ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Learning in and beyond the classroom: Communities of practice in education support for separated children

Maggie Grant | **Andrew Burns** | **Siân E. Lucas**

Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK

Correspondence
Maggie Grant, Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA, Stirling, UK.
Email: margaret.grant@stir.ac.uk

Abstract

Separated children, seeking protection in a new country unaccompanied by parents or customary caregivers, have the right to education yet many face difficulties accessing appropriate provision. We analysed data from Scotland across different types of provision: one specialist programme for separated children and four areas providing a mixture of mainstream and adapted classes. Drawing on situated learning theory and the concept of communities of practice, we argue that supporting these learners requires collaborations with them and across professional boundaries. While highly effective communities of practice can and do develop organically, a coordinated approach to expanding them could bring additional benefits.

KEYWORDS
community of practice, education, education support, separated children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children

INTRODUCTION

In classrooms around the world, separated children—who have arrived in a new country under 18 years of age unaccompanied by a parent or customary caregiver, and/or have been trafficked—are engaged in learning. For some this includes a return to education following a period of disruption, for others this may involve their first experience of attending formal education on a regular basis.

Although research on the needs and related support services for separated children has started to accumulate from a range of countries (cf Abunimah & Blower, 2010; Chase, 2010; Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Kanu, 2009; Kohli, 2006; Rydin et al., 2011; Thoresen et al., 2016), it is only recently that this body of work has begun to consider the role of communities of practice within the classroom (De Fina et al., 2020a, 2020b). This paper expands that framing to consider how communities of practice within and beyond the classroom underpin the provision of education and related support for separated children by facilitating the learning and development of their members including teachers, other professionals and young people.

The data are drawn from a project that evaluated a specialist English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course provided by a Further Education College[1] in a large urban area in Scotland. This course is provided specifically for separated children aged 16 and over, who make up a majority of unaccompanied children in Europe (Eurostat, 2020, 2021). In addition to collecting data from stakeholders in this specialist course (young people, teachers and other professionals), we also collected data from professionals working with smaller populations of separated children in different areas of Scotland, where young people were attending a mixture of mainstream classes, most frequently ESOL classes for adults, with more limited adapted support. In this paper, we analysed the full range of data through the prism of communities of practice in order to illuminate a fuller set of actors and learning processes involved in education support, and to highlight the ways in which community building outside the classroom influences what happens within, and vice versa.

The education and support of separated children in Scotland

Separated children living across Europe form a diverse group. Nearly 13,600 asylum applications from unaccompanied children were received in the European Union in 2020 (Eurostat, 2021) with 4081 unaccompanied children claiming asylum in the UK in the year ending March 2022 (Refugee Council, 2022). In addition to unaccompanied minors, children are also trafficked into Europe. Exact numbers are difficult to estimate because only those who are discovered are added to official figures, but almost a quarter of the 20,532 identified or suspected trafficking victims in Europe during 2015/2016 were children (European Commission, 2018). Separated children may be in the process of seeking asylum or may have been granted asylum. As the term 'unaccompanied asylum seeking children' is often used within UK legislation we use this term when referring to specific documents.

Disaggregated UK statistics are rarely published by the Home Office, making precise numbers of separated children in Scotland difficult to establish. Research by Rigby et al. (2018) found that there were approximately 140 unaccompanied children being 'looked after' by local authorities across Scotland, with a further 125 care leavers over 18 years of age who had been unaccompanied children. Since 2000, around two-thirds of separated children have been looked after in Glasgow (ibid), although the number of local authorities involved in supporting separated children has increased in the past few years due to changes including transfers under s.67 of the Immigration Act (2016), the Vulnerable Children's Relocations Scheme and the UK National Transfer Scheme (COSLA, 2018, 2020).

According to UNICEF (2016, p. 14), regardless of migration status, "children have a right to be protected, to keep learning and to receive the care and services they need to reach their full potential". Education has been recognised as being central to integration (cf Ager & Strang, 2008; Popov & Sturesson, 2015) and as contributing to the well-being of the young people (cf De Wal Pastoor, 2015; Viner et al., 2012). While the commitment of this particular group of young people to education has been well-documented (Kohli & Mather, 2003), the stress of the asylum process, separation from family and familiar places, and the work involved in adapting to a new country, culture and language

have all been shown to affect separated children's education (Boyden & Hart, 2007; Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Kanu, 2009). In their research in England, Ott and O'Higgins (2019, p. 569) argue that education provision for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) should be conceptualised as "meeting multi-faceted needs of UASC including emotional, cultural, social, language and educational needs and as a vehicle for integration". Given this range of needs, understanding how educators, other professionals and young people work together to address them is an important part of the picture.

The legal and policy context for separated children bridges two distinct and often conflicting policy areas: immigration and child welfare. In the UK, the former is largely predicated on suspicion, restriction and detention, while the latter is based on inclusion and the promotions of rights (Giner, 2007). In Scotland, this is further complicated by a multi-level government structure in which immigration policy and administration are reserved to the UK Government, while education and child protection are devolved to the Scottish Government. Based on the principals and values set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the 'Getting it Right for Every Child' framework has been used and developed in Scotland since 2006 and has provided guidance and resources to support coordinated collaboration between children, families and the services they need (Scottish Government, nd).

