EL LEGADO DE LA PENÍNSULA IBÉRICA EN LA ÉPOCA MEDIEVAL: UNA VALIOSA FUENTE DE RECURSOS PARA LOS RETOS EDUCATIVOS DEL SIGLO XXI

Resumen: El legado histórico de la 'convivencia', o intercambio cultural que se produjo en la época medieval entre los musulmanes, los judíos y los cristianos de la Península Ibérica, puede contribuir al contexto educativo global en el que vivimos como una valiosa fuente de contenido interdisciplinar. Esta interacción entre diferentes culturas, en ocasiones conflictiva, y que se desarrolló durante casi ocho siglos, supuso además una variada amalgama de costumbres y conocimientos en numerosos ámbitos del saber. En el presente artículo rescatamos este momento histórico para mostrar cómo se puede vincular al contexto educativo multicultural en el que vivimos. Para ello, explicamos el fenómeno de la 'convivencia' en su contexto histórico y, a continuación, presentamos diferentes ejemplos relacionados de investigación-acción: un programa de teatro que se lleva a cabo en la actualidad en el campamento de refugiados de Yenín en Palestina, y una actividad interdisciplinar de trabajo en equipo para que estudiantes de diversas culturas puedan investigar, buscar y experimentar, a la vez que encuentran soluciones creativas para abordar algunos de los retos educativos a los que nos enfrentamos en el siglo XXI.

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LEARNING FROM THE PAST: THE LEGACY OF MEDIEVAL IBERIA FOR 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION

Abstract: The legacy of *convivencia* or cultural exchange among the Muslims, Jews and Christians of medieval Iberia has an important contribution to make to education in the 21st century. Creating a bridge between the history of *convivencia* and our own global society, this article aims to bring into the classroom a subject that is both timely and relevant, given its multicultural and interdisciplinary content. Highlighting the interaction of Iberia's 'three cultures' over almost eight centuries we illustrate issues of diversity, emphasizing how these medieval Iberians built community by interacting with each other and melding their contrasting, often conflictive traditions, languages and religions into a remarkable pluralistic narrative. To demonstrate how *convivencia* can serve education we offer a framework for interdisciplinary learning, as well as two examples of action research and role playing: a successful theatre program for high school students of the Jenin refugee camp in Palestine that is effecting social change; and a collaborative classroom activity in which students do research, brainstorm, and experiment with representation to give voice to conflict as they search for creative solutions to some of today's pressing issues.

Keywords: action research; *convivencia*; diversity; curricular design; historical legacy; multiculturalism; role-play; 'three cultures.'

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1. INTRODUCTION: MINING *CONVIVENCIA*

History has known few examples of multicultural societies that even approach the complex and dynamic *convivencia,* or cultural exchange, among the Muslims, Jews and Christians of medieval Iberia. But despite its brilliant achievements, significant contributions to Western civilization*,* and enduring legacy, *convivencia* has not received its proper place in education—an important omission considering its influence on the art and architecture of churches and synagogues from the smallest Peruvian towns all the way to New York City, to say nothing of the Spanish language replete with words of Arabic origin and the literature that it spawned. This omission is unfortunate given our need to foster the cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation that can help us deal effectively with the unprecedented global challenges confronting us. It is especially serious if one considers the many young people who are unprepared to function adequately in our global world. As Julia Resnik has observed, while elite schools offer their students the multicultural competencies that will enable them to play an active role in multinational corporations and global affairs, there are no such offerings for students in state-funded schools. Indeed, '[t]he relevance of multicultural skills in global management alongside the decay of multiculturalism in public education systems entails a growing disparity between lower class and higher class children' (Resnik, 2009, p. 219).

Unquestionably, our new mandate is to make these multicultural skills available to a wider group of students, in the same way that technology is being provided to an increasing number of young people. Education in the 21st century necessitates the combination of technology and multiculturalism as essential and integral to an

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interdisciplinary curriculum fostering emotional-artistic, socio-communicative, and cognitive-intellectual skills—a curriculum that prepares young people to live productively within a global, technologically complex and very volatile world. Such is the program that we are proposing.

