CORE
Metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
Provided by Warwick Research Archives Portal Repository

University of Warwick institutional repository: http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap

This paper is made available online in accordance with publisher policies. Please scroll down to view the document itself. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our policy information available from the repository home page for further information.

To see the final version of this paper please visit the publisher's website. Access to the published version may require a subscription.

Author(s): McKenna, U. Ipgrave, J. & Jackson, R.
Article Title: Children's Dialogue in the Context of International Research

Year of publication: 2008
Link to published version:
http://www.waxmann.com/?id=20&cHash=1&buchnr=1980
Publisher statement: None

Chapter 1: Children's Dialogue in the Context of International Research

Religious Diversity and Schooling

In recent years, the study of religious diversity has become a significant educational issue in Europe and on the wider international scene. This is partly due to a recognition of the significance of religion as a factor in relation to issues of ethnic, national and cultural identity (Baumann, 1999), and as a factor in social divisiveness or social cohesion, for example as an indicator of what Modood calls 'cultural racism' (Modood, 1997).[1] This development also reflects specific events such as the riots in some towns and cities in the north of England in 2001 (Home Office, 2001) and in Paris in 2005, and those of September 11, 2001 in the United States of America as well as their complex and ongoing consequences internationally (e.g. Beauchamp, 2002; Leganger-Krogstad, 2003). Such debates are especially relevant within states where migrants from a range of religious and cultural backgrounds have settled. The global and more local situations are related in a variety of ways, through the transnational identities of many families (Jackson and Nesbitt, 1993; Østberg, 2003) and the direct effects of international conflicts on community relations within particular states.

In relation to these issues, the Council of Europe has recently completed a project that set out to bring the dimension of religious diversity to intercultural education in schools across the 47 member states (Council of Europe, 2004; Keast, 2007). This project aimed to influence curriculum and policy and to encourage research on pedagogy. Among other initiatives in Europe are the development of guiding principles for teaching about religions and beliefs under the auspices of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE 2007) and the first major research project on RE funded by the European Commission. This project, entitled 'Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries' (REDCo) is running from 2006-2009. The project aims to identify approaches and policies that can contribute to making religion in education a factor promoting dialogue in the context of European development, and includes nine European Universities from England, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia and Spain (Jackson, 2006b; Jackson et al., 2007; see also http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de/web/3480/3481/index.html).

Beyond Europe there are recent national and international initiatives to raise awareness and increase understanding of religions. For example, there is a growing movement in the United States of America to introduce the study of religions into

1 An example of cultural racism is equation of national and Christian identity, associating all other religious identities with difference and otherness (Modood, 1997). Racism directed towards religious groups, or justified on religious grounds, prompts the writers of the Parekh report to argue that strategies for countering it need to recognize the distinctive and powerful nature of religious identity (Runnymede Trust, 2000).

publicly funded schools, with a number of experiments taking place currently in teacher education. For example, the Program in Religion and Secondary Education at Harvard Divinity School (Moore, 2007),[2] and more recently, the Project on Religion and Public Education at California State University, Chico,[3] have pioneered the incorporation of the study of religions in teacher education. Links between the debates in Europe and in the USA were explored at the 2004 conference of the American Academy of Religion (e.g. Grelle, 2005; Nord, 2005). Also at the broader international level, the Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religion or Belief, in association with UNESCO, is running a project on Teaching for Tolerance, which gives close attention to understanding religions as well as promoting antiracist education and conflict resolution initiatives (Larsen and Plesner, 2002; Jackson and McKenna, 2005),[4] while the International Association for the History of Religions has given attention to issues of religion and education in relation to peace education (Jackson and Fujiwara, 2008).[5]

In England and Wales, the study of religious diversity usually has been the province of RE. Since the introduction of the curriculum in citizenship education in 2000, however, there has also been a requirement that pupils in secondary schools and a recommendation that pupils in primary schools be taught to understand and appreciate cultural and religious difference, to think about the lives of people with different values and customs and to try to see things from others' points of view. (DfEE/QCA, 1999a). In many schools, RE specialists are contributing to citizenship education (Blaylock, 2003). The non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education brings together goals of understanding and reflection with the promotion of social cohesion, advocating 'the celebration of diversity in society through understanding similarities and differences' (QCA, 2004, p. 8).