As with other UK nations, local authorities in Scotland are obliged to provide separated children with accommodation, safeguarding and protection. Alongside local authority services, support for separated children (excluding those from EU countries) is provided by the Scottish Guardianship Service, which was established in 2010. Guardians assist separated children in navigating the welfare and immigration systems, helping them to understand the processes involved and advocating for them to receive the services they need, including education, health and welfare (Crawley & Kohli, 2013).

The Scottish Government's New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018–2022 outlined a vision for Scotland as 'a welcoming place' for refugees and asylum seekers, including separated children, to rebuild their lives (Scottish Government, 2018). The strategy was developed with direct input from a range of community stakeholders (Scottish Refugee Council, 2020), and has been welcomed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019). The tone of the strategy can be contrasted with the UK Home Office's approach (for a discussion of the impact of the UK Government's 'hostile environment' policy on a range of migrant communities, see Taylor, 2018). Nevertheless, the wider picture in Scotland of attitudes towards historical and contemporary migration is considerably more mixed, as evidenced in the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students in schools (Guyan, 2019) and explored in artworks such as Kayus Bankolé's (2020) *Sugar for Your Tea* and Lavery's (2019) *Scotland, You're No Mine*.

The policy frameworks in Scotland explicitly draw on research that conceptualises education as a key marker of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). The New Scots strategy states "Suitable support for young people, particularly those between 16 and 18 years of age, but more broadly for 15–20 year olds, is required, so that they can access the education opportunities, and support they need to reach their potential and go on to future success" (Scottish Government, 2018, p. 47). Compulsory education in Scotland is to the age of 16 with the option of continuing education in school until the age of 18, or moving into further education colleges that provide a range of vocational and academic courses (Education Scotland, 2022). Therefore, education for separated children, most of whom are aged 16 years or over, is often provided within the further education sector rather than in school settings. Many separated children attend English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses provided by their local college, although some younger children attend local primary or secondary schools and access English as an Additional Language (EAL) support. Most publicly funded ESOL courses in Scotland are provided through local partnerships, which typically include colleges, in line with the ESOL Strategy for Adults in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2015). While ESOL is not compulsory,

demand is high (and sometimes unmet) with different partnerships using assessment processes in order to place learners in appropriate provision and avoid duplication (Education Scotland, 2017).

The increase in dispersal of separated children to a greater range of local authorities has important implications for education. In some areas, there may only be one or small numbers of separated children attending a particular school or college. In contrast, in large urban areas separated children often attend colleges or schools that have experience of supporting similar groups. Anecdotal evidence suggests substantial disparity in provision across Scotland, a pattern similar to that found in other parts of the UK (Ott & O'Higgins, 2019).

Situated learning and communities of practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that all activity is situated in that it constitutes and is constituted by the social world. As such, all learning is situated and "is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p. 31) that involves the whole person developing understanding through activity in and with the world. Learning is not a separate, reifiable process; it is an "integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (p. 35). This relational view is consistent with theories of social practice in sociology and anthropology where theories emphasise the reciprocal, interdependent and mutually constitutive nature of the relationships between actors, their actions and the social worlds in which they act. Within this context, Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 51) argue that "[o]ne way to think of learning is as the historical production, transformation, and change of persons". This makes their theory of particular relevance in trying to understand how learning and education can support separated children in adapting to their new lives in a different country through their participation in different communities of practice, with focus on educational settings.

Communities of practice can be any sociocultural group where new members are able to learn practices from other variably experienced members of the community (ibid). Lave and Wenger introduce their concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation' which is the process by which new members in a community of practice begin the process of becoming experienced 'old timers' from whom future newcomers can learn. This learning takes place regardless of whether there is any intentional instruction (ibid). 'Legitimacy' comes from an individuals' interest or participation in a community, while 'peripheral' relates to a way of gaining access to that community. Given the complexities of communities, it is important not to reduce participation in them as a linear progression towards a closed or complete centre from a side-lined periphery. The partial nature of peripherality "suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources of understanding through growing involvement" (p. 37). This access to resources is not only to more experienced members, but also to other newcomers or near peers who can figure out the practices of the community in relation to each other (Lave, 2011).

Communities of practice are dynamic structures that emerge and evolve over time. These structures do not exist in isolation and are continually interacting with, and responding to, forces in the wider context around them. Wenger (1998) identifies three core characteristics of communities of practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Mutual engagement involves meaningful and sustained coordination; work is required to both build and maintain communities of practice. Joint enterprise refers to the communally negotiated practice, defined by and belonging to participants in the community, and which creates a sense of mutual accountability. Shared repertoire is a result of communities negotiating meaning over time, such as memories of events, patterns of actions and shared understanding of sector-specific terms.

