of children going to school, highlighting the author's belief that education makes social inclusion possible.

Little's works emphasise the significance of special education in the lives of children with disabilities. This type of education provides children with impairments with the opportunity to identify assistive and adaptive learning methods that suit their individual needs. Special education is designed to meet the specific requirements of students with disabilities, providing them with personalised attention and services, as outlined in the essay "Special Education: The Importance of Special Education" published on the *Help Me* website. This specially designed instruction includes related services and supplementary aids and services.

Special education services play a crucial role in addressing the unique needs of children with disabilities. These services, encompassing individualised instruction, adapted materials, and assistive technology, are specifically designed to facilitate academic success and comprehensive participation in the educational journey for these children. Little's works shed light on the significance of special education, as her characters who have attended

special schools or schools for the visually impaired exemplify the benefits of this specialised approach. Through their experiences, Little convincingly demonstrates how special education provides a nurturing environment and necessary assistive technology, ultimately easing the learning process for these individuals. It is evident that the characters in Little's works who have received special education not only derive significant advantages from it but also deeply appreciate the enriching experiences afforded by this form of education.

For instance, Sally's enrolment in the special care school in the novel *Mine for Keeps* is driven by her desire to access special education. In this context, it becomes apparent that Sally receives unparalleled attention and support from the special education system, ultimately leading to her overall growth and development. Similarly, the protagonist Anna Solden in *From Anna* is advised by a doctor to enrol in a special care school, specifically acknowledging that lessons are tailored to accommodate children with poor eyesight. Given Anna's need for assistance from teachers and assistive devices, enrolling in a special care school ensures that she receives the educational support and necessary modifications crucial for her social and academic success.

Simultaneously, Little's works underscore the inherent value of inclusive education, which offers opportunities for individuals with disabilities to learn side by side with their non-disabled peers. These narratives vividly illustrate the multifaceted benefits of inclusive education, including fostering social inclusion, promoting empathy, dismantling barriers between individuals with and without disabilities, and cultivating a more inclusive society. Inclusive education is an indispensable vehicle for children with disabilities to acquire knowledge and skills while also facilitating their integration within the wider community. Recognising the significance of inclusive education, the article titled "Inclusive Education: Every Child Has the Right to Excellent Education and Learning" *UNICEF* acknowledges its

pivotal role in providing equal opportunities for all children to attend school, learn, and develop the essential skills required for their holistic development.

While special education undoubtedly remains vital for the educational progress of children with disabilities, inclusive education plays a distinct role in their social growth. The study contends that all of Jean Little's books centred on disabilities consistently highlight the value of inclusive education. For example, in *Spring Begins in March*, Sally Copeland attends an inclusive school, granting her access to the regular education system, enabling significant learning opportunities, and fostering friendships with both disabled and non-disabled peers.

Little's works serve as a poignant reminder of the social model of disability, a perspective that challenges the notion of inherent flaws in individuals with disabilities and instead directs attention to the barriers and discrimination imposed by society. Through her characters, Little effectively portrays how societal attitudes can exacerbate the challenges faced by people with disabilities, extending beyond their physical impairments.

The study extensively explores the social model of disability as a framework for addressing the societal barriers and instances of bullying experienced by individuals with disabilities. According to this model, it is the structures and norms of society that contribute significantly to disability, leading to various forms of physical, mental, social, and financial hardships. This perspective has gained widespread acceptance as a means to understand and conceptualise disability on a global scale, positing that an impairment only becomes a disability when it hinders one's social functioning.

In Little's novel *Mine for Keeps*, the character Sally, who uses a wheelchair due to cerebral palsy, encounters obstacles in her mobility and is deprived of a proper desk in her inclusive school, which sets her apart from her classmates. This lack of inclusivity not only impacts her physical experience but also hinders her social integration. Similarly, in *From Anna*, the protagonist Anna, who is visually impaired, struggles to locate her inclusive

classroom due to structural deficiencies. The environmental challenges she faces significantly affect her sense of belonging and comfort. It is crucial to recognise that individuals with disabilities already confront substantial physical and mental hurdles due to structural restrictions, and it is imperative to acknowledge and address the social barriers they encounter. Therefore, comprehensive reforms within social systems and institutions are necessary to facilitate inclusion and mitigate discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Another significant finding underscores the crucial role of family in the development and well-being of children with disabilities. Families and parents play a pivotal role in the lives of these children, providing them with the essential support, love, and care they need. It is imperative that families take the initiative to integrate children with disabilities into society. Jean Little's works strongly emphasise the significance of education for children with exceptional needs, urging parents to prioritise their special child's educational journey. Through her literary creations, Little effectively portrays that education is not only essential for the inclusion of children with special needs but also serves as a pathway to a better life for them.