There remains a debate between those who see RE as a distinct and intrinsically valuable subject, needing no further justification, and who are suspicious of applications of the subject beyond its own sphere (Wright, 2003) and those who see the subject as instrumentally worthwhile, potentially offering an important contribution to social cohesion. The present authors take the view that religious education is *both* intrinsically and instrumentally worthwhile, providing opportunities for pupils to explore religious language and existential questions, so that they can develop an understanding of religions and clarify and develop their own theological or philosophical positions, and to deal with the religious dimension of broader areas concerned with values, such as citizenship education, intercultural education, education in human rights, moral education and peace education. (e.g. Ipgrave, 2002; Jackson, 2006a; Jackson & Fujiwara, 2008; Jackson & McKenna, 2005).

Given the widespread demand for methodologies to deal with religion both in discrete RE and in the context of a wider values education, there is a need for peda-

---

2 See http://www.hds.harvard.edu/prse/ (accessed Jan 8 2006)

3 See http://www.csuchico.edu/rs/rperc/proj.html (accessed Jan 8 2006).

4 See http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/project_school_education/index.html (accessed 5 January 2006).

5 The IAHR conference in Tokyo in March 2004 featured a panel on religious education in relation to peace education. Selected revised papers are published in Jackson & Fujiwara (2008).

gogical approaches that are effective in helping young people to engage with and to understand different religious perspectives within society. The present project is partly concerned with the interface between RE and this broader values field – especially in relation to citizenship education – at the level of practice in primary schools in the context of a project on pupil to pupil dialogue. Whilst affirming the intrinsic worthwhileness of religious education, the project is also in line with a recent Ofsted[6] report on RE which argues that the subject should be more overtly concerned with issues of social or community cohesion (Ofsted, 2007) and the Ajegbo Report on diversity and citizenship (Ajegbo, Diwan & Sharma, 2007). Our study illustrates that there is a need to ensure that teachers understand the goals and methodologies of both religious and citizenship education to ensure that the former is not inadvertently reduced to the latter.

In the UK, the debate about multiculturalism, initiated by Ruth Kelly, then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government,[7] prompted a search for models of education that balance common values with cultural difference and promote communication and collaboration between people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The work on dialogue described in this book presents relevant work that was already in place, which maintains a more positive and flexible view of 'multiculturalism' than held by Ms Kelly.

Pedagogies for Learning about Religious Diversity

For many years, RE specialists in England and Wales have argued that the subject should both inform pupils about religious diversity in British society and globally and encourage them to relate their studies to their own personal development (e.g. Schools Council, 1971; Grimmitt, 1987; QCA, 2004). However, Ofsted[8] reports have noted that, in practice, RE often concentrates on knowledge ('learning about religion') rather than reflection (often referred to as 'learning from religion') (Ofsted, 1997). A number of commentators and researchers have developed pedagogies that aim to integrate the goals of learning about and learning from religion (Grimmitt, 2000). All of these are worthy of attention, but the present project relates especially to interpretive and dialogical approaches, which focus especially on learning about and engaging with the living religions of others in the contemporary world.

---

6 Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is the national inspection body in England responsible for the inspection of individual schools. (see http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

7 Ms Kelly questions the concept of 'multiculturalism' in a speech launching a Commission on Integration and Cohesion in August 2006. (The full text was accessed at http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/Story/0,,1857368,00.html on 27 October 2006).

8 Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is the national inspection body in England responsible for the inspection of individual schools. (See http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/)

The Interpretive Approach to Religious Education

The interpretive approach draws on insights and methods from social anthropology, cultural theory and other fields in providing methods that integrate issues of representation, interpretation and reflexivity into teaching and learning (Jackson, 1997, 2004a, b, c, d, 2006c, 2008b). The approach takes a critical view of conventional representations of religions and 'cultures'. In explaining the interpretive approach, Jackson argues that a key aim is to develop an understanding of the grammar – the language and wider symbolic patterns – of religions and the interpretive skills necessary to gain that understanding (Jackson, 1997, p.129). Jackson also argues, however, that understanding and reflection are inseparable in the interpretive process, and that significantly more time than is usually given at present in RE needs to be given for pupils to reflect upon what they study in relation to their own beliefs and values. RE, he argues, should develop self-awareness, since individuals learn through reflecting upon encounters with new ideas and experiences. RE is thus a conversational process in which students, whatever their backgrounds, continuously interpret and reinterpret their own views in the light of what they study (cf. Meijer, 1995). For learners, this reflexive involvement raises issues to do with their relationship with others from a range of religious and cultural backgrounds within society.

