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Youth Philosophy Conferences and the Development of Adolescent Social Skills: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT: In this paper we present an empirical case study into the effects of attending a philosophy conference on social skill development in 15- to 18-year-old students. We focus on the impact that the conference had on their communication skills, sociability, cooperation and teamwork skills, self-confidence, determination, social responsibility, and empathy. These are social skills previously studied in 2017 by Siddiqui et al. who found student development in these areas as a result of Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions in primary schools. In this paper, we ask whether our conference—Pursuit of Knowledge—brought about comparable results. Overall, attendees reported that they felt that the conference had improved their communication skills, sociability, cooperation and teamwork, self-confidence, determination, social responsibility and empathy. We conclude that further research into the potential of models of philosophy akin to the model employed by the conference should be conducted. We discuss the potential of this model as a means of educating for social skills.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy for Children, non-cognitive, social and communication skills, empathy, social responsibility

Introduction

PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE IS A RESIDENTIAL philosophy conference for 15- to 18-year-old students, organized by the authors of this paper in the UK. It has been in existence since 2015 and aims to promote philosophy in schools, to bring together a community of participants to share their interest in philosophy, and to explore the potential educational benefits of philosophy.

This paper presents and discusses the results of an empirical case study into the effects of this experience on attendees' social skills: specifically, their communication skills, sociability, cooperation and teamwork, self-confidence, determination, social responsibility and empathy. The case study is based on questionnaire responses from all 71 attendees, alongside 7 interviews with randomly-selected attendees that asked them about their experiences of the conference and its effects on them.[1]

The research design underpinning this study is adapted from prior research by Siddiqui, Gorard, and See (2017a and 2017b); they studied the effects of Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions on the social skills of 9- and 10-year-old students. Their research involved a large-scale quasi-experiment involving 2722 participants from 42 primary schools in the United Kingdom, and showed that P4C sessions had a small effect on students' communication skills, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience (Siddiqui et al. 2017a, 155). The case study presented in this paper investigates whether *Pursuit of Knowledge* brought about comparable improvements in the social skills of older students. We used the same questionnaire as Siddiqui et al. and followed similar methods of analysis to compare the effects of participating in *Pursuit of Knowledge* and P4C sessions. Siddiqui et al.'s questionnaire, which is a valid, reliable and rigorous instrument for measuring these social skills, was easily adapted to our purposes.

Studying the effect of the conference on social skills is important for various reasons. Social skills can be understood as contributing to human flourishing. One compelling way of thinking about educational activities is that they ought to help students to flourish, or live 'a rewarding life' (Brighouse 2005, 4). Improving social skills can help students achieve rewarding lives. White and Reiss list ten personal qualities, including social skills, which they think contribute to flourishing: regulation of emotions, confidence, independence of thought, determination, good judgement, 'fortitude in coping with reverses,' courage, appropriate judgements of others, sensible attitudes towards risk, and keeping values in proper perspective (2013, 7). This idea motivates Siddiqui et al.'s research; they hold that 'education is also about the happiness of individuals, their preparedness for life beyond work and their general "flourishing"' (2017b, 146).

Social skills are important when considering other aims of education. Gutmann argues that 'education in character,' which incorporates educating for social skills, is central to educating for democratic citizenship (1987, 51). It is also possible to make the case that social skills are important regardless of the

overall aims of education. Siddiqui et al. propose that poor social skills can cause social isolation, rejection, bullying, behavioral and social emotional difficulties, and can lead to criminal activity and mental health problems (2017a, 10). In their 2011 systematic review of research into social and emotional learning programs in schools, Durlak et al. found that teaching for social and emotional learning leads to 'positive social behaviour,' fewer 'conduct problems,' less 'emotional distress,' and improved academic performance (413). In light of this, it seems that improving students' social skills would be a worthwhile outcome of *Pursuit of Knowledge*.

In this paper, we provide evidence which suggests that the model of philosophy education used in *Pursuit of Knowledge* can contribute to the social skills of 15- through 18-year-old students. This research supplements existing evidence about the potential of P4C models of philosophy to contribute to the development these skills.