In the novel *From Anna*, the Solden family flees Germany and resettles in Canada to escape the upheaval caused by World War II and the shifting political landscape in their homeland. During this transition, they discover Anna's disability and make it a priority to provide her with the necessary support to thrive in their new environment. Despite facing financial challenges in their adopted country, Anna's family places utmost importance on her education, ensuring that she is equipped with the resources and accommodations needed for her success.

In the novel *Mine For Keeps*, Sally's parents play a crucial role in promoting her inclusion and adapting their living arrangements to accommodate her needs. Despite the

initial hesitation of Sally's siblings, her parents take proactive measures to ensure that Sally feels accepted and valued within the family. They modify their living style by making adjustments to the home environment, such as creating a more accessible and barrier-free space for Sally to navigate with ease. This demonstrates their commitment to embracing Sally's disability and fostering her full participation in family life.

Moreover, Sally's mother goes the extra mile to empower Sally's independence by modifying her dresses. Recognising Sally's desire to dress herself without relying on assistance, her mother tailors her dresses in a way that allows Sally to manage them independently. By making these modifications, Sally's mother not only promotes her daughter's self-reliance but also affirms her dignity and autonomy, enabling Sally to develop a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Similarly, in the case of Anna in the book *From Anna*, her parents exhibit unwavering support and appreciation for her at every step of her life. They recognise and acknowledge her unique strengths, talents, and accomplishments, providing her with the care, attention, and time necessary for her growth and development. Anna's parents make a conscious effort to create an environment where she feels valued and loved, fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth.

Anna's parents also dedicate more time and care to meet her specific needs. They invest in resources, such as specialised educational materials, assistive technology, and therapies, to facilitate Anna's learning and overall well-being. Through their unwavering dedication, Anna's parents demonstrate their commitment to ensuring that she receives the support and opportunities she requires to thrive.

These examples from Little's works highlight the pivotal role of parents in the lives of children with disabilities. Sally's mother's modifications and Anna's parents' unwavering support exemplify the dedication and love that parents can exhibit towards their children with

disabilities. Their actions demonstrate the importance of parental advocacy and involvement in promoting the inclusion and empowerment of children with special needs.

However, it is disheartening to observe that unfavourable attitudes and preconceived notions about individuals with disabilities can exist even within the family unit. In *Mine For Keeps*, Sally experiences alienation from her siblings due to their parents' and siblings' lack of empathy, misconceptions about disabilities, or fear of societal stereotypes. These family members, whether parents, siblings, or grandparents, are not yet prepared to share their living spaces with Sally due to her cerebral palsy. Consequently, Sally feels uncomfortable in her own home and instead prefers the inclusive and accommodating environment of her special school. Similarly, in *From Anna*, Anna's siblings treat her poorly, with her brother Rudi repeatedly mocking her as "Awkward Anna." Furthermore, Anna is excluded from the Christmas gift that her siblings organise for their parents. These experiences contribute to Anna's sense of inferiority compared to her siblings, leaving her deeply affected and emotionally distressed. These instances portrayed in Little's literature vividly depict the psychological trauma that individuals with disabilities may also endure within their own families.

Little's works shed light on the significant role of assistive technology in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Assistive technology serves as a transformative tool that empowers disabled individuals, enabling them to participate fully in society and overcome the barriers they face. By leveraging assistive devices, individuals with disabilities can mitigate the effects of their impairments and enhance their social inclusion.

The *World Health Organization* recognises the crucial role of assistive technology in promoting independence and dignity for people with disabilities. Assistive technology not only empowers individuals to lead more autonomous lives but also contributes to broader socioeconomic benefits. Little's works align with this recognition, emphasizing the value of

assistive technology and underscoring its essential role in facilitating the lives of individuals with impairments.

In the realm of education, assistive technology plays a vital role in supporting children with disabilities. These technologies encompass a range of software, hardware, and devices designed to facilitate access to the curriculum and enhance classroom participation for children with disabilities. For instance, speech recognition software can be a valuable tool for children who struggle with typing or writing, while audio books and text-to-speech software can greatly benefit children with visual impairments.