Thus, although the aims of RE include increasing knowledge, understanding and personal (including spiritual) development, there are also goals related to wider society. It is intended that inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding and social cohesion will be promoted *through* the processes of learning. Clearly, knowledge of itself does not necessarily foster tolerance. Racists can be well informed. Education about religious diversity (whether through RE, citizenship or other areas of the curriculum) needs to engage learners with the material studied so that they consider negative issues of stereotyping and racism and positive issues of tolerance, respect and recognition.

The interpretive approach was first used in the context of ethnographic studies of children and young people from a range of religious and ethnic backgrounds in British cities and towns. Material from these studies, edited and written with the involvement of those portrayed in the texts, was used in the preparation of resources for children in schools across the country (Barratt, 1994a, b, c, d, e; Barratt & Price, 1996a, b; Everington, 1996a, b). In effect, individual children and their families, associated with particular religious groups and traditions, were put into relationship with children from a wide range of backgrounds by means of published texts. More recent uses of the interpretive approach acknowledge the creative role of the teacher or teacher-researcher in using the key concepts of the approach. For example, the approach has been developed in the context of classroom-based action research, starting from other points on the cycle of learning, such as students' questions or concerns (O'Grady, 2005). It has also been adapted for use with pupils with particular special needs (Krisman, 1997) and with students of high ability (Whittall, 2005). In these various developments, the creativity of the practitioner-researcher has played an important role in the use of the approach. The use of the approach has been shaped by each teacher-researcher's practice in a particular

context, as well as through being brought into conversation with other theoretical perspectives. Thus, in Julia Ipgrave's work the methods of the interpretive approach, originally used as a means to organise and present ethnographic studies of children to others of roughly similar ages from a range of backgrounds, were adapted and developed in order to bring children from different religious and cultural backgrounds into *direct* dialogue with their peers in school (Ipgrave, 2001).

Developing a Dialogical Approach

Ipgrave's work on dialogue grew out of her educational experience as a primary school teacher in Leicester in a community primary school with over 85 per cent Muslim pupils. She became interested in the interactions of children from different backgrounds and developed research on the religio-cultural and theological influence of children from her class upon one another, and their formation of new ideas through encounter (Ipgrave, 2002). It was this research that stimulated her pedagogical work on dialogue (Ipgrave, 2001). Jackson introduces and summarises this research, which concentrated on a group of 35 non-Muslim 8-11 year old pupils in Ipgrave's school (Jackson, 2004a, pp. 117-123). Ipgrave's use of Bakhtin's ideas on discourse are especially noted (Bakhtin, 1981). She shows, for example, how children adopted and shaped a language of diversity, including vocabulary relating to religion, power, race and equality. She reveals how the children used and processed the reported words of others. For example, remembered language spoken by Muslim pupils could be distinguished by non-Muslims from their own and used to provide information about Muslim practices, or to relive and resolve tensions and disagreements. Examples are also given of how children adapted and assimilated a wide ranging, multi-sourced religious language into their own discourse, using it as a means to formulate and express their personal theological views (internally persuasive discourse). Children could also express rather formulaic statements in which they communicated ideas expressed with an authority that was not their own (for example, the authority of scripture), but which they appear to have adopted personally (authoritative discourse).

Applying Findings to Religious Education

The key pedagogical lessons from the research were derived from observations of the ways in which the children who took part responded to the format and style of the interviews and discussions. The research revealed the abilities and resources that children brought to their learning. These included children's readiness to engage with religious questions and the use of the religious language they had assimilated as well as their creativity in reworking received ideas as they negotiated their way through different viewpoints and understandings. The research also demonstrated a range of insights into the challenges of difference that children had gained through their experience of diversity, showing the 'bank' of meanings and

associations they had accumulated which was available to them in developing their understanding.