Learning communities are developed when educators forge links with others to seek advice, share and access information, or benefit from mutual support. A number of recent studies have used

qualitative methods to explore the structures of teachers' networks and how these shape the development of teaching. Pataraia et al.'s (2015) study of social networks in higher education, teachers drew on informal relationships (bottom-up networks) as well as formalised structures for teacher development (top-down networks), showing how teachers can be involved in multiple communities of practice simultaneously. Similarly, Baker-Doyle's (2012) study of first year teachers highlighted the value of networks of 'diverse professional allies' in school communities, including students' parents and volunteers.

It has long been recognised that the classroom is more than a place where students study languages or other subjects; it is also where wider sociocultural learning takes place, and where the actions and relationships in a student's sociocultural environment shape their learning (Vygotskiǐ et al., 1987). Classroom communication is a social activity in which teacher–student interactions shape, maintain and change relationships between and among themselves (Sarangi, 1998). Drawing on the Bordieuan notion that all linguistic exchanges are predicated on and (re)produce social structures, interactions between teachers and students are hierarchical, and create learning cultures where some communication styles are privileged over others (Roberts & Sarangi, 2001). However, over time, teachers and students develop a community of practice in the classroom based on 'shared semiotic practice and a shared repertoire of resources around common interests and aims' (De Fina et al., 2020a, p. 71). In line with migration research and policy that emphasises a two-way process of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), classroom-based communities of practice facilitate learning based on reciprocal relationships in which 'old timers' and newer members (Lave & Wenger, 1991) are both altered by the process.

METHODS

Our study included a mixture of qualitative approaches to investigate education support for separated children (see Table 1 below). We carried out classroom observations of the specialist ESOL course for separated children aged 16 or over, provided by a Further Education College in a large urban area. Two researchers observed four classes of 3 hours each, led by four different lecturers covering two ESOL levels. We moved around the classroom to observe different activities and recorded jottings describing direct teaching, discussions between lecturers and students, peer-to-peer dialogue and classroom environment, which were then written up into full fieldnotes at the end of the observation in line with common ethnographic practice (cf Bryman, 2008). After each session, we carried out one-to-one debriefing interviews with lecturers to reflect on the observations and seek further information to contextualise observation data (Cassady et al., 2004).

We carried out three focus groups with young people aged 16 years and above: two with young people who were currently undertaking ESOL in the specialist programme and a third with young people who had previously attended this programme before moving on to different further or higher educational courses. A total of 21 young people took part in the focus groups, which were facilitated by two researchers. The young people were identified by the Further Education College as either current or previous students on the specialist programme.

We conducted telephone interviews with five external and internal stakeholders working regularly with the specialist ESOL programme. Interviewees included accommodation providers, a psychologist, a maths lecturer who was teaching a new module on the programme and a Guardian from the Scottish Guardianship Service. The interviews explored participants' views on how the programme addressed young people's needs, and included questions about language learning, guidance and pastoral care.

TABLE 1 Data sources and types

Method of data collection	Data sources	Number/average length	Data type/output
Classroom observations	Students/Lecturers on specialist ESOL course, and observers	4×3-h classes	Researcher jottings and fieldnotes from observation
Debrief interviews with lecturers	Lecturers for specialist ESOL Course	4×debrief interviews with lecturers	Interview notes
Telephone interviews	Stakeholders for specialist ESOL Course Professionals working with smaller populations of Separated Children	Five interviews with five stakeholders (average length 35 min) Four interviews with five individuals (average length 28 min)	Audio recordings and detailed notes
Written responses	Professionals working with smaller populations of Separated Children	Two written reponses to request for information	Written responses
Focus groups	2×focus groups with young people currently attending specialist ESOL course 1×focus group with young people who successfully completed specialist ESOL course	Twenty-one participants in total (average length 60 min)	Transcripts of audio recordings

To explore education provision in other parts of Scotland, we conducted a further four telephone interviews with five education and social work practitioners (one interview involved two participants) in areas with smaller populations (<20) of separated children. In these areas young people were attending non-specialist courses at school or college, including ESOL classes aimed at a range of adult learners. These interviews, along with two written responses from additional practitioners, covered four local authority areas, and explored participants' roles, the arrangements for education and related support in their areas, and what helped or hindered their efforts to meet young people's needs.

Participants for interview across different sites were identified through the networks of members of the project's Advisory Group (who worked in practice, policy and research related to education and/or separated children) and then through snowballing. Interviews lasted between 25 and 65 min and were audio-recorded. During each interview, the researcher took notes and used the audio-recording to develop a fuller record shortly afterwards.