Little's characters exemplify the significance of assistive technology in enabling children with disabilities to thrive academically and socially. Sally, the protagonist in *Mine for Keeps* and *Spring Begins in March*, who has cerebral palsy, relies on a wheelchair and crutches to navigate her surroundings. Similarly, Anna, the visually impaired character in *From Anna* and *Listen for the Singing*, utilises glasses and braille to facilitate her daily activities, especially in the realm of learning. Little's own life experiences also reflect the importance of assistive technology, as she employs tools such as Braille, a computer for typing, a screen recorder, and glasses to effectively live and learn. These assistive technologies have been instrumental in her writing career, enabling her to overcome barriers and harness her creative potential. Little's works underscore the critical role of assistive technology in empowering individuals with disabilities. By enabling access, promoting independence, and enhancing educational opportunities, assistive technology serves as a catalyst for inclusivity and equal participation in society. It is a tool that empowers individuals to overcome limitations, fostering their overall development and well-being.

Peers play an immensely significant role in the integration of children with disabilities within educational and social settings. The inclusion of these children alongside their non-disabled counterparts not only fosters a profound sense of belonging and security but also

mitigates the risk of them being cast aside as outsiders. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the lack of awareness and understanding surrounding disabilities among non-disabled students can give rise to apprehension when it comes to forming friendships, and in some cases, may even manifest as taunting or disruptive conduct. Jean Little's personal encounters with being teased by her peers due to her visual impairment, as depicted in her book *Little by Little: A Writer's Education*, serves as a vivid portrayal of the adverse consequences such behaviour can inflict upon a child with a disability. Conversely, Sally's positive experiences of being embraced and supported by her peers, as portrayed in the book *Mine for Keeps*, serve as a compelling testament to the pivotal role peer support plays in cultivating a sense of inclusion and belonging for children with disabilities. Thus, it is imperative to recognise and harness the power of peer interactions to facilitate the integration and overall well-being of children with disabilities.

In addition to Sally's positive experiences of being supported and accepted by her peers in her regular school, it is important to note the additional dimensions of these friendships. Sally not only receives assistance and understanding within the school environment but also enjoys socialising with her friends outside of school. These friendships extend beyond the confines of the classroom, enabling Sally to engage with her peers on a deeper level and develop connections based on shared interests, such as their mutual love for a pet dog. This aspect further emphasises the significance of peer relationships in facilitating the integration of children with disabilities, as they provide opportunities for meaningful interactions and social bonding beyond academic pursuits.

Furthermore, the experiences of Sally and Anna in their special school highlight the presence of understanding and supportive friends who remain by their side throughout their lives. These friendships serve as a vital source of emotional support, fostering a sense of belonging, and contributing to their overall well-being. It is worth noting, however, that the

social success of Sally and Anna is not confined to their special school alone. They also demonstrate the ability to form friendships in regular schools, underscoring the potential for integration and acceptance among their non-disabled peers.

By showcasing the positive experiences of Sally, Anna, and their friends in various educational settings, it becomes evident that inclusive peer relationships can be transformative. These relationships not only contribute to the academic and social development of children with disabilities but also promote understanding, empathy, and acceptance among their non-disabled peers.

Another noteworthy finding pertains to Jean Little's exploration of not only educational aspects but also the incorporation of social occasions and the experiences and interactions of individuals with disabilities in these settings. Social events can present challenges for individuals with special needs, as they may harbour uncertainties regarding acceptance and fair treatment. However, it is imperative to recognise the significance of these events as opportunities to empower and ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities within the broader community.

In Jean Little's book, *Little by Little: A Writer's Education*, her unfortunate encounter of being ridiculed at a birthday party due to her visual impairment serves as a poignant illustration of the potential for negative experiences in social contexts. Nonetheless, attending social events can also offer valuable prospects for socialisation and engagement, which can prove advantageous for children with disabilities. The key lies in ensuring that they are accorded respect, dignity, and a genuine sense of belonging.

This study serves to underscore the profound significance of inclusion for individuals with disabilities, illuminating its pivotal role in fostering social connections, facilitating active participation in various activities and events, ensuring equitable access to opportunities, and dismantling barriers and peer exclusion. By prioritising social accessibility

and promoting active engagement, the ultimate objective of inclusion is to engender acceptance from peers, foster the development of problem-solving skills, and cultivate a positive self-image for individuals with disabilities.

An additional significant finding revolves around the intricate relationship between migration and disability, wherein the already challenging topic of migration becomes even more complex when coupled with disability. Jean Little, the author under examination, adeptly draws upon her personal experiences to exemplify this thematic connection. This intersection of migration and disability poses unique and arduous challenges for individuals, families, and societies, as expounded upon in Margherita Pisoni's enlightening article titled "Intersectionality between Migrants and People with Disabilities," published on *A Path for Europe's* website.