Children who participated in the research showed a number of benefits they had gained from a dialogical approach. For example, children's sharing of ideas in interviews and discussion groups stimulated their interest in religious and theological questions, and also provided a sympathetic forum for the discussion of issues that concerned them. Ipgrave found that the approach raised children's self-esteem, provided opportunities to develop critical skills, gave a voice to underachievers and generated an atmosphere of moral seriousness as children discussed fundamental human questions. The fact that children worked out solutions to problems themselves rather than accepting answers on others' authority was empowering (Ipgrave, 2001).

The research project developed a threefold approach to dialogue that has been incorporated into the pedagogical work derived from it. *Primary dialogue* provides a context for other forms of dialogue and is basically the acceptance of diversity, difference and change – a recognition that people are in daily encounter with different viewpoints, understandings and ideas. In pedagogical terms, primary dialogue acknowledges and capitalises on different experiences, viewpoints and influences in children's social backgrounds. *Secondary dialogue* represents a positive response to primary dialogue, characterized by an openness to difference. Bringing together different points of view is seen as a positive activity, of benefit to all participants. Pedagogically this is represented by a class ethos in which children are willing to engage with difference and to share with and learn from others. Individual children are open to the possibility of change in their own understanding and outlook. *Tertiary dialogue* is the activity of dialogue itself – the forms and structures of verbal interchange that draw upon primary and secondary dialogue. Tertiary dialogue is enabled through methods, strategies and exercises that facilitate verbal interchange.

Ipgrave applied these three dimensions of dialogue to her multicultural primary school in inner city Leicester. In terms of primary dialogue, the resources initially were the diverse intake of the school. Further voices were introduced into classroom discussion through quotations from people holding a variety of beliefs or viewpoints or taking different positions on moral issues debated by the children. Material for discussion was also introduced from religious traditions, including extracts or quotations from texts.

Secondary dialogue encourages openness to one another's ideas. Children were taught the skills of listening to and learning from others as fundamental values in a plural society, and were also encouraged to engage with difference. In RE, the pupils themselves discussed and set out the basic rules for the study of religions. One class of 9 and 10 year olds, for example, identified three key ideas: respect for each other's religion; talking and thinking seriously about differences; being ready to learn new things including about their own religion. Such principles were revisited and used as criteria for success when pupils evaluated their learning at the end of lessons. Pupils were encouraged to formulate their own questions when they engaged with other religions and points of view, not least when formulating questions to ask visiting speakers.

Various strategies, activities and exercises were used to facilitate tertiary dialogue, the basic activities being discussion and debate (examples of these can be found in Ipgrave, 2001 and 2005). Different stimuli were used to raise questions and issues for discussion including stories and other textual sources, case studies, quotations from different viewpoints, pictures, film or video extracts and examples of teachings from different religious traditions. To maximize involvement from children, sorting exercises were used in which pupils classified or sequenced cards with different statements, words or pictures. These are the sorts of exercises regularly used by advocates of the development of 'thinking skills' (e.g. Baumfield, 2002). They help children to organize their thoughts as they negotiate with one another to justify their positions. Children were also introduced to issues of ethics, such as the pros and cons of using violence or taking animal life, or of belief, such as whether there can be life after death, and how such a belief relates to other beliefs – about forgiveness, for example.

Throughout, the approach encouraged personal engagement with ideas and concepts from different religious traditions (How does this idea relate to my views?) and children were encouraged to be reflective about their contributions and to justify their own opinions (What are your reasons for thinking that?). They were also asked to consider how they arrived at their conclusions (How did you reach that answer?), to recognize the possibility of alternative viewpoints (Can you think of reasons why some people would not agree with what you have said?) and to be open to the arguments of others (Do you think X has a point here?). Role play was used to help children engage with difference by arguing a case from the point of view of a particular tradition or interest group.

Like the work of Christensen (2004), Hallett and Prout (2003) and Prout (2001), Ipgrave's approach to teaching and learning regards children as active participants in social construction, as they negotiate varied ideas of childhood in home, community and school experience and access their previous experience, knowledge and understanding as resources for learning in class. Children are seen as collaborators in teaching and learning. Teaching maximizes pupils' input, with the teacher acting as prompter, chair, interviewer and questioner as well as providing information when required.

