The language of friendship and identity: children's communication choices in an inter faith exchange

Introduction to the email project

In the United Kingdom in recent years, the community cohesion and social harmony agenda has sought to bring together people of different cultural and religious backgrounds into relationships of co-operation and friendship. Such work, building on voluntary sector projects promoting inter faith and intercultural harmony, has been given added impetus from government recommendations and funding. The promotion of school twinning arrangements and links between school children of contrasting cultural backgrounds has been part of this movement. A variety of these have been reported in national audits such as the Faith and Cohesion Project (Coles 2006) and the Diversity and Dialogue Report (Hatch 2006). This article analyses data produced by one such project, a programme of email exchanges using the Building E-Bridges model (Ipgrave 2003), carried out between primary aged children from inner city, multicultural Leicester and from more homogenously white, small town and rural schools in East Sussex. The children participated in an online discussion the purposes of which were to establish relationships of friendship, to find out about each other's lives as members of different geographic, cultural and religious communities, to engage each other in dialogue around key issues of ethics, social justice, values and beliefs. Sameness and difference were catchwords of the project reflected in the teachers' comments at its outset. They anticipated that the project would:

> Help them to realise that the children are not really different to them

[Increase their] understanding that others are different and these differences make them unique

The email programme has been the subject of an evaluation research study, using questionnaire and interview material and analysis of the email exchanges. The results of this study have recently been published and teacher and pupil perspectives on this approach to religious dialogue reported (McKenna, Ipgrave, Jackson 2008; Ipgrave, McKenna 2007), but this article uses the material differently to focus on the children's choice of communication strategies to project their presence into the contested space of the online exchange. Central to the discussion are the concepts of 'presence' and 'space'.

Presence

By presence I understand a situated self, in this case a self situated in a context of communication and so a self who is experienced by others. The concept of presence is closely bound to the idea of identity as the self who is placed in that situation or context. In the particular communicative context of an email exchange, language is the means by which identity is expressed and presence is experienced.

Garrison and Anderson's framework for a successful online community of enquiry posits three types of presence in the exchanges: 'social presence', being the participants' ability to project themselves socially and emotionally, 'cognitive presence' demonstrated in their ability to argue a point and justify their argument, and 'teaching presence' that designs, facilitates and directs the social and cognitive processes towards an educationally worthwhile and personally meaningful outcome (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). This article uses a variation on Garrison and Anderson's

model that incorporates a 'representative presence' (see below) and analyses the power relations in the interaction between teacher and child presences.

The various purposes of the project required the children to present themselves in different ways. They were to introduce themselves as friends, as email-pals, to their partners and so to have a social presence in the communication.

> *Hi, it's me again. What sports do you like? I like badminton because I always beat my whole family. I always play football with my brother and I'm very good at tackling. Anyway, Carlene, Adnan would like to know what your favourite video is. As you already know he is mad about Spiderman and also Matrix Revolution. Bye! Please write back as soon as possible.[1]*

Through dialogue activities they were to come together in a community of enquiry and to participate as reasoned thinkers, to have a cognitive presence.

> *This week we are talking about homeless people. I think that people who are homeless should not be given anything because they deserve it. But then I think that some people should not be homeless because they have not done anything and don't deserve it. There is a man near my house and he is homeless and people give him money but he spends it on Beer, cigarettes and other things. He should save his money and buy a house. Don't you think? Tell me what you think about people who are homeless. Write back soon.*

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[1] Extracts from the email exchanges are printed in italics and the children's original orthography is reproduced.

The children were to provide insights for their partners into the lives of the religious and cultural groups to which they belonged and so to have what I shall call a representative presence.