For each strand of data, two researchers analysed the data and identified initial themes independently, before combining their analysis and agreeing final themes and sub-themes via discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Having identified 'communities of practice' as a prominent theme, all three researchers then revisited the data to verify the context of the coded examples and draw out further details of how these communities had developed (or not) across different sites.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the General University Ethics Panel at University of Stirling. Prior to classroom observations, the research team visited the college and gave a presentation on the research to the young people so that they were aware of the nature and scope of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in this study. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

FINDINGS

Building a community of practice in the classroom

For the specialist ESOL course, participants from multiple perspectives highlighted the work that lecturers did to engage young people from the outset. Following referral to the college, the Principal Lecturer assessed each young person's learning capabilities and developed individual plans based on the students' needs and interests. These initial assessments meant that, as well as being of a similar age, students in each class were at a somewhat similar level of English proficiency. The time invested in this intake procedure was viewed as important by lecturers, other professionals and young people alike. One interviewee from a housing provider described how "…rather than just shoe-horning young people onto the courses that need to be filled or are available", young people were tested for the level that would suit them. If there were no places available at the time of assessment, other professionals reported that lecturers would "find a way to find a space" on another course initially, to help students get used to the college environment before joining the specialist course at the next available opportunity.

This tailoring of the course around age and language proficiency was seen by young people as improving their learning experience. It meant that they did not feel 'out of place' in the group, that they had opportunities to develop relationships with their peers and to learn from them as well as from lecturers, as detailed by one of our focus group participants.

> Yes, exactly, because you know when you come to ESOL, you are get the friend and the people around the same age as you and same level of English, that's you can communicate, but if you don't have that much English but you are in same level […]

This social aspect of the programme was seen as crucial by young people across the focus groups who, understandably, relished the opportunity to make friends with others in similar situations to themselves. This improved the 'legitimacy' of the group for them and contributed to their motivation to both attend the course and engage in shared activities that further developed their relationships and their learning. For example, because the classes were always held in the same rooms, the young people worked together to decorate them; this included a world map with everyone's home country annotated with information and pictures. This provided opportunities to learn about each other's respective cultures, while building relationships and learning English at the same time. This contributed to young people's feelings of being part of a community, learning with and from each other, which was noted during classroom observations and discussed by young people in the focus groups:

> Especially the class decoration is colourful, compared to other classes, just under just blank wall so you feel more confidence when you go on through that class and the people and as they say, the same age, and it is very important. You can build the confidence, build the trust and make your best friends

Other professionals commented that, once teaching had begun, lecturers built up a sense of community in the classroom over time. These perspectives were underpinned by what they had observed and been told by young people. Because young people generally enjoyed the programme and had good relationships with the lecturers, this helped them to sustain their engagement and progress in education. One interviewee, who worked in a local semi-independent accommodation service, commented:

> We see that when we go to visit [the college] and all the young people have kind words about [the programme]. They say the lecturers are fun, they enjoy it, they're nice.

Young people were able to build up trust in the lecturers and turn to them for information and support on a range of issues beyond education. On both days of classroom observations, a small queue of students waited for the lecturers after class with questions, forms they needed support to read or complete, or concerns. A focus group participant highlighted some of the help they can access via the lecturer:

> Sometimes if you feel down, they help you, you can talk to her and she will introduce you to some professional people you can go to and get help from them.

Other professionals with links to the specialist ESOL programme described how they had come to rely on the lecturers' expertise in helping young people access the support to which they were entitled. Lecturers, in turn, benefitted from information about young people's lives outside the classroom—either from young people themselves or through collaborating with other professionals. The mutuality of these exchanges highlights the reciprocal nature of relationships and how knowledge and skills are developed within and across communities of practice (De Fina et al., 2020a; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The lecturers had built their knowledge and skills in a range of areas through interactions with young people over time and also through their involvement in professional communities of practice outside of the classroom and the college.

Local professional communities of practice

Over time lecturers on the specialist ESOL course had developed good working relationships with a range of external organisations, including accommodation providers, the Scottish Guardianship Service and social work and health professionals. This informal community of practice, involving colleagues across different professions offered circular benefits, as noted above. Pooling information across professional boundaries about the education, welfare, asylum and care systems improved expertise across the network. In essence, this created a community of practice focussed on learning how to best support a specific group of young people. As a result, young people were more likely to get the information, advice and support they needed, while professionals became more comfortable and competent in working with separated children.

Interviewees working in external organisations valued the relationships with lecturers highly for their consistency and continuity. Some noted that they would refer young people into the specialist ESOL programme from surrounding areas around the city because the systems elsewhere were less consistent and well-developed. In addition, external relationships also provided a supportive network for lecturers. The course leader had arranged regular supervision for the lecturing team with a psychologist and access to supervision and training to help them to reflect on and process their own feelings in relation to their work with separated children. Lecturers described this as an invaluable element of professional development that enabled them to continue to offer educational and pastoral support to young people facing a range of challenges, and to explore ways in which to develop practice and resources to better meet their needs.

These communities of practice were primarily built upon informal relationships (bottom-up) rather than formalised structures for teacher development (top-down), forming an expanded and specialised learning community around the separated children attending the specialist ESOL course. The commu-

nity had expanded over a period of decade to include a wider range of professionals involved in separated children's lives, including not only education and language but also welfare, protection and accommodation. As one participant, a psychologist with extensive experience working with separated children, noted:

> It's about recognising the needs of these young people and the complexity around it, which requires understanding and thinking developmentally and systematically in terms of who does what.