Ipgrave's initial work, described above, was with children within one school, combining research with a form of dialogical teaching (Ipgrave, 1998). The next stage was to link children from two different schools in the same city, and to incorporate teachers into the work who were not researchers or indeed RE specialists (Ipgrave, 2001). The third development was the establishment of the Building E-Bridges Project, in which children from Leicester were linked by email to children from schools in East Sussex. This further development introduced a number of complexities – the inclusion of many more schools; the participation of children living in very different parts of the country; the incorporation of more non-specialist primary teachers; and the expanded use of information communication technology (ICT). The evaluation study reported in this book focused on the phase of the project that linked schools in Leicester and East Sussex.

Introduction to the Building E-Bridges Project

The Building E-Bridges Project set out to use insights from Ipgrave's research in fostering email partnerships, bringing together pupils of different religious and secular backgrounds, and from contrasting regions of England, in relationships of friendship and dialogue (Ipgrave, 2003b). The aim was to promote positive attitudes towards those differences by setting up structures of exchange, discussion and debate. In the early stages of the Building E-Bridges Project, fifteen schools took part. Ten were based in Leicester, a multicultural Midlands city, and five were in East Sussex, a coastal region with seaside towns and smaller rural settlements that (in spite of recent immigration) were still predominantly white in their demographic make-up. Five of the Leicester schools had email partners in East Sussex. The other Leicester schools had email partners in contrasting areas of the city (a suburban Roman Catholic school partnered with an inner city community school with a mainly Muslim intake; a largely white school in an area of social and economic disadvantage on the outskirts of a large city partnered with an ethnically mixed inner city school). Children taking part were within Key Stage 2 (aged 7 to 11). Each child was paired with an email friend of a contrasting religious and/or cultural background from the partner school. They engaged in a series of exchanges timetabled to take place at periodic intervals (often on a weekly basis) throughout the school year. In addition, two residential weekends were organised with a group of Leicester children visiting East Sussex to share a holiday with their partners at the start of the project and with East Sussex children visiting Leicester after a year of email exchanges.

The Building E-Bridges Project fitted well with the recommendations of Home Office reports produced in 2001 by the Ministerial Group and the Independent Review Teams on Public Order and Community Cohesion. Concerned about the possible fracturing of some English towns along racial, cultural and religious lines, these suggested that schools should help counter this trend by 'developing contacts with other cultures' (Home Office, 2001, 5.8.3) and 'inter-school twinning' (Home Office, 2001, 5.8.12). The email partnership also aimed to address requirements of the new school curriculum subject, Citizenship, which recommended that pupils should be taught to understand and appreciate cultural and religious difference, to think about the lives of people with different values and customs and to try to see things from others' point of view (DfEE/QCA, 1999a; Ipgrave, 2003a). More recently, *Making Sense of Religion,* (Ofsted, 2007) suggested that, as part of the RE curriculum, pupils should learn more about the complexities of religion and its role in a modern world. The need for RE to address the issue of 'community cohesion' is a central theme of this report, the term being used five times within the first nine pages. The importance of twinning links between schools where pupils are mostly white, English and Christian (if only nominally) with schools in which pupils are from a different ethnic and religious background is increasingly being seen as a way to prepare pupils for life in a diverse society.

The project also coheres with recent thinking about the place of religious discourse or discourse about religion in the public sphere, especially as articulated by the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas (2006; Jackson 2008a). Habermas

distinguishes between the *formal* public/political sphere, consisting of parliaments, courts, ministries etc, and the *informal* or public/political sphere, regarded as an appropriate setting for communication between religious and non-religious people. Thus, Habermas maintains that, while political institutions should remain neutral with regard to religion, at the level of discourse between secular and religious citizens (and between citizens of different religious persuasions), religious language and argument can and should be used. Fundamentally, understanding is developed through dialogue. In the Building E-Bridges Project, we take the view that the publicly funded school is a microcosm of the informal public/political sphere and is an entirely appropriate setting for pupils to engage in dialogue about religious and secular beliefs and values, provided that the dialogue is facilitated and managed by teachers who take an impartial role.