> *At Christmas we put up a fir tree and decorate it with tinsel and coloured balls and lights. We give each other presents. We eat turkey, sausages in bacon, roast potatoes and some kind of vegetable. For pudding we have CHRISTMAS cake which is called figgy pudding…It is on the 25th December every year as this was the day that God's son Jesus was born.*

Space

In the emailing project the communication space has various dimensions. There is the concrete physical space of the computer screen onto which the children project their linguistic representations of themselves and their communities and through which they experience the presence of their email partners. The children's presentation of themselves remains for a while on the screen before them for them to assess (a source of satisfaction, pride or embarrassment) and the presence of their partner is transmitted in verbal form onto their screens. There is also a virtual space (a cyber space), the ongoing communication between the various participants in the project. The complex interplay of characters, interests and purposes within that communication means that it can be broken down into a number of discourses, each of which incorporates content and language.

The space into which participants project their presence and within which they interact has a territorial aspect. The nature of that presence depends on whose space it is the children are occupying and on whose terms. As the email exchanges are written and sent during school time

within the classroom, the dialogue could be understood as taking place on the teacher's territory. The teacher has invited (or obliged) the children to participate. The questions that form the focus of ethical debate emerge from class discussions orchestrated by the teachers. Children are invited to share their opinions on these issues in class and then extend the invitation that originally came from the teacher, to their email partners: '*Todays subject is about killing animals. Is it ever all right to kill an animal?'; 'This week we are talking about homeless people'; 'Today we are introducing a new topic. The topic is wether footballers get to much money or not'.'*

The reasonable and reasoning young people presented through these particular exchanges are working within the formal structures of debate modelled for them by their teacher. The email below contains the learned grammatical constructions of reasoned debate:

> *Hello Khadijah and Adam,*
>
> *We are going to write to you about a new topic which is about football players getting too much money. **Why do** footballers get this much money? **What do** they do? ....**one person in our class thinks that** they deserve it **because** of how much they have to train and that they work their socks off. ...**But Bethany thinks that** circus people do more than kicking a ball and get much less money ....**Andrea thinks that** if they earn so much money **why** can't they give it to charity? ... Also **I sort of think that I disagree because** anyone could become a footballer and get lots of money. **One example** we were given **is that** firemen and nurses save lives almost all the time and don't earn nearly half the amount that footballers do. **Lastly** footballers do not work as much as most people and they get a much lloooooooonnggggeeeeerrr holiday than any hard working citizen. **What do you think? ….***

Whatever the writer's conclusions, neat phrasing, balanced statements, the grammar of reasoning in the email about homelessness, make it something a teacher would recognise as educationally worthwhile.

The teacher control of the online communication space does not go uncontested. Some emails indicate an element of resistance in the children's thinking.

> *I'm sure we have told you about [Easter] already but we'll tell you again anyway because our teacher told us to.*

> *Sorry to say my teacher has just said that this is the last email I can send you telling you about mine and Adam's hobbies.*

The pupils' also raised the degree of teacher control an issue in interviews.

> I think sometimes our teacher made us ask certain questions and it sort of moved us on to another topic and stopped us from writing, talking like what we were talking and writing about.

In these cases the teacher's instructions have been followed but there are other indications of the children carving out their own areas of communication space even within the structures of lessons. Important here is the use of the word 'chat' to denote a form of conversation over which the children have greater ownership. It is a form of speech associated more with interchanges of friendship than with classroom communication patterns.

Discussing in interviews why they thought it was good to have an email partner, some children made the following contributions:

I'd say it's fun because you can make new friends and chat to them during lessons

I'm chatting to a person called Mohsin.

It's like a chat on the phone but it's on the computer you just typing it and it would be really fun.

There are numerous examples of the informal, chatty style of communication by which the children claimed territory within the communication space for themselves and used it for the formation of friendships. In these they are projecting themselves not as pupils but as friends. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to give the impression that the children were wresting control from the teacher. Interviews showed that the teachers themselves were unsure how far the communication should be under their control and how far it should be handed over to the children. All shared the view that the formation of friendships enabled by such freedom to 'chat', was key to the purposes of the project. In an evaluation discussion at the end of the project several teachers concurred that the emailers should be given more space to pursue their own areas of interest.