Philosophy for Children

A body of evidence associates philosophy in schools with improvements in students' social skills. For the most part, the literature about philosophy in schools focuses on Philosophy for Children (P4C) which is a common model for philosophy education in schools. In 2008, an estimated 2000 primary schools and 300 secondary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland had some involvement with P4C (Hand and Winstanley 2009, xiii). P4C is an umbrella term used to describe programs stemming from Matthew Lipman's work to bring philosophy into schools. Lipman thought that schools needed to change their focus from trying 'to get students to learn the solutions' to getting students to 'investigate the problems and engage in inquiry for themselves' (Lipman 2003, 20). His P4C program involves a distinctive pedagogy—*Community of Inquiry (COI)*—whereby 'students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions' (Lipman 2003, 20). The COI model forms the basis of many P4C pedagogies.[2]

In 2015, Gorard, Siddiqui, and See published a report which linked P4C sessions run by the *Society for Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education* (SAPERE) with improved cognitive outcomes.[3] Their research was the first large-scale randomised controlled trial into the value of P4C. It involved 3,159 students aged 8–10 from schools across the UK. This study renewed interest in P4C in the UK, with the press claiming that: 'Philosophy sessions boost primary school results' (BBC 2015), and 'Philosophical discussions boost pupils' maths and English progress, study finds' (*Guardian* 2015). This research confirmed earlier findings summarized by Topping and Trickey in a systematic review of

empirical studies linking P4C with improved outcomes in a variety of cognitive tests (2004, 376).

However, the effect of P4C on social skills has been less extensively studied. This motivated Siddiqui et al. to investigate these 'non-cognitive' outcomes. In their study, they focused on measuring communication skills, sociability, cooperation and teamwork, self-confidence, determination, social responsibility, well-being, and empathy. Aside from well-being, we chose to focus on the same 'non-cognitive' outcomes to allow for comparison.

A range of improved social skills have been suggested as outcomes of P4C. Lipman saw P4C as developing 'creative and . . . caring' thinking (2003, 172). Through COI, children recognize 'the complexity and multidimensionality of human experience' (Lipman 2003, 173) and practice 'care thinking' (138) in which reasonableness and kindness are key qualities. Haynes claims that 'bringing the development of thinking and values together is a defining feature of the philosophy with children movement' (2008, 55). Fisher sees P4C as helping to 'create a moral culture, a way of thinking and acting together that cultivates virtues such as respect for others, sincerity and open-mindedness' (2008, 57).

Empirical studies support the connection between P4C and the development of students' social skills. For example, Barrow's case study into the impact of P4C on communication skills concludes that P4C sessions improve classroom dialogue, which in turn improves students' communication skills (2015). Makaiau's research into social skills associated with P4C shows a promising link between P4C and the skills conducive to democratic citizenship (2017). The British Department for Education cites a P4C case study which demonstrates the potential of P4C sessions to counter extremism in schools through encouraging open-mindedness, discussion of difficult subjects, and critical and independent thought (Bonnell et al. 2010, 79).

A Comparison between Two Different Models of Philosophy Education

Siddiqui et al. point to the small-scale, qualitative nature of existing research into the non-cognitive improvements linked to P4C. They undertook a large-scale experiment into the non-cognitive benefits of P4C which they present in a 2017 report (2017a), and 2017 paper (2017b). They reported that P4C sessions had a small positive effect on students' social skills including their ability to communicate effectively, cooperate, work in teams; and on their resilience (Siddiqui et al. 2017b, 155). This bolsters previous studies into the effects of P4C. However, few studies have considered the effects of other models of philosophy education and whether they can contribute to the social skills of pre-college students as well.

We characterize the model of philosophy education provided by *Pursuit of Knowledge* as a Traditional University Model (TUM) of philosophy education. It is characterized by the use of lectures to communicate philosophical

perspectives; and seminars in which students discuss the perspectives communicated in the lectures, and engage in facilitated inquiry in smaller groups. TUM is widely employed in universities across the world to teach philosophy. It is significantly different from the more widely studied P4C model. The P4C model studied by Siddiqui et al. is that used by SAPERE.