Within this context, it becomes evident that migrants with physical or intellectual disabilities encounter additional social barriers and face heightened inaccessibility to essential services, thereby compounding the difficulties associated with the act of migration itself. Jean Little's literary works vividly portray the struggles faced by characters with disabilities who undertake migratory journeys compelled by circumstances such as poverty, war, or the pursuit of a better life. For instance, in the novel *From Anna*, the protagonist Anna and her family relocate from Germany to Canada in order to escape the perils of the Second World War, all the while contending with Anna's visual impairment as an additional challenge. Similarly, in Jean Little's memoir, *Little by Little: A Writer's Education*, her personal accounts reveal frequent relocations driven by the necessity of medical evaluations, a circumstance further magnified by her own visual impairment.

Another significant observation and challenge pertains to the process of learning a new language, which is an inherent aspect of the migration experience. The examination of Anna's struggles to learn English despite her disability presents an important and thought-

provoking subject for analysis. By delving into Anna's personal journey, profound scholarly observations can be made regarding the intricate process of language acquisition.

Anna, who faces the additional challenge of being visually impaired, initially encountered significant obstacles in her efforts to acquire English proficiency. However, with her migration to Canada, she found herself immersed in an environment conducive to language learning, which facilitated her progress in mastering the new language. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that at the age of nine, Anna confronted instances of language discrimination, highlighting the detrimental effects of bias and prejudice on language acquisition, whether overt or subtle. These experiences shed light on the importance of addressing and rectifying discriminatory practices to ensure equitable opportunities for language learning among individuals with disabilities.

Despite the difficulties Anna encountered in both Germany and Canada due to her disability, her perseverance and determination ultimately led to her success in acquiring the English language, albeit with the assistance of additional support. This underscores the significance of providing appropriate resources and accommodations to individuals with disabilities during the language acquisition process, fostering an inclusive and accessible learning environment.

By closely examining Anna's journey, valuable insights emerge regarding the intricate dynamics of language acquisition in the context of migration, particularly for individuals with disabilities. These insights emphasise the imperative of implementing inclusive language education practices, eradicating discriminatory practices, and establishing robust support systems to facilitate the seamless integration and linguistic development of individuals with disabilities within their new linguistic and cultural contexts.

Jean Little's vision inherently emphasises the pivotal role of inclusion for individuals with disabilities, aiming to cultivate a sense of normalcy within their lived experiences.

Fundamental to her perspective is the notion that reducing the disablement experienced by individuals with disabilities necessitates the removal of barriers impeding their full participation in societal structures. Little's stance posits that the attainment of normalcy, in the sense of feeling included and integrated, is intricately linked to minimising the disabling effects imposed by physical, educational, and social barriers. Central to her vision is the idea that fostering inclusion involves not merely accommodating individuals with disabilities but actively dismantling the obstacles that hinder their engagement and contribution within society. This perspective aligns with broader movements advocating for systemic changes aimed at creating environments that empower individuals with disabilities to navigate the world with greater agency and equality.

Based on the findings of this study, several topics for further research can be recommended. Firstly, future research could focus on the representation of disabled children in the works of Jean Little, particularly in her other novels. Secondly, it would be interesting to investigate the perspectives of other writers from Little's generation on disability and inclusion. Thirdly, using the social model lens, examining social barriers to inclusion could help to identify and address specific challenges faced by people with disabilities. Fourthly, exploring possibilities for education and accessibility to aids for people with disabilities could inform policies and practices aimed at promoting inclusion. Lastly, further research could examine the significance of assistive technology, education, and inclusion through the social model of disability.

Disability emerges as a significant and universal subject that transcends national borders, racial distinctions, and gender categories. It has persisted throughout history and remains a relevant issue in contemporary society. While attitudes towards disability have undergone some transformation over time, further changes in societal attitudes are imperative, as advocated by the social model, which posits that it is society that renders

individual disabled. This comprehensive study underscores the paramount importance of education and inclusion for children with disabilities, along with the crucial roles played by parents and schools in fostering their well-being. Moreover, adopting a social model perspective, the research highlights the existence of societal barriers that impede the attainment of true inclusion. To advance the field of disability studies and foster a more inclusive society, it is recommended that future research builds upon these findings and endeavours to address the persistent challenges and barriers faced by individuals with disabilities.