Communicating friendship

The children selected content, style and language to establish their social presence as friends in the communication space they were afforded by teacher withdrawal. When given free rein they often chose to discuss the shared interests of the 'tweenie' age group: football, computer games,

films, pop stars, theme parks. The topics and the direct, chatty language of the following emails are fairly typical of this discourse of friendship.

Are you into football? If so tell me. I am into football and my best football team is ARSENAL THE GUNNERS my best players are PIRES, Henry and Viera…when I grow up I wanna be a Footballer in the premiership.

Have you seen finding nemo? We think it's really really really really funny!!! Our favourite character is Dori, as she is sooooooooooooooooo funny and a bit stupid as she can't remember anything!!!

Some used paralinguistic devices to communicate friendship in compensation for the lack of the visual and tonal clues. These include capitalisation for emphasis, repetition of words and letters, emoticons, punctuation, texting language and slang.

HI its hassan, well who else it gonna be?

Hi carl mate how are doing

:):):):):):):):):) tilt ure head to da left then u can see them properly

hi is me how is u im fine wat did u do in India ……….
Ssssssssssssssseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee   uuuuuuuuuuuuuuu   soooooooooooooooonnnnnnn ffffffrrrrrrooooooooooommmmmmmmmmmm ggeeoooooorrgia

So enjoy working wile were having fun HA HA HA HA HA HA

HAAA HAAAA HAAAAAAAA

Where the children's control of the communication space was constrained by the need to engage in teacher-dictated tasks, some managed to carve out territory for friendship with the interjection of jokes or more chatty relational speech, developing a plurilingual facility of hopping to and fro between friendship and classroom discourse. Two girls, for example, incorporated a joke at the expense of David Beckham in their reasoned debate about footballers' pay.

We think that he spends more time at the hairdressers than on the football pitch. If a single hair on his head is out of place he goes to the hair-dressers ...again!

They used idioms of every day speech ('*th*ey *work their socks off'*) and linguistic devices to maintain a lively, chatty tone

[footballers] get a much llooooonnggggeeeeerrr holiday than any harder working citizen

Friendship, hostility, 'hostipitality'

The emailing programme was set up in such a way as to establish an imperative towards friendship. The initial questionnaires and interviews with the children showed eager anticipation of friendships to be formed: 'I like to meet new friends', 'it will be good to have friends from other areas', 'I'll make a good friend', 'it will be good to have an email friend'. The children had been told they would make friends; from the evidence friendship was what most seemed to want and what many were working hard to maintain with the kind of communication devices identified

above. The overall effect of content and language choices was to project a presence of someone friendly, confident, approachable and 'cool'. The shared interests and common language seem to signal group solidarity.

Alongside the positive predictions of friendship in the children's questionnaires there were, however, expressions of other emotions. Significant numbers acknowledge feelings of nervousness, shyness or even fear: 'I'm nervous speaking to someone I don't know'; 'we don't know who they are or how they look and we're quite nervous'; '[I'm] scared because I won't have heard their voice or seen their face'. Some expressed concern about making mistakes in the new relationship; 'They might like make a mistake or something the other people might think they're weird or something for what they're writing', 'If we say the wrong thing we were scared'. The communication space was not only contested between teacher and pupil. Were the teacher to be removed from the picture, there would still be some tension over the occupancy of the space that is left. Shyness implies hesitation about the projection of self into a space that is occupied by others. Fear of saying the 'wrong' thing in the email or of appearing 'weird' implies that it is the other child who sets the terms for encounter within that space.

Some of the children took their fears even further and, perhaps recalling warnings of the dangers of internet chat rooms, reported concerns that the 'other' in the email encounter might constitute a threat: 'it's dangerous as well because you don't know any of them'; 'they might not be good they might be bad', 'they might not say who they really are', and even 'they might hunt you down'. In these extreme cases there was a sense of potential danger, of trust betrayed and of the invasion of a hostile presence into one's own space. There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of the children's expressions of friendship but within their positive overtures to each other a complexity of factors are at play.