In other areas of Scotland, professionals in education and social work were working with smaller populations of separated children and tended to know them individually. However, there was less variety in the type and scope of services for the young people to take up, and particularly in specialist services for separated children. This group of interviewees generally had limited previous experience of working with separated children and provision was more likely to be in the early stages of development. However, most were collaborating with colleagues in other professions, and in one area in particular a multi-disciplinary community of practice was starting to emerge, largely coordinated via an experienced specialist social worker with responsibility to support separated children. The local further education college, youth services and voluntary organisations all contributed to ESOL provision, depending on the level and availability of the students. Although the form and scale differed from that in the large urban area, interviewees indicated that people's shared goal of supporting separated children, and their willingness to find alternatives if initial strategies did not work out as planned, had helped build trust and mutual support among professionals from different services. Another similarity with the large urban setting was that this community of practice had developed somewhat organically (bottom up) although strategic recognition had been given through the remit of the specialist social work professional.

Professionals in some other areas described how difficult it could be to access the necessary information and services to support young people, and some education and social work staff felt isolated in this work. For example, two teachers in one area described a lack of co-ordination, training and guidance in relation to working with separated children. While they had been able to work with some children to effect good outcomes, this appeared largely down to a process of experiential learning: "figuring things out as we went along", such as seeking out information on the asylum process. A community of practice where they could learn from more experienced practitioners in other areas as well as from near peers would be a useful resource for teachers in this position.

Learning in and beyond the classroom

The inter-professional community of practice surrounding the specialist ESOL provision directly affected classroom interactions. Lecturers were explicit about paying attention to classroom communication, including verbal and non-verbal interactions with individuals and the class as a whole, acknowledging that nuanced differences in teachers' interactions with individual students can impede or accelerate their learning (Sarangi, 1998). The information provided by other actors in the community of practice informed how lecturers worked with individual students, which was especially important at times when young people were experiencing distress or at a critical point in the asylum process. For example, sometimes staff at the accommodation services helped young people to contact lecturers to explain a planned absence due to an appointment or meeting, or shared (limited) information informally, so lecturers could judge when to allow some leeway in a student's timekeeping or concentration.

The content and structure of lessons also reflected knowledge gained through the overlapping communities of practice within and beyond the classroom. Lecturers had spent considerable time developing ESOL materials relevant to students, using a topic-based learning approach to teach language, grammar and critical thinking skills. Lessons observed during this research included those based around the local city, Scotland and the UK, for example learning about justice systems. As one lecturer described it "…we teach for their lives, not the curriculum" as evidenced in a lesson planned for the future was about reading a mobile phone contract. These resources, knowledge and skills had been built through involvement in professional communities of practice as well as from repeated engagement with separated children in classroom communities over time. In this way, these lecturers had become experienced 'old timers' in the education and support of separated children through their involvement in overlapping communities of practice.

To address the concern that specialist language courses may limit opportunities for getting to know peers from the local community (Augelli et al., 2018; Lems, 2019), lecturers had developed activities beyond the classroom that facilitated access to and participation in other communities of practice for young people. For example, in collaboration with a local social worker, they had set up a peer activity group that many students from the class were involved with. A partnership with a conservation charity meant young people could work towards an award by taking part in various nature-based activities.

While many of the young people took advantage of these opportunities to become involved in activities via the college, they also sought out their own by learning from their near peers on the programme. A focus group participant highlighted some of the ways in which this happens:

> Then I started to build up this friendship, because only at two places, here and campus, but you start to meet with the people with different - they know more than you and they would start to invite you. 'Let's go and eat.' 'Oh, do you know where is the mosque?', and they will indicate you. So you start to build up […]

As Ager and Strang (2008) note, educational settings can facilitate contact with people who are already established in the community and help to build relationships that support integration. In our study, both interviewees and focus group participants linked educational progress with broader positive outcomes, in particular confidence and social integration, as one participant from a housing provider noted:

> The benefits of [the programme] for our young guys are not just about speaking English, not just about words and sentences – but also social skills, confidence building. Being able to communicate a wee bit helps to instil a sense of confidence and achievement for young people. The outcome isn't just about being able to speak English, it's about more than that.

In areas with smaller populations, separated children usually attended either adult ESOL classes or local schools, and there were fewer opportunities for specific curriculum activities tailored to their circumstances and needs. However, efforts were in place to help support connections within local communities. For example, in some areas, different services collaborated to bring together separated children and peers who had grown up in the area for regular social activities. In one area, two young people who had arrived as unaccompanied children were now involved in providing peer support for more recent arrivals.

Social workers also helped young people to make connections based on their interests and preferences: for instance, visiting larger cities to find familiar foods, a greater variety of shops, and places

of worship not available in their own area. Sometimes young people also had an element of choice in accommodation, including living with a local family, and this brought opportunities to develop relationships in the community, echoing research on foster care in other countries such as England (Wade et al., 2012) and Switzerland (Mörgen & Rieker, 2021), where this is a more common living arrangement for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.