With technology enabling us to live and work in real or virtual proximity to many diverse cultures and people, our global world has much in common with *convivencia.* Valuable lessons can be learned in comparing the present with the past to explore how openness to different cultures can enhance creativity and innovation. Medieval Iberia certainly offers a wealth of historical information and material evidence of successful exchanges and adaptations (i.e., religious, linguistic, social, artistic, scientific, commercial, etc.) that can now be researched via new digital databases (Cohen, 2010, pp. 1-2). Not only is there much to learn from the touted aspects of *convivencia,* but also from its failures. Like certain celebrated societies in recent history that also embraced the 'three cultures'—Alexandria and Salonika—, Iberia's medieval pluralism came to an end and was followed by a period of repression. While it might be useful to consider the limits of tolerance manifested by xenophobia and hostility to immigrants among broad populations in Western nations (Habermans, 2010, pp. 1-3), we also need to look at the downside of global communication, which 'has fractured, rather than reinforced, multiculturalism 'by giving rise to 'identity politics,' with minorities claiming special rights and privileges thereby 'poisoning liberal democracy.' What is needed, says Jonathan Sacks, is not 'a rights-based culture,' but one that is 'responsibility-based' (Sacks, 2007, pp. 4-5). Within this broader spectrum of what is involved in community building, namely the need to 'balance' opposing realities of conflict and cooperation, a reconsideration of the idea of *convivencia* is called for, so that we can mine it for its various contributions to 21st century education.

Offering a content-based, interdisciplinary approach to multicultural education, this article aims to create a bridge between *convivencia* and our own contemporary global society by bringing into the classroom a subject heretofore the exclusive domain of scholarship. Teachers and students can begin to explore the numerous aspects of this 'first rate' culture in which people of diverse origins shared traditions and ideas, translated classical texts, and disseminated technological know-how that paved the way for the Italian Renaissance.[1] More importantly, *convivencia* can serve as a model or reference point in dealing with today's pressing issues. Despite the thousand years that separate us, medieval Iberians were thoroughly familiar with the adjustments and accommodations that the fast pace of globalization is forcing us to make, and which we

as educators are observing in our classrooms: adjustments relating to political change and rule of law, immigration and displacement, language barriers, ethnic tensions, economic downturns, the challenging of religious beliefs, generational problems, intermarriage, sexual orientation, differing attitudes towards authority, and myriad other situations of potential stress and conflict.

To fully appreciate the scope and reach of *convivencia* we must first understand the socio-historical forces that produced it. Thus the first part of this article reviews the historiography of medieval Spain, highlighting the interaction of Spain's 'three cultures' over almost eight centuries: their ability to build community by melding their contrasting, often conflictive traditions, languages and religions into a remarkable pluralistic narrative. In the second part we demonstrate how this historical phenomenon can serve education in the 21st century. Using an interdisciplinary framework, we link *convivencia* to different academic disciplines within the arts, sciences and social sciences and show what extrapolations can be made. This is followed by two programs that combine Kurt Lewin's action research with Jacob L. Moreno's role playing method: Arna Mer-Khamis' *Freedom Theatre* with the children of the Jenin Refugee Camp in Palestine, and a collaborative classroom activity in which students research, brainstorm and experiment with representation to give voice to conflict and creativity.

2. WHAT IS *CONVIVENCIA*: THE CONCEPT OF *INTRAHISTORIA*

The interactive spirit of Iberia's medieval Muslims, Jews and Christians can best be understood by viewing the panoramic sequence of events that enveloped them, focusing on what Miguel de Unamuno (1912) called their *intrahistoria* or 'inner history' as expressed in their cuisine, dances and songs, art and crafts, and especially their language, literature and traditions. As we follow the sweep of history, these expressions yield glimpses of the small, intimate moments based not on the events themselves, but on their effect on how people thought, felt and acted, what they shared with each other and passed on through generations. To appreciate the *intrahistoria* of medieval Iberia we begin with the term '*convivencia*' and how it evolved.