This combination of imperative towards friendship and potential for hostility, echoes Derrida's problematisation of hospitality and his coinage of the term 'hostipitality' that includes elements of both (Derrida 2000). Hesitations about entering or admitting others into the communication space raise questions about who is at home and who being invited into that space at any time. The alternation of exchanges, many of which, through direct questions, contain invitations to the email partner to take over responsibility for the next stage of the dialogue, imply that the role of host and guest alternate. But the relationship between space and control is complicated by the (perceived) relative social status of the emailing partners.

Several comments from the East Sussex children reveal uncomfortable assumptions about the lower status of their ethnic minority, inner city partners who live 'in a crowded city', 'in a confined space' while 'we are lucky, we get more opportunities and money'. Some view their partners as foreigners who come from 'far away', and who may not be able to speak or write English. Assurances that they will treat their partners well whatever their colour 'I won't take the mickey out of their colour', 'I will not be a racist', 'I don't make fun of coloured people', paradoxically imply that colour is perceived as a possible point of tension. Such perceptions combine to put these children in the role of host in the communication space, generously inviting in the foreigners and strangers, looking after them in their vulnerability: 'I will write nice things and make them feel comfortable', 'I'll cheer them up'.

Some of the Leicester children's comments reinforce this impression. When asked whether they would make good friends for their partners most children described the positive qualities that they have to offer to the friendship. A number of the Leicester children however were prompted by this question to consider aspects of their own identity (ethnic, religious, racial) that might make

them less attractive as prospective friends. As all are aspects over which they had no control, identifying them as issues makes the children dependent on their partners' good will. 'He might not like me because I'm brown'; 'they might not like me because I'm Indian'; 'They might be good to me or welcome me or they might be bad to me because I'm brown'. The last of these statements clearly gives the welcoming host role to the East Sussex children. Such an understanding puts the onus on one side to receive, setting aside prejudice, and on the other, to be accepted, setting aside self-doubt.

Projection and withdrawal

At their most positive, the content and language choices made by the children in their discourse of friendship welcome by establishing a register of friendship, and look for acceptance by trying to reproduce that register. Some choices can also be interpreted as attempts to contain the potential threat inherent in the invitation. They might be proactive, establishing the child's own forceful presence in the space, or defensive, setting up limits and boundaries beyond which their new friend is not to venture. In many of their self-presentations we can see children selecting aspects of their own character, skills and experience that will make a good impression and give them status in the relationship. The swaggering slang and 'cool' paralinguistic devices of many of their communications may have been part of this tough image. There were those who provided lists of their school friends *('my best [friend] is Afsana the others are Amira, Naila and Aysha'; 'my best friends are Mohsin, Uwais, Ahmed, Aaron and Khubayb'; 'mine are Robbie, Yas, Becs an Sain an Jac'*), names that would mean nothing to their partners but projected an identity of someone who inspires friendship and respect. Others set out to impress with their prowess in sport;

> *i play for leicester Nirvana FC …when we play matches we always win because we're the best team*

or by the shockingly gruesome nature of their computer games:

> *its hilarious its laugh or death ha ha and these people on it walk around tripping over there toungs and have to have them cut off and others have blown up heads and have to have them cut off*

Occasionally they bend the truth to gain the admiration of their partners:

> *I know I am the strongest in the school because I have had fight with everyone in my school. I am going to buy all the games on ps2*

But their partners may not be easily taken in:

> [Meeting face –to- face would be better] you know more about them really… And if they say stuff like 'I'm really fast' and when you get to know them they're really slow and stuff like that

The children's preliminary discussions of friendship presented an ideal of openness and trust; the sharing of secrets featured prominently. However, as the exchange progressed some emails revealed a defensive negotiation of boundaries and a sense that some aspects of their lives were off limits to their partners.