Some interviewees felt living in areas with smaller numbers of separated children offered opportunities for young people to adapt and make friends in the local area more quickly. A similar view can be found in research from 'folk schools' in Denmark where migrant and non-migrant students learn together and developing relationships with Danish peers enables refugee students to access other resources, including education support and knowledge about everyday life in Denmark (Borsch et al., 2019).

DISCUSSION

The communities of practice identified in our analysis benefitted education support at a structural level, for example, services working together to organise classes or events for young people, and at an interpersonal level, shaping everyday interactions between lecturers and students in the classroom. Communities of practice involved not only teachers and learners, but also staff in social work, accommodation, healthcare and third sector organisations who rarely set foot in the classroom yet influenced the planning and provision of education. Young people and professionals described similar hopes for separated children: opportunities to learn English, build relationships and enjoy a range of activities. The building of confidence, self-esteem and social networks can help young people to imagine and maintain a sense of a 'clear future trajectory' (Allsopp et al., 2014), albeit a conditional one for those awaiting a decision on their asylum claim (Kohli & Mather, 2003).

These communities of practice were based on individuals seeking out and making connections with others based on shared interests and aims (Pataraia et al., 2015), rather than the strategically developed multi-agency networks explored elsewhere (Hanberger et al., 2016). One of the benefits of these organically developing communities of practice lies in the strength of the connections between individuals who have found each other and forged a relationship based on shared goals and values, as evidenced in the positive ways they discussed their engagement with each other.

Our analysis found examples of existing and emerging networks within local areas, but far less evidence of exchanges between different geographical areas, with some interviewees describing a sense of professional isolation. This is a clear weakness of the organically developing communities of practice—that they are developing in isolation from one another. As a next step, creating more explicit links *between* these communities of practice and engaging individuals currently working in isolation, would open up opportunities to build, refine and share resources across different contexts. This would create a constellation of practices (Wenger, 1998), based on shared elements such as their related enterprises, some common membership (e.g. Guardians working across different areas) and similar conditions in working within the same policy landscape. Professionals who are new to working with separated children would benefit from the knowledge of 'old timers' who have built up several years' worth of experience as well as from near peers who are also figuring things out. As well as past and present learners, these communities should include practitioners with different levels of experience, working across a range of services—including education, social work, guardianship, housing/accommodation and healthcare—to bring together the necessary skills and knowledge for effective and sustainable education support for separated children.

The value of lecturers on the specialist ESOL course having developed knowledge and skills in supporting this particular group of students appropriately was emphasised from multiple perspectives,

in line with previous studies from other countries (Augelli et al., 2018; Popov & Sturesson, 2015). Although a large majority of separated children in the UK are concentrated in urban areas, in recent years other local authorities are starting to receive small groups (COSLA, 2018, 2020). This dispersal has been accelerated by a Home Office directive in November 2021 that changed the previously voluntary arrangements for transferring children away from areas with higher populations of separated children to a mandatory scheme. Therefore, the development of local and translocal communities of practice can make an important and timely contribution to sharing and spreading expertise across geographic as well as professional boundaries.

Another benefit of multi-disciplinary communities of practice is that they can provide support over an extended period, as professionals' remits have different timescales. Young people may remain in contact with other members of the community of practice outwith college term-time and beyond the period in which education funding is available. Under Scottish legislation, separated children are 'care experienced' and therefore eligible for continued support beyond the age of 18, and in some cases up to age 26, which may help extend their regular contact with social workers, carers or staff in accommodation. Having a range of professionals engaged in the community may provide an important safety net for young people at times of transition.

Within language classrooms, students and educators form a 'superdiverse community of practice', to borrow De Fina et al.'s (2020a) phrase. Young people attending the specialist ESOL classroom described feeling safe: a particularly prized commodity for separated children when other areas of life can feel precarious (de Wal Pastoor, 2015). The wider communities around young people, beyond those described in the current paper, are likely to be transnational and include family, friends, carers and relationships based on shared culture, faith and/or language (Wade et al., 2012). Young people may chose to keep different parts of their lives fairly separate to retain a sense of agency in navigating the complex and varied systems that influence their lives (Chase, 2010). However, language courses can act as a stepping stone: as young people's level and confidence in using English in different situations increases, they are better equipped to make the most of opportunities to meet and make friends independently, thus building their own networks and becoming involved in or forming communities of practice that are relevant for them.

Limitations

Our study explored provision for young people aged 16 years or over, and while separated children in Europe are most likely to fall into this age group (Eurostat, 2020, 2021), we know less about the experiences of younger children, particularly in schools, which may be very different. The current paper includes the views of young people who were currently engaged in the specialist programme or who had (in most cases) successfully completed it. Due to the design of the original project (Lucas et al., 2019), we did not obtain the views of young people who had disengaged from the programme or of young people in smaller cities and rural areas of Scotland. These important perspectives should be explored in future research.

CONCLUSION

Communities of practice in education and related support involve young people, teachers and other professionals working with the same young people in other contexts. While young people are often highly motivated and effective in advocating for their own needs, strong inter-disciplinary connections

also play an important role, enabling professionals to support each other in what can be demanding and emotional work and ensure resources—information, advice, experience—are shared as effectively as possible.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

ORCID

Maggie Grant https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4077-5890

ENDNOTE

[1] Further Education Colleges provide post-16 academic and vocational courses in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2022)

REFERENCES

Abunimah, A., & Blower, S. (2010). The circumstances and needs of separated children seeking asylum in Ireland. *Child Care in Practice*, *16*(2), 129–146.

Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *21*(2), 166–191.

Allsopp, J., Chase, E., & Mitchell, M. (2014). The tactics of time and status: Young people's experiences of building futures while subject to immigration control in Britain. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *28*(2), 163–182.

Augelli, A., Lombi, L., & Triani, P. (2018). Unaccompanied minors: Exploring needs and resources to plan socio-educational programs into school settings. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, *10*(1), 43–61.

Baker-Doyle, K. J. (2012). First-year teachers' support networks: Intentional professional networks and diverse professional allies. *The New Educator*, *8*(1), 65–85.

Bankolé, K. (2020). Sugar for your tea Retrieved 31 July 2020, from https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/books/read-kayus-bankoles-contribution-edinburghs-message-skies-1396752

Borsch, A. S., Skovdal, M., & Jervelund, S. S. (2019). How a school setting can generate social capital for young refugees: Qualitative insights from a folk high School in Denmark. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *34*(1), 718–740.

Boyden, J., & Hart, J. (2007). The statelessness of the World's children. *Children and Society*, *21*(4), 237–248.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.

Cassady, J. C., Speirs Neumeister, K. L., Adams, C. M., Cross, T. L., Dixon, F. A., & Pierce, R. L. (2004). The differentiated classroom observation scale. *Roeper Review*, *26*(3), 139–146.

Chase, E. (2010). Agency and silence: Young people seeking asylum alone in the UK. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *40*(7), 2050–2068.

Correa-Velez, I., Gifford, S. M., & Barnett, A. G. (2010). Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia. *Social Science and Medicine*, *71*(8), 1399–1408.

COSLA (2018). National transfer scheme protocol for unaccompanied asylum seeking children—Scottish protocol. Retrieved 28 October 2021, from http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/18-04-16%20UASC%20 National%20Transfer%20Scheme%20-%20Scottish%20Protocol.pdf

COSLA (2020). Unaccompanied asylum seeking children—Consultation on national transfer scheme. Retrieved 20 September 2021, from https://www.cosla.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0032/19796/20-09-25-Item-03-Unaccom-panied-Asylum-Seeking-Children-Consultation-on-National-Transfer-Scheme.pdf

Crawley, H., & Kohli, R. K. (2013). *She endures with me. An evaluation of the Scottish Guardianship Service Pilot*. Scottish Government.

De Fina, A., Paternostro, G., & Amoruso, M. (2020a). Odysseus the traveler: Appropriation of a chronotope in a community of practice. *Language & Communication*, *70*, 71–81.

De Fina, A., Paternostro, G., & Amoruso, M. (2020b). Learning how to tell, learning how to ask: Reciprocity and story-telling as a community process. *Applied Linguistics*, *41*(3), 352–369.

De Wal Pastoor, L. (2015). The mediational role of schools in supporting psychosocial transitions among unaccompanied young refugees upon resettlement in Norway. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *41*, 245–254.

Education Scotland. (2015). Welcoming our learners: Scotland's ESOL strategy 2015–2020, the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) strategy for adults in Scotland 2015. Retrieved 18 October 2021, from https://www. education.gov.scot/Documents/ESOLStrategy2015to2020.pdf

Education Scotland. (2017). English for speakers of other languages (ESOL): Impact report 2015–2016. Retrieved 18 October 2021, from https://education.gov.scot/Documents/ESOL-Impact-Report.pdf

Education Scotland. (2022). Further education. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/ learning-in-scotland/post-16-opportunities/Further%20education

European Commission. (2018). Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU. Retrieved 12 April 2019, from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-secu-rity/20181204_data-collection-study.pdf

Eurostat. (2020). News release: Almost 14,000 unaccompanied minors among asylum seekers registered in the EU in 2019. Retrieved 20 July 2020, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10774034/3-28042020-AP-EN.pdf/03c694ba-9a9b-1a50-c9f4-29db665221a8

Eurostat. (2021). News release: 13600 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in 2020. Retrieved 20 September 2021, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210423-1

Giner, C. (2007). The politics of childhood and asylum in the UK. *Children & Society*, *21*(4), 249–260.

Guyan, K. (2019). *The perceptions and experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic young people in Scottish schools*. Intercultural Youth Scotland. Retrieved 27 July 2020, from https://interculturalyouthscotland.org/in-sight-report

Hanberger, A., Wimelius, M. E., Ghazinour, M., Isaksson, J., & Eriksson, M. (2016). Local service-delivery networks for unaccompanied children in Sweden: Evaluating their effectiveness. *Journal of Social Service Research*, *42*(5), 675–688.

Hopkins, P., & Hill, M. (2010). The needs and strengths of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people in Scotland. *Child and Family Social Work*, *15*(4), 399–408.