The word originates from the Latin *convivere* used by Seneca and other Roman writers to speak about 'people brought together for a banquet,' the quintessential Roman function (Falconi, 2009). Hence our word 'conviviality' and the Spanish *convidar* meaning 'to invite,' with its added connotation of 'lived experience' or 'experience of the world' contained in the word *vivencia*.[2] A more neutral meaning of 'coexistence' or

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'cohabitation' was to follow, until the early 20th century when historian-philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal used the term *convivencia de normas* (coexistence of forms) to characterize 'the contemporaneous existence of variant forms of the early Romance languages' in Iberia. It was his student, Américo Castro, who in 1954 challenged the prevailing notion of Spanish identity by coining the term *convivencia* to refer specifically to the interaction with Muslims and Jews that he saw as having fundamentally shaped Spanish Christian society, and by extension the Spanish character (Glick, 1992, p. 1).

While few would challenge Castro's vision today, the term has been amplified to encompass not so much the influence of the other cultures on Iberia's Christians, but rather 'the situation of subordinate religions—be they Christian, Jewish or Muslim—in medieval Spain.'[3] Various visions or definitions of *convivencia* now range anywhere from 'living in mutual harmony, cooperation and even respect,'[4] to the assertion that *convivencia* was 'not inconsistent with resentment or tension,' thus a relative term implying 'degrees of tolerance, stability, security, and cordiality.'[5] As Nina Melechen (1986, p. 309) has indicated, the root question is that of the degree of acculturation or influence of one culture on another or others, together with the ebb and flow of that influence in the course of medieval Iberia's history. To be sure, tolerance and intolerance coexisted 'in an ever-shifting balance,' (Burns, 1984, p. 22; quoted in Klein 2006, p. 13) while certain groups (e.g., *mudéjares* or Muslims living in Christian cities, and Barcelona's Jews) were more concerned with preserving their identity, or exclusivity, given the inevitable acculturation that resulted from sharing the same space with other cultures.[6]

Convivencia, then, is not one concept but diverse phenomena of acculturation occurring in various pockets of Iberia, at various times in the course of almost eight centuries, and among different, hybrid groups. Much like our own pluralistic societies today, *convivencia* was time and place-specific, subject to myriad political, economic and social pressures. But unlike our global societies, Iberia's dynamic pluralism was unique for its time. Not only was it distinct from all other medieval societies, but the Iberian people were aware of their own distinctiveness. Diverse within their own borders, and well connected through abundant cultural and trade relations with other regions and distant lands, they were open and receptive to the world of their day.

2.1. History of Convivencia

From the outset, the Muslim invasion of 711 brought with it geopolitical experience that would shape both the conquest and the governance of the Iberian people. When Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed the stretch of waters from Tangiers to name the spot where he landed Jabal-Tariq, or Gibraltar, he had with him a full century of Mediterranean culture informed by a tradition of Roman, Carthaginian, Phoenician, and especially Mycenaean, Classical, Hellenistic and Byzantine influences (Bernal, 1994, p. 127). Transcending the limitations of tribal organization in Arabia, the Islamic spirit sought expansion, so that by the beginning of the 8th century the Muslim Empire had made its capital in Damascus, stretching as far as Samarkand (Uzbekistan) and the plains of the Indus in the East, and in the West controlling the North African province named Ifriqiyah (Tunesia) with its capital in Kairouan (Trevelyan, 1984*, p. 12). Linking the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, Damascus dominated almost all important maritime and caravan trade routes.[7] Its unified currency, based on the gold *dinar* and silver *dirham*, had given it an economic supremacy that allowed for the transport of men and goods, technology and information across great distances (Wink, 1990, p. 9).

Europe, in sharp contrast, cut off from its Greek and Roman past, was adrift, dark and poor, its 'economy [...] local, agricultural and virtually moneyless' (Levering Lewis, 2008, p. 222). Like the rest of Europe, the Iberian Peninsula was a land under Visigothic rule in constant struggle with barbarians from the North. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the arrival of Tariq, with his army of 7,000 to 12,000 mostly Berber tribesmen from North Africa, resulted in the quick defeat and killing of King Roderic, 'the last of the Goths,' on the banks of the Guadalete river, and an Iberia overrun in a span of ten years.