Leicester boy*: Tell me all of your secrarates pleace ....*

East Sussex boy*: hi ....I don't think I can tell you all of me secrets well o.k. you are my pen pal mr h the person who teaches my football no I can't tell you my secrets you tell me your secrets first here. I luv someone beginning with I.*

I'd like to know more about his holiday from his religion to India because he didn't really want to tell me much it seemed

On a few occasions the boundaries were breached, and it is ironic that it was in the discourse of friendship the children created for themselves that the only explicit antagonism in the exchanges was expressed or felt. Disagreements about singers or football teams could be sharp and hurtful.

We are sorry to say that we think Blazin squad are rubbish. They think they are so cool but they only look like complete idiots. Sean Paul is ssssoooo boring !!!

ALSO LISTEN UP DON'T SAY MY TEAM IS RUBBISH BECAUSE IT IS THE BEST TEAM AND IT WILL RIP YOUR TEAM

[I didn't enjoy] disagreeing with them like when you have – when you stick up for whatever you like and they're sticking up for something they like then you just gonna keep causing a grudge on each other and then you won't like them.

[I didn't like it] when I was emailing my partner I was talking about football and I was telling them that I supported a team called Real Madrid and they supported Man United

and then when I got my email back from them they said like they started swearing about my team but they calmed down a bit.

Communicating communal identity

The aims of the email project move beyond the establishment of friendship. The teachers hoped that online encounter would enable the children to engage positively with different religious and cultural identities. With its orientation towards shared youth identity, discourse of friendship had little room for the religious/cultural 'other'. There was only an occasional attempt to use its chatty style to express religious difference.

> *yeh I do go 2 kuran scool but we call it the mosque. We have 2 wear a kinda robe and a religious hat*

But this is not the only discourse in the project's communication space. The email communication is divided into different discourses marked by a combination of content and language use. Through each of these discourses the children are projecting different identities, selected and constructed in response to the context and purposes of the exchange. In the classroom discourse where the teacher is host the identity of pupil/thinker is present, the content is ethical dilemma and the language that of reasoned debate. In the friendship discourse where children are hosts and also guests, the salient identity is friend/social being, the content is the commercially inspired enthusiasms of the 'tweenie' generation and the language is the 'cool' script of cyber communication. A third discourse is that by which the child participates as the representative of the religious/cultural group (or groups) to which he or she belongs. As representative of a particular group the child becomes a gatekeeper to its territory, and, when

he/she shares information about the life and practices of that group, a host inviting the guest to his/her home.

While the orientation of the friendship discourse is towards sameness, that of the religious/cultural discourse is towards difference. The aspects of the children's identity that become salient in the cultural identity discourse are those that emphasise otherness. This is particularly the case with the ethnic and religious minority Leicester children who, questionnaire and interview evidence indicate, were more conscious of those features that made them different from their partners: *'I am Muslim/ Sikh/ Hindu', 'I speak urdu/kachi/gujarati', 'I was born in Afghanistan'*. The content of this discourse included cultural/religious practices and beliefs: '*At Christmas we put up a fir tree and decorate it with tinsel and different coloured balls and lights';* '*my holy book is the Qur'an because if you pray one word of it it is 10 good deeds so you get saved at the end of the world*'; '*we have Jesus in our religion too but he is not the son of god'.*

Some of the information the Leicester children gave about themselves related to religion and ethnicity, the very things they had identified in pre-project exercises as possible reasons for rejection by her friends. By sharing these they were exposing their vulnerability, but, in spite of initial misgivings about relationships across cultural boundaries, emails (such as those quoted below) showed the other children approaching the religious/cultural territory of their peers with sensitivity and respect. As they shared and requested information about each other's customs and communal practices there was frequently a change of register in the language they employed. This change of register may reflect a sense of the greater seriousness of the topic being discussed, and the desire expressed in the questionnaires not to offend others. When religious practices in particular were the subject of the discussion, the language was more formal and respectful than the child-to-child chat of the friendship discourse. While the brashness of some of the friendship

discourse had the effect of projecting a forceful presence into the communication space, the politeness of the tentative approaches towards their partners' religious/cultural territory suggests that these children remained at the threshold as outsiders looking in.