Haynes (2008, 31–38) summarizes the P4C pedagogical model: in a P4C session, students sit in a circle. They have a set of ground rules which have been mutually agreed upon. A session begins with the introduction of a stimulus to the group—a picture, story, thought experiment, or quote—that will provoke questions. Children are asked to pause for thought, in small group discussions, in pairs, or in silence. The next step involves questioning. In some cases, this is spontaneous and natural but in others, children's questions are written on a board and grouped to allow children vote on the questions they would like to address first. Group discussion is then facilitated with the aim of building on each other's ideas. The teacher records the discussion and aims for closure at the end of the session with some form of review.

Siddiqui et al. (2017a and b) claim that SAPERE sessions led to improved social skills in students, but there is little empirical evidence about the effect of TUM on students' social skills. We are interested in whether TUM (which emphasizes the planned communication of philosophical perspectives) rather than facilitated dialogue (emphasized by P4C approaches, such as that used by SAPERE) might bring about similar improvements.

Fisher and Tallant's case study (2015) discusses whether TUM might bring about similar benefits to P4C approaches. The researchers claim that existing P4C-based studies do not 'deploy contemporary philosophical research' in the classroom (2015, 2). Fisher and Tallant conducted empirical research into the impact of contemporary philosophical research on primary and secondary school children in Nottinghamshire (9- and 10-year-olds, and 14- to 16-year-olds, respectively). They taught lessons based on philosophical research about moral reasoning, sport, and narrative. After each session, students were asked how the session had changed their confidence in answering questions about the subject matter of the session; for example, after the lesson on moral reasoning, students were asked: 'Are you more confident in your ability to think about what makes an action right (and wrong) than you were at the start?' (2015, 8). Researchers found that students became 'more confident about their ability to reason about the areas described' (2015, 10). Overall, they concluded that 'it would seem that there is no obvious impediment to generating . . . positive social impacts' from a TUM approach to philosophy education (2015, 10). This provides a precedent for thinking that TUM might provide a positive educational experience for precollege students; however, Fisher and Tallant did not directly study students' social skills; rather, they focused on students' confidence tackling questions about moral reasoning, narrative and sport. Although this single case

study has limited generalizability, it seems to open the door to exploring whether TUM can play a valuable role in schools.

In order to understand whether TUM can improve students' social skills, we compare the impact of *Pursuit of Knowledge* to the impact of SAPERE sessions as reported by Siddiqui et al. (2017a and b).

Pursuit of Knowledge: A Case Study

Research was conducted during the fourth year of *Pursuit of Knowledge*, which took a TUM approach to philosophy education. There were three types of activities:

(1) Lectures delivered by members of the University of Sheffield's philosophy department.

(2) Semi-structured seminars led by undergraduate volunteers from *Philosophy in the City*, an organization bringing philosophy into Sheffield schools and other community spaces.[4] The seminars included games and activities as well as time for open discussion. Between 10 and 13 students attended each seminar, and the groups were constantly changing so that students were able to meet and interact with new peers.

(3) Evening poster-making sessions during which students (divided into in small groups) were introduced to four or five philosophical ideas. They were then asked to come up with their own answers to a philosophical question which interested them.

Figure 1: Pursuit of Knowledge Program

Day 1	Day 2
Lecture 1: Ryan Byerly: The value of studying religious conceptions of character: the case of others-centeredness. (1 hour)	**Lecture 4**: Megan Blomfield: Climate ethics. (1 hour)
Seminar 1: on Byerly's talk (40 minutes)	**Seminar 4**: on Blomfield's talk. (40 minutes)
Lecture 2: Luca Barlassina: How to think about the intelligence of emotions. (1 hour)	**Lecture 5**: Joshua Forstenzer: Democracy and science: an uneasy partnership. (1 hour)
Seminar 2: on Barlassina's talk (40 minutes)	**Seminar 5**: on Forstenzer's talk. (40 minutes)
Lecture 3: Rosa Vince: What is sexual objectification and what is wrong with it? (1 hour)	**Plenary session**: reflections and questionnaires filled in and collected. (30 minutes)
Seminar 3: on Vince's talk. (40 minutes)	
Poster making session: Short introductions to philosophical questions followed by a poster making session. (30 minutes followed by 2 hours)	

Over the course of the conference, lecturers and seminar leaders were asked to reflect on and judge the content, structure and pedagogy of their work (the organisers provided guidance for those requiring it). In this way lecturers and seminar leaders were encouraged to think about why they wanted to communicate philosophical ideas and perspectives to students, the best way to communicate these ideas and perspectives, and the value of the activities.