The teachers taking part in the project themselves had a range of teaching experiences from majority white community schools, church schools, ethnically mixed schools and schools where one faith predominated. Few of the teachers in the email project (and none in the evaluation study) were specialists in religious education. This was a key difference between Ipgrave's initial study and the Building E-Bridges Project.

Several attended in-service training (INSET) on the Building E-Bridges model at the beginning of the project and participating schools were given a copy of the Building E-Bridges handbook (Ipgrave, 2003b), which provided guidance on the setting up of an email link. Both the in-service training and the handbook recommended the close integration of the email exchanges into the children's RE schemes of work so that subjects and issues raised in the exchanges were those being discussed and explored in class lessons. It was also suggested that links should be made with the schools' citizenship education programmes. A number of models are presented in the handbook, but teachers were generally encouraged to organise their programme into discrete blocks of exchanges, each with a key focus for questions and discussion. Examples of areas of focus chosen by schools in the project include the following: being a Muslim, gifts, journeys, creation, celebrations, leaders, life after death, angels, violence, animal rights, special places and prayer.

Building E-Bridges and Dialogue

The starting point of the Building E-Bridges Project was difference and diversity, and there were some very evident differences between the schools in Leicester and East Sussex. It would be misleading, however, to distinguish in simplistic terms between 'multicultural' or 'monocultural' schools, as within *any* classroom (including those where all pupils are of indigenous white ethnic origin, or where all are of Muslim background), children will come from a variety of home circumstances and experiences, and will have assimilated a variety of viewpoints, beliefs and values (Nesbitt, 2005; see Jackson, 2004a on the influence of 'traditional' and 'modern' plurality on identity formation, especially on how children from a particular background might still choose ideas and values from other cultural

sources). Any one of the classes involved in the Building E-Bridges Project is in itself a context of primary dialogue, a diverse community where positive attitudes towards others can be promoted, and a potential forum for dialogical activities, discussion and debate. What Building E-Bridges sought to do was to use electronic dialogue exchanges to broaden the children's experience of difference by introducing them to a greater diversity of cultures than the demography of the school allowed (primary dialogue), to give them the skills and confidence to deal with a wider range of views and experiences and to encourage them to relate as friends to dialogue partners from backgrounds different from their own (secondary dialogue), and to encourage them to *engage* with one another on a range of relevant topics (tertiary dialogue)

Key to the purposes of the Building E-Bridges Project was the desire to encourage dialogue. Through INSET sessions and the use of a handbook (Ipgrave 2003b), teachers were offered guidance on the development of children's dialogue skills as they initiated exchanges and formulated their responses to their partners' emails. To support the structuring of the exchange programme, teachers were also presented with a version of the fourfold classification of dialogue first proposed by the Vatican's then 'Secretariat for Non-Christians' (now the 'Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue') in 1984 and subsequently used by Christians of other churches engaged in inter faith dialogue (Vatican, 1984). The four strands ('forms' in the original document) of this schema are the *Dialogue of Life* – ordinary experience of respect and friendship; *Dialogue of Action* – working together for justice and common ethical and social objectives; *Dialogue of Religious Experience* – sharing spiritual riches; and *Theological Dialogue* – discussing questions of belief. For the Building E-Bridges Project teachers were encouraged to use the strands to determine the content of the different blocks of exchanges so the children's dialogue could progress from initial introductions (dialogue of life), through the sharing of experiences and practices (dialogue of religious experience/experience of religion) to ethical debates (dialogue of social involvement) and exploration of a variety of beliefs and life stances (theological debate). For Building E-Bridges the relationship between these four strands and the three dimensions of dialogue that emerged from Ipgrave's initial research can be represented in the form of a matrix showing how the project brings together dialogue theory, themes of inter religious encounter and practical teaching and learning activities.