> *Please could you tell us more about Hindu celebrations and Eid.......Hope to hear from you soon.*

> *It is very interesting that you pray every day for 30 minutes. Could you please tell us why? Do you have a pray hat and mat?*

> *[Of the 'Id sacrifice] We think it is nice that you give the animal to the poor.*

> *Eid sounds fun but why do you celebrate Eid? ....Can you tell us more about Eid?*

The insider status of those identifying with religious/cultural membership groups was expressed linguistically by the use of the first person plural in descriptions of religious practice

> *I have a festivale it is called eid. We wear new clothes. We respect our god by praying salaat furthermore we get exesize from doing it. ...We love our festival a lot.*

by the use of insider terminology *'zakat, Ramadan, salaat, Diwali, guru, masjid, halal, mass, Lent'* and echoes of the authoritative voices of the tradition in the words and phrases the children employ:

I believe that "there is only one God and that there is none worthy of worship besides him"

I think the most precious gift that god has given me is his son Jesus who came down to earth and died on a cross for us so that we could be free of our sins

Everything happens by [God's] will and will not happen without his will.

Evidence from the emails indicates that this discourse was used in such a way as to maintain a safe space for the children's religious/cultural identities: a 'proper' space, different from the 'common' (though occasionally disputed) space, of the friendship discourse. Partners were invited to the threshold of each other's spaces and given opportunities to look and learn, but access was controlled and protocols of politeness and respect observed.

Although the subject of the religious/cultural discourse encouraged the children to talk about their own home and community backgrounds, it became clear that the teacher presence was very significant in guiding this discussion, both by establishing an ethos and expectation of respect for others as the context in which the discussion would take place, and by prompting the children to return to these themes when they were deemed to have spent enough time on friend-to-friend chat.

Meeting of Identities

The religious/cultural discourse restored to prominence those elements of difference between the children that were key in the initial construction of the project and the dialogue pairings. It could be argued that this emphasis promotes an essentialist understanding of the religious/cultural

identities of the children and does not allow for the complexity and fluidity of personal identity. To return to Derrida's discussion of hospitality/'hostipitality' (2000), and relate it to the arena of proper space, we can see in this project some of the ambivalence and paradoxes he identifies in the host-guest relationship. Earlier I wrote of the children (host-like) inviting their peers to the threshold of their own space. Derrida teases out the dual status of host as master of the home and as hostage of the guest, both of which seem to act counter to the generosity and sharing of true hospitality. Where the children are undisputed masters of the identity, the culture, experiences, values and beliefs they present, these will remain undisturbed by the visits of their partners. On the other hand, the visit of another to one's proper space - in the case of the email dialogue, the questions others ask about their cultural and religious, practices, experiences, beliefs - can fix the children within a particular pre-determined identity; the invitation can, metaphorically speaking, require the host to stay at home.

This is a genuine concern that the teachers as dialogue facilitators and guides need to be aware of; however, there are a number of responses to such criticisms of the religious/cultural discourse. Firstly the alternative of an unguided discourse of friendship, that stresses the commonalities of a shared youth identity rather religious, ethnic and geographic difference, can itself restrict the individual child within a particular youth identity, and a superficiality and tendency towards stasis suggested by the repetitions of content and linguistic devices (lists of favourite footballers and PC games, responses that rely on multiplications of letters and emoticons) in the emails.