There are key differences between our research on *Pursuit of Knowledge*, as a case study, and Siddiqui et al.'s study into SAPERE sessions. First, the conference was residential, taking place over two intense days of study. Second, it took a TUM rather than a P4C approach to philosophy education. Third, participants in our study were older than those studied by Siddiqui et al., aged 15 to 18 years as opposed to 9 to 10 years, respectively.

There are also similarities. Neither the conference nor SAPERE sessions involve any examination or student testing. Both were low-stakes events in terms of the current educational discourse about test-taking and academic achievement; students were merely expected to engage and participate in the events. *Pursuit of Knowledge* was mindful of some potential problems with the TUM; the conference carefully balanced the ages, genders and nationalities of speakers and seminar leaders, so that speakers were invited to participate with this in mind. Overall, there was equal gender representation amongst the speakers and the seminar leaders. The poster-making session ensured that student participants were able to investigate ideas that interested them, share their work, and have a voice within the conference.

Research Design

Two research questions guided this study:

(1) How do the effects of attending *Pursuit of Knowledge* compare to the effects of SAPERE sessions studied by Siddiqui et al.?

(2) Which aspects of *Pursuit of Knowledge* improved participants' social skills?

One of the advantages of case study research is that it allows exploration of 'the richness of the phenomenon' in question (Yin 2009, 2). This case study used a questionnaire and interviews to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was designed to elicit a comparison between Siddiqui et al.'s findings and our own; interviews were designed to optimize understanding in relation to our research questions by providing further detail, particularly regarding the effect of TUM.[5] This was undertaken in accordance with Mason's view that mixed methods research can 'help us to understand multi-dimensionality and social complexity' (2009, 9) by exploring answers in more depth through interviews.

In order to compare the extent to which *Pursuit of Knowledge* and SAPERE sessions affect the development of teens' social skills, we adapted the questionnaire used by Siddiqui and her team in their work on non-cognitive outcomes of SAPERE sessions, using ten of that team's questions.

This case study differed from Siddiqui et al.'s study in several ways:

(1) It did not include pre- and post-testing, or a control group. Instead, we asked students to self-report how much they thought the conference had affected their non-cognitive attributes, and used the reported baseline scores as an indication of how they would have felt had they not attended, under the assumption that the group was able to provide its own control group data. We divided the difference in scores by the standard deviation of the data set.

(2) It was smaller, including 71 participants, all of whom were self-selecting: that is, attending students had either attended a philosophy class or indicated interest in the subject, factors which likely affected our results as discussed below.

Additionally, we interviewed seven randomly-selected students to ascertain how students were interpreting questions so that we could draw more accurate conclusions about the meaning of the quantitative data collected; and to determine, in more detail, which components of the conference played a role in improving attendees' social skills. Specifically, we wanted to explore the relative impacts of taught content (the planned communication of philosophical perspectives in lectures and seminars) and the dialogue-based components (discussions that took place during seminars and the poster-making session; and spontaneously, for example during lunch). The semi-structured interviews, about 30 minutes long, followed the questionnaire format while gently prompting participants to explain their answers.

The interview data was transcribed into NVivo where it was coded and categorized to indicate which responses could be ascribed to the lectures and seminars, and which to the structure of the conference (the effects resulting from attending a residential event, meeting students from other schools, interacting with undergraduate students, etc). These categories were further coded using techniques from grounded theory to analyze the data. This approach holds that 'without grounding in data, that theory will be speculative, hence ineffective' (Strauss 1987, 3); it draws the researchers' focus to the collected qualitative data and away from their own preconceived expectations. In our analysis, 'coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data' (Charmaz 2006, 46).

The research has been granted ethical approval from the University of Birmingham. Questionnaire and interview responses are confidential. All reported

findings have been fully anonymised. There was no attrition: all conference participants filled in the questionnaire.