Table 1 Strands and Dimensions of Dialogue in the Building E-Bridges Project

STRANDS **DIALOGUE DIMENSIONS**	**Dialogue of Life**	**Dialogue of Social Involvement** (for justice and peace)	**Theological Dialogue**	**Dialogue of Experience**
Primary Dialogue (context): acknowledgement of diversity, difference and change	Diversity of interests and experiences; cultural, religious, social diversity. Global links of children's families. Geographical diversity.	Ethical issues for debate; diversity of positions; different priorities, under-standings and values.	Diversity of beliefs; faith positions (including non-theistic); responses to life's 'big questions'	Diversity of religious practices, and experiences; patterns of meaning in every-day life
Secondary Dialogue (attitude): being open to and positive about change, being willing to engage with difference and learn from others	Positive interest in and openness to the lives of others; prepared-ness to share something of own life with others; making friends	Positive interest in and openness to views of others; prepared-ness to share own views; reviewing own opinions in response to others; recognition of interests other than own; interest in justice and fairness for others	Positive interest in and openness to beliefs of others; prepared-ness to share own beliefs; reflecting on own beliefs in light of encounter with others; interest in joint search for truth and meaning	Positive interest in and openness to the religious practices and experiences of others; reflecting on own practices and experiences and their patterns of meaning in the light of those of others
Tertiary dialogue (activity): Activity; the actual verbal interchange between children, its forms and structures.	Initial email exchanges: introduction to selves, sharing interests, likes and dislikes, school experience, geo-graphical loca-tion, personal histories	Email exchanges: ethical debate; sharing views on given questions of justice and social concern; jointly seeking solutions to given problems and case studies	Email exchanges: reflecting on some of life's big questions; expressing own beliefs and con-victions; sharing and comparing viewpoints	Email exchanges: describing and explaining (where applicable) own practices, religious observance, cele-brations etc; find-ing out about each other's practices; comparing experiences

In each of the four strands of dialogue the children encountered diversity. In each they were encouraged to develop a positive attitude to difference. Each strand became a focus of dialogical activity. In the Building E-Bridges Project the relationship between the three different understandings of dialogue was complex and multi-directional. The fact of diversity was the context of the project. The desire to promote positive attitudes towards difference led to a widening of the children's experience of diversity. The structures of the email exchange enabled this encounter with others and provided forms with which attitudes of interest and openness could be expressed. The direction taken by the dialogue exercise and forms of expression used were influenced by the ethos of friendship with which the project was first set up.

Evaluating the Building E-Bridges Project

Those responsible for guiding the Building E-Bridges programme felt that the continuation and expansion of the project needed to be founded on firm evidence of its effectiveness in encouraging pupils to recognise and engage positively with difference. Undertaking a rigorous evaluation to determine the influence which email dialogue could have on pupil and teacher perceptions and attitudes was seen as vitally important. It was hoped that the evaluation would make possible the modification and further development of the project into a model from which other schools could benefit in their efforts to promote the skills required for 'developing good relationships and respecting differences between people' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p. 138 & 140). Funding from the Westhill Endowment Trust enabled the present writers and colleagues from participating Local Education Authorities to carry out an evaluation research study of the Building E-Bridges Project. The stated aims of the evaluation were to ascertain:

- How the Building E-Bridges Project has affected children's attitudes towards peers from different cultural and religious backgrounds

- How the project has affected the teachers' understandings of and approaches to teaching about difference of religion and culture

Conclusion

The research from which the dialogical approach to RE and the Building E-Bridges Project emerged has been described. There were some parallels between Ipgrave's initial research on dialogue (Ipgrave, 2001, 2002) and the Building E-Bridges Project and its evaluation, particularly in the focus on encounter with difference and the analysis of verbal exchanges between pupils. There were also some key differences: the use of electronic communication; the geographical distance between the dialogue partners; the inclusion of children from a wider range of faith and cultural backgrounds; the involvement of non-specialist teachers of religious

education; and the teachers' role in running the project and planning the exchanges. All these factors were points of interest in the analysis of the email exchanges and interview transcripts. They make the evaluation study particularly interesting for what it reveals about the practicalities and value of applying the principles and understandings of one successful model of pupils' inter faith dialogue to new contexts, structures and media. In the next chapter methodology and methods of data collection are outlined. The methodology used in the evaluation study was qualitative and ethnographic, drawing from theory about evaluation research and action research. The rationale for the choice of methods is explained. Further information is given about the schools, teachers and pupils involved in the evaluation study.