Secondly, the process of representing oneself as a member of a religious/cultural community to outsiders entails some self-reflection and self-understanding as well as an increased awareness of the viewpoints of others. As the children represent aspects of their lives that are outside their partners' experience, the requirements of communication mean that they need to express

themselves in ways that can be understood from their partner's perspective. Where this is effective the children have had to think carefully about their own beliefs, values, experiences and practices, and they have had to incorporate into their words something of the perspective of their partners in order to make sure they receive their self-representations positively. An example is the following careful explanation of the practice of the 'Id al-Adha sacrifice. The Muslim emailers, discovering that their partners find the idea of killing an animal repugnant, distance the act by placing it 'in another country' and relate it to the positive ethic of helping the poor.

> *Our families don't sacrifice the animal we just tell someone like sometimes people in another country to do it as they have more sheep or goats there. Some people even sacrifice the animal here so they get to eat the meat whereas we don't get to eat it as we give it to the poor.*

The role of language in such exchanges is to both represent (and so look to the language of home and community context) and communicate (and so look to the language that partners might understand). The language needed requires a degree of care and sophistication that might not be found in the chatty language of friendship (*'we have 2 wear a kinda robe')*; or in exclusively 'insider' language that fails to communicate meaning to the 'outsider', as in this Catholic boy's response to his Muslim partner's request for explanation of the meaning of 'class mass'.

> *A class mass is when everybody in the class gets together and we have a mass.*

Finally the logic of the email exchange means that in the discourse of religious/cultural identity, visits are made to-and-fro between each other's proper spaces. The 'turn-taking' of email dialogue is stricter than that of face-to-face communication. There is time for a careful processing

and analysis of a partner's words as they appear on the screen and before responses are formulated. There is time to relate what the partner has said to one's own experience and meanings, to note differences and similarities, to question some of these in the return email, or to review and maybe readjust one's own understanding in response. To pick up the home and hospitality metaphor once more, an insight into the organisation of another's proper living space might encourage one to return to one's own home and rearrange the furniture; a process analogous with the *reflexivity* of Jackson's *Interpretive Approach* (Jackson 2004). Again this is a fairly sophisticated process and requires not just a representative presence but a cognitive presence too. Though there were few instances in the exchanges of this intellectual engagement with cultural/religious difference, the polite and careful formulations suggested the benefit of the teacher's guiding presence either through his/her direct involvement or through the modelling of interest and encouragement that takes place on a day-to-day basis in the classroom.

> *I want to thank you for your letter and now I know a bit about yourself but I don't really know about your beliefs and that's what I want to discuss with you and also I want to share thoughts about my beliefs too.*

> *I think that when I die a new baby will be born and it will have my soul. What ideas do you have?*
>
> *From James*
>
> *That's a good idea James that would be nice if it did happen. Do you think your soul would remember who it was before.*
>
> *Actually our ideas are different. We belive if people do bad things then they will go to hell, and if they do good things they will go to heaven. Heaven and hell are in the sky.*

From Julekha and Shital

The presence these children are projecting into the dialogue is one of interested and thoughtful young people. It includes key elements of their own identity, their views and beliefs, but also, in its responsiveness and 'addressivity', includes something of 'the other'.

In this paper I have used the concepts of presence and space to explore the children's use of language and projection of their identity into an email exchange. Through this exploration I have come to the conclusion that the energies of intercultural interchanges should not be directed above all to the creation of a shared space of friendship – elements of tension, and limitations were found in the children's attempts to do just this - but should instead aim for a dynamic that preserves and respects the proper spaces of both partners while enabling each to question and learn from the other in a reciprocal movement between the two. The children's language choices depend on the direction and purposes of the interchange, as does the nature and relationship of teacher and child presence. Use of the language (or chat) of friendship limits teacher presence in the dialogue (I would suggest that it is not part of the teacher's remit to construct or intervene in his/her pupils' friendships). However, the role of the teacher as guide and model is significant in developing the more sophisticated language of respect, politeness, interest, cooperation and dialogue, qualities that, rather than friendship, should be the key guiding principles for children's intercultural exchange.

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