Findings

The first research question asks how the improvements in the social skills of conference attendees differ from the improvements of participants in Siddiqui et al.'s study. There are ten points of comparison which correspond to the ten shared questions. Siddiqui et al. calculated the mean difference between their control group results and post-intervention results, then divided this by the standard deviation to calculate an effect size of the SAPERE intervention. Due to design differences, we calculated the self-reported mean change in social skills as indicated by participants in lieu of the difference between control group and intervention data.

Figure 2: Comparison of findings from Siddiqui et al. (2017) and *Pursuit of Knowledge*

Questions taken from student questionnaire	**Siddiqui et al. (2017a & b) SAPERE effect size**	**Conference effect size**	**Associated social skills**
I am good at explaining my ideas to other people.	0.10	0.87***	Social and communication skills
I like meeting new people.	0.05	0.30*	Sociability
I can work with someone who has different opinions to me.	0.15	0.41*	Cooperation, teamwork and resilience
I can do most things if I try.	0.04	0.37*	Self confidence
Once I have started a task I like to finish it.	-0.02	0.19	Determination
I want to try and make my local area a better place.	0.08	0.17	Social responsibility
I like to be told exactly what to do.	-0.04	-0.12	Social responsibility
I am often afraid to try to new things.	-0.02	-0.10	Social responsibility
I try to understand other people's problems.	0.01	0.55**	Empathy
I know where to go for help with a problem.	-0.02	0.11	Empathy
* means low statistical significance, ** medium, *** high Cohen 1969)			

As Figure 2 shows, *Pursuit of Knowledge* participants reported that they felt that the conference had improved their social skills across the board. The

effect size reported is much higher than the effect size of Siddiqui et al.'s study; however, this may be due to differences in the research design and several others factors, some discussed above:

(1) lack of a control group, as well as pre- and post-testing;

(2) study's reliance on self-report which may have introduced bias;

(3) older age of the students;

(4) smaller sample size;

(5) sample composed of self-selected participants;

(6) awareness that the conference organizers were conducting the research; and

(7) structure of the conference.

Even considering these confounding factors, it still possible that *Pursuit of Knowledge* and similar programs can contribute to social skills development. Siddiqui et al. found that SAPERE sessions had the greatest effect on communication skills, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience. Our study also showed the highest levels of self-reported change in these skills. In addition, we found that students felt that attending *Pursuit of Knowledge* also improved their feelings of determination, social responsibility and empathy.

When the data is presented in terms of the percentage of participants who indicated that the conference improved their social skills, certain outcomes are highlighted as points of contrast to Siddiqui's study. We observed higher-than-expected levels of self-reported change with regard to:

(1) sociability: 40.8% of participants reported that the conference helped them feel more positive about meeting new people

(2) self-confidence: 41.8% of participants reported feeling more positive about trying new things

(3) social responsibility: 45.7% felt more strongly that they wanted to improve their local environment

(4) empathy: 54.3% of participants said that the conference had inclined them to try to understand other people's problems; interestingly, this was an area which showed some of the smallest effect sizes in Siddiqui's study.

It appears from the data collected that *Pursuit of Knowledge*, which used the TUM approach to philosophy education rather than a P4C approach, may contribute to improvements to social skills reported by Siddiqui et al. It may also contribute additional benefits for 15- to 18-year-olds.

Figure 3: Student perceptions of the effect of taught content and dialogue on social skills at Pursuit of Knowledge

Question	Percentage who associated content with improvement	Percentage who associated dialogue with improvement	Associated social skills
I am good at explaining my ideas.	25%	72%	Social and communication skills
I like meeting new people.	14%	83%	Sociability
I can work with someone who has different opinions to me.	13%	77%	Cooperation, teamwork and resilience
I can do most things if I try.	19%	80%	Self confidence
Once I have started a task I like to finish it.	11%	87%	Determination
I want to try and make my local area a better place.	38%	57%	Social responsibility
I like to be told exactly what to do.	33%	52%	Social responsibility
I am often afraid to try to new things.	19%	73%	Social responsibility
I try to understand other people's problems.	24%	71%	Empathy
I know where to go for help with a problem	31%	53%	Empathy

Our second research question asked which elements of *Pursuit of Knowledge*—planned communication of philosophical perspectives (content delivered through lectures) or dialogue-based activities—were most effective in developing social skills.