Kanu, Y. (2009). Educational needs and barriers for African refugee students in Manitoba. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *31*(4), 925–939.

Kohli, R. K. S. (2006). The comfort of strangers: Social work practice with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people in the UK. *Child & Family Social Work*, *11*(1), 1–10.

Kohli, R., & Mather, R. (2003). Promoting psychosocial well-being in unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in the United Kingdom. *Child and Family Social Work*, *8*(3), 201–212.

Lave, J. (2011). Everyday life and learning [video online]. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from https://newlearningonline.com/ new-learning/chapter-6/supporting-material/lave-and-wenger-on-situated-learning

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lavery, H., 2019. *Scotland You're no mine, from Finding Sea Glass*. Stewed Rhubarb. Audio-recording of the author performing this work available at the Scottish Poetry Library. Retrieved 7 October 2021, from https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poet/hannah-lavery/

Lems, A. (2019). Being inside out: The slippery slope between inclusion and exclusion in a Swiss educational project for unaccompanied refugee youth. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *46*(2), 405.

Lucas, S. E., Grant, M., & Burns, A. (2019). *Towards best practice in educating and supporting separated children in Scotland: Executive summary*. Scottish Refugee Council.

Mörgen, R., & Rieker, P. (2021). Doing foster family with young refugees: Negotiations of belonging and being at home. *Children & Society.*, *36*, 220–233. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12460

Ott, E., & O'Higgins, A. (2019). Conceptualising educational provision for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England. *Oxford Review of Education*, *45*(4), 556–572.

Pataraia, N., Margaryan, A., Falconer, I., & Littlejohn, A. (2015). How and what do academics learn through their personal networks. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *39*(3), 336–357.

Popov, O., & Sturesson, E. (2015). Facing the pedagogical challenge of teaching unaccompanied refugee children in the Swedish school system. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, *64*, 66–74.

Refugee Council. (2022). Top ten facts from the latest statistics on refugees and people seeking asylum. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/top-10-facts-about-refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum/

Rigby, P., Fotopolou, M., Rogers, A., & Manta, A. (2018). *Responding to unaccompanied minors in Scotland: Policy and local authority perspectives*. University of Stirling.

Roberts, C., & Sarangi, S. (2001). *"Like you're living two lives in one go": Negotiating different social conditions for classroom learning in a further education context in England* (pp. 171–192). Education and linguistic difference.

Rydin, I., Eklund, M., Sjöberg, U., & Högdin, S. (2011). *Evaluation of implementation of the "general recommendations for education of newly arrived pupils" issued by the Swedish Agency for Education*. Halmstad University.

Sarangi, S. (1998). 'I actually turn my Back on [some] Students': The metacommunicative role of talk in classroom discourse. *Language Awareness*, *7*(2–3), 90–108.

Scottish Government. (2018). *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018–2022*. Scottish Government.

Scottish Government. (N.D.). Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC). Retrieved 27 October 2021, from https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/principles-and-values/

Scottish Refugee Council. (2020). The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: Year one progress report. Retrieved 23 July 2020, from https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-year-one-progress-report/

Taylor, R. (2018). *Impact of 'Hostile Environment' policy debate on 14 June 2018: House of lords library briefing*. House of Lords Library.

Thoresen, P., Fielding, A., Gillieatt, S., & Thoresen, S. H. (2016). Identifying the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children in Thailand: A focus on the perspectives of children. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *30*(3), 426–446.

UNHCR. (2019). The three-year strategy (2019-2021) on resettlement and complementary pathways. Retrieved 23 July 2020, from https://www.unhcr.org/5d15db254.pdf

UNICEF. (2016). Uprooted: The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children. Retrieved 27 October 2021, from https://www.unicef.org/reports/uprooted-growing-crisis-refugee-and-migrant-children

Viner, R. M., Ozer, E. M., Denny, S., Marmot, M., & Resnick, M. (2012). Adolescence and the social determinants of health. *Lancet*, *379*, 1641–1652.

Vygotskiĭ, L. S., Rieber, R. W., & Carton, A. S. (1987). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky*. Plenum Press.

Wade, J., Sirriyeh, A., Kohli, R., & Simmonds, J. (2012). *Fostering unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. Creating a family life across a 'World of Difference'*. BAAF.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Maggie Grant is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection, whose work focuses on care experienced children, families and migration. She specialises in qualitative and creative methods of research with children, young people and the adults in their lives, including a current study with survivors of child trafficking. Prior to starting in research she worked in refugee support organisations in London and Syria.

Andrew Burns is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection specialising in ethnography and qualitative methods. He is currently undertaking an ethnography in residential childcare in Scotland exploring everyday care and what makes it therapeutic for children and is also working on qualitative project exploring how/if the shared group experiences of residential childcare are captured and recorded. Prior to starting in research, he worked in front line drug and alcohol services in Glasgow.

Siân Lucas is a lecturer in Social Work at the University of Stirling. Siân has research interests in peri-natal support, migration, linguistic discrimination and social justice. She has worked on various research projects to explore dimensions of well-being using participatory research methods.