As expected, most participants cited dialogue as most effective in developing their social skills, which accords with previous research into the benefits of P4C. However, participants did report that content contributed to some improved outcomes, specifically in relation to changes in empathy and social responsibility. This corresponds to the two points of divergence between improvements in social skills attributed to the conference, and improvements in social skills attributed to SAPERE sessions by Siddiqui et al. This suggests that the planned communication of philosophical perspectives had a distinctive effect on improving empathy and social responsibility. By this, we do not mean that lectures, as

a pedagogical approach, played a role in improving outcomes for empathy and social responsibility, rather that the philosophical perspectives communicated were valuable.

Our interview data gives some further insight into the value of lectures, which direct attention toward the opinions and reasoning of others. For example, one participant explained in an interview that a lecture had encouraged this person to become more empathic towards those with different opinions:

> When we were doing the feminism lecture, a lot of the things she was saying . . . I understood a lot of them and I agreed with them. But there were aspects where I don't care about it, but I get where you're coming from and I understand it, and it was just like saying . . . I still respect it even though she's got a different opinion to me.

This suggests that philosophical perspectives communicated in lectures can contribute to increased empathy by demonstrating that it is possible to engage in reasonable and respectful debate despite disagreement. The interviewee was clearly impressed by the lecturer's carefully argued conclusions, which seems to have led this student to consider the views of others with a more open mind.

Another participant credited a lecture with an increase in empathy noting that that conference "helped me to become more empathetic . . . as I was exposed to the opinions of others."

Interviewees also reported that attending lectures had an impact on their feelings about social responsibility. This was because taught content provided clarity about the issue involved. One interviewee explained that during a seminar, the seminar leader provided a philosophical perspective which contributed to the student's own beliefs:

> We were just talking about how in our school or like in our area there was a global warming protest, for the kids. And like a lot of our pupils went to walk out of school and we were stopped because we were told we wouldn't make a difference. But the seminar leader was like, well activism can work, it's just about different priorities, so it has made me think that maybe my original priority, I should have stuck to it more. Not been so influenced by other people's views.

Another interviewee explained that a point made during the lecture about objectification made them reassess their understanding of the issue and feel more confident communicating their own views, even in a public setting:

> The point that she said of how they're looking for a definition [of objectification] that if you're at a protest you can explain to any person on the street. It just put it in a new perspective . . . like it's not that complicated. . . . And it is something that you can educate the masses on.

An interviewee also explained that the conference made them feel more inclined to try to improve their neighborhoods. They attributed this change to philosophical perspectives communicated in a lecture:

> I'm more inclined [to be politically active] because some of the issues they've brought up in these lectures were things that we could change. Like if people put forward their ideas and send them to the politicians and the parties and vote for them, then we can hope that they change it. For example, the last [lecture] was on democracy. . . . It made me more motivated to [vote] yeah.

These vignettes suggest that the philosophical perspectives presented in lectures and introduced and discussed in seminars may have played a role in improving social responsibility and empathy, which were outcomes reported in the quantitative data.

Alongside social responsibility and empathy, our quantitative data showed that participants felt that their sociability improved. Interview data suggests that this might be due to the structure of the conference, which was very different from their everyday experiences of education. That the conference was residential and that it afforded students the opportunity to meet others from different schools was a formative experience in itself. For example, one interviewee highlighted how the conference helped them to think of themselves as an engaged participant rather than an unwilling school-child:

> I think it's more the structure of it. You've got to be here but you're here on your own terms and you can take what you will from it so the conference structure it's less patronising than going to school . . . it treats you more like an adult.

Another student talked about the importance of meeting students with whom they had something in common. They spoke about how they ordinarily felt excluded by their peers if they talked about questions that interested them, and that they appreciated meeting likeminded people at *Pursuit of Knowledge*: "I was talking to people slightly older than me, and if I have a really complex opinion on something it's like 'go on, elaborate' and not 'shut up, stop being stupid."

Interview and questionnaire data suggest that *Pursuit of Knowledge* helped participants to be more open to meeting new people. This is not surprising: for many, the conference gave them a rare opportunity to meet students from other schools and to discuss challenging and sometimes sensitive issues. The residential nature of the conference meant that participants had a chance to bond with those around them. Participants also shared a common interest in philosophy. These factors might explain why the conference enhanced sociability measures alongside other social skills.

Discussion

Differences in research design make direct comparisons between the changes to social skills reported by those attending *Pursuit of Knowledge* and changes associated with SAPERE sessions difficult. However, attending *Pursuit of Knowledge* seems to have brought about similar benefits to those found by Siddiqui et al. At face value, the results from the conference appear more promising than those of Siddiqui et al.'s study. Most participants in our study reported that they felt that their social skills were enhanced by attending *Pursuit of Knowledge*. However, due to limitations in research design and sample size, this finding must be treated with caution.

There are two points of contrast between the *Pursuit of Knowledge* results and Siddiqui et al.'s results: the conference had an impact on both participants' self-reported empathy, and sense of social responsibility. These two outcomes were more often attributed to TUM elements of *Pursuit of Knowledge* (in the questionnaire and interview data) than other outcomes. Our results suggest that exposure to philosophical perspectives through lecture content may have a positive impact on students' empathy and social responsibility (given that these outcomes were self-reported by the participating students). Although we cannot claim that this outcome is replicable across contexts, we can use these results to advocate for introducing philosophy to high school students.

One possible claim suggested by the data is that empathy can be developed through the sort of planned communication of diverse philosophical perspectives presented in lectures. In particular, being introduced to many points of view and the philosophical methods used to reach reasoned conclusions can be beneficial. Since rigorous reasoning is commonly associated with good philosophical thinking and lecturing, it makes sense that a good philosophy lecture can possibly contribute to the development of empathy.

Lectures that introduce students to multiple perspectives on particular social issues can provide clarity and a depth of understanding that students did not previously possess. This could be one way to explain reported improvements in social responsibility. In *Pursuit of Knowledge*, the lectures on climate ethics and democracy directly addressed social issues. Both lectures focused on reaching clarity about how to understand the issues and provided frameworks for beginning to make progress. Students reported that the guidance provided by the philosophical perspectives presented in these lectures made them feel more able and willing to try to improve their local environments.

Pursuit of Knowledge also contributed to students' sociability. We believe that the structure, rather than TUM elements of the conference, contributed to this. Participants travelled from across the UK and Republic of Ireland to engage in an intense period of study with peers. In interviews, they commented on the experience of meeting new people from different backgrounds, and of engaging in in-depth philosophical study in a collegial environment. The event's

residential nature and the experience of attending multiple lectures for the first time prompted cooperation and friendship among participants. Since this was a social experience, it is also possible that the structure of the conference contributed to students' other social skills. Although this social aspect of *Pursuit of Knowledge* makes it difficult to isolate the effects of philosophical activities on the development of social skills, it provides some insight into the value of residential events at which students meet peers from other schools and engage in inquiry together. The questionnaire and interview findings suggest that students felt a sense of community which aided meaningful dialogue. This corresponds to claims made by Lipman and P4C advocates about the importance and value of creating COI. Perhaps the residential nature of the conference combined with the fact that students chose to attend allowed a COI to develop even though *Pursuit of Knowledge* lasted only two days.

Alongside identifying the effect of communicating philosophical perspectives, our data highlights the importance of the dialogue-based elements of *Pursuit of Knowledge* in improving students' social skills. This reproduces Siddiqui et al.'s findings about the value of the primarily dialogic P4C pedagogy. In our findings, dialogue is strongly associated with improvements in all of the social skills we measured. Although we have focused on the additional effects of the TUM, the value of philosophical dialogue should not be underplayed.

Limitations

The limitations of the case study presented are significant, and it would be both interesting and revealing to conduct further, more rigorous research into the impact of TUM philosophy education on students' social skills. Ideally, this research would involve pre- and post-testing, a control group, and a larger sample size. In our study, we relied on participants to self-report on how they felt the conference effected their social skills. Given that students filled in the questionnaire immediately after attending the conference, it is likely that their perception of its effect was heightened. Using both pre- and post-conference questionnaires, as well as a control group, could have added understanding of these reported effects on social skills. Another limitation of our case study is that the primary researchers were also the organizers of *Pursuit of Knowledge*. It is possible that participants were reluctant to criticise the organisers and/or the conference impacts, which might have inflated the positive results of the study regarding social skill development and advances. Introducing pre- and post-testing, the use of a control group, and increasing the sample size would make the findings more generalizable.

Furthermore, the residential, school-trip nature of *Pursuit of Knowledge* introduces some complicating factors when it comes to drawing conclusions about the value of TUM. For example, it is unclear whether students who had not chosen to attend a philosophy conference would have found the event as formative

as those who attended. It is also unclear how much of the reported improvements in social skills were attributable to the experience as a whole, as opposed to ascribing them to the philosophical and instructional elements of the conference. These complications limit claims that can be made about the value of TUM, but also draw attention to the potential value of residential, immersive educational experiences like *Pursuit of Knowledge*.

Conclusion

In this paper we present data collected at *Pursuit of Knowledge*, a philosophy conference for 15- to 18-year-olds, which shows that the conference led to self-reported improvements in participants' social skills. In comparison to data collected by Siddiqui et al. (2017a and b), *Pursuit of Knowledge* appeared to bring about similar improvements in students' (self-reported) social skills. It also appeared to contribute to self-reported skills which Siddiqui et al. did not find had improved, namely, sociability, empathy and social responsibility.

We draw conclusions about the relative merits of TUM and P4C. One merit of TUM is the value of communicating philosophical perspectives about complex applied philosophical questions such as climate ethics and democracy. We discuss how interview responses suggest two mechanisms for this. First, empathy might be developed through modelling philosophical perspective-taking about complex issues, highlighting that people might hold different opinions for good reasons. Second, social responsibility might be developed by clarifying social issues. We also find that the structure of *Pursuit of Knowledge* was conducive to improving sociability. We attribute this to the collegiality of a residential event which brings together a community of people interested in philosophy.

Our conclusion is that further, more robust research exploring the value of TUM for pre-college students would be beneficial to produce generalizable findings. The research presented through this case study is valuable insofar as it provides new information about the benefits of TUM with 15- to 18-year-old students. It also highlights the value of *Pursuit of Knowledge* in terms of self-reported improvement of social skills with this age group.

Notes

1. In February 2019, 71 students from 6 different schools across the UK and Ireland participated in this overnight conference, spending two days at a UK boarding school where they attended five lectures and seminars run by university academics and undergraduate philosophy students, and a poster-making session. The high school students also ate and socialized together.

2. P4C is an umbrella term used to describe programs stemming from Matthew Lipman's work to bring philosophy into schools. Lipman thought that schools needed to change their focus from trying 'to get students to learn the solutions' to

getting students to 'investigate the problems and engage in inquiry for themselves' (Lipman 2003, 20). His P4C program involves a distinctive pedagogy—*Community of Inquiry (COI)*—whereby 'students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions' (Lipman 2003, 20). The COI model forms the basis of many P4C pedagogies.

3. SAPERE,the largest UK-based organization offering training and guidance for those wishing to do philosophy in schools, trains 'teachers in Philosophy for Children which encourages children to think critically, creatively, collaboratively and caringly' (SAPERE, 2018). SAPERE sessions focus on facilitated dialogue and do not include the sort of planned communication of philosophical perspectives emphasised by the TUM. The SAPERE model of P4C is underpinned by a particular session structure: 'children are taught how to create their own philosophical questions. They then choose one question that is the focus of a philosophical enquiry, or dialogue. . . . The teacher, as facilitator, supports the children in their thinking, reasoning and questioning, as well as the way the children speak and listen to each other in the dialogue' (SAPERE, 2018).

4. The seminar leaders, who met in advance to plan each session, were not trained P4C practitioners, and they did not take an explicitly P4C approach to the seminars.

5. The questionnaire used in the study by Siddiqui et al. provides an excellent data-collection instrument. Ensuring reliability and validity, because questions 'were developed in association with the Cabinet Office, and represent either the item with the single highest loading on that construct or the item recommended for single use by the test developers' (Siddiqui et al. 2017a, 151). It has 'a clear audit trail' and has 'been used previously with tens of thousands of children in several research studied in England and as far afield as Japan.' The questionnaire 'included 11 scaled attitude items, representing the best single question available from 11 established tests of psychological constructs such as self-confidence, determination and well-being' (2017a, 18).

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