Tariq's advantage had much to do with the element of surprise, and the fact that the Visigoths were not liked by the indigenous folk, especially the Jews, whom they had treated harshly and who now welcomed the Arab invaders (Trevelyan, 1984, p. 12-13). Also, as Levering Lewis (2008) has observed, the Muslim leaders displayed real political savvy in their dealings with the people they came to conquer. Reaching the Roman fortifications around the city of Cordoba, and forcing their way in through a break in the wall, they were surprised to discover that the Visigothic governor and nobles had fled. It was here, Levering Lewis emphasizes, that 'they established a precedent of historic political and religious impact' (2008, p. 92) by leaving the Jews 'together with willing Christians and a small detachment of Muslims in charge of Cordoba's defenses' (Taha, 1989, p. 92; quoted in Levering Lewis, 2008, p. 126). This

collaborative precedent, more than 'an astute response to the numbers on the ground [...] established the conditions for the vaunted Muslim-Judeo-Christian interdependence that was to distinguish Islam for several centuries' (Levering Lewis, 2008, p. 126).[8]

Advancing north towards the Visigothic capital of Toledo the Muslim army repeated this tactic. A year later they did so again by invading Seville, then Beja, then Merida, and in 714 Coimbra and Santarem, today Portugal, were added. One by one, the Muslim armies were able to surprise and defeat the Visigothic strongholds and consolidate their power by leaving the administration of the city in the hands of the local people (Levering Lewis, 2008, pp. 126-128).[9] Not until 722 did the Muslim army suffer its first defeat: riding through the Asturian mountains they were routed by a group of Christians and their leader Pelayo—a setback regarded as inconsequential by the Muslim leaders: a mere skirmish by a small band of Christians refusing to pay tribute to the new rulers (Levering Lewis, 2008, p. 156; Lowney, 2005, p. 42). In hindsight, however, the Battle of Covadonga marked the beginning of the *Reconquista*, the long Christian struggle to recover the lands occupied by the Muslims. In time Asturias would become the first Christian kingdom in Iberia with Pelayo its first king, to be followed by Galicia, Leon, Aragon, Navarra, Catalonia and Castile.

Undaunted, the Muslim army forged ahead crossing the Pyrenees into Frankish territory all the way to Tours, 184 miles from Paris. There, in 732, in a field midway between Tours and Poitiers, they were stopped by Charles Martel in a battle that could hardly have seemed inconsequential to the defeated Muslims. The famed Battle of Poitiers changed the course of European history. After the massive and unexpected blow received from the Christian Franks, instead of advancing on to Paris, the Muslims were forced to retreat south of the Pyrenees, south of the Duero river, to settle in the southern region of Iberia they named *al-Andalus*. In consequence, the Franks headed by Charles Martel, subsequently by his son Pepin the Short and later by his grandson Charlemagne, had the time and space to consolidate their vision of a Christian Europe. European historians, notably Henri Pirenne and Leopold von Ranke, have traditionally regarded Poitiers as the iconic event of the formation of Europe. This was certainly the perspective that held sway, particularly as regards Muslim-Christian relations, to become the stuff of legend and literature informing public opinion and belief for the eventual 'creation' of Europe up to today's European Union. It also established the imprint of the 'other' on Muslim culture. As Edward Said has pointed out, this artificial reconstruction derived from *idées reçues* in textual sources was a European representation, not of the Muslim, but of 'Orientalism,' a self-serving cultural

generalization with political purpose (Said, 1979, pp. 115-119). A denigrating concept, it would provide the basis and precedent for the strained, divisive relations between the two cultures over subsequent centuries, with the serious geopolitical and socio-economic consequences that we know today.

2.2. Alternative Narratives

The events at Poitiers could have gone the other way, in which case a very different master narrative would have followed. Had the outcome been different, Edward Gibbon famously observed in 1776 in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: 'Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mohammed' (quoted by Menocal, 2002, pp. 55-56 and Levering Lewis, 2008, p. 173). 'History' being almost invariably the viewpoint of the winners, one cannot but wonder at the pliability of historiography and its range of possible interpretations and perspectives. The new trend among modern historians like David Levering Lewis has been to view Poitiers by contemplating the hypothetical alternative: 'Had Abd-al-Rahman's men prevailed that October day the post-Roman Occident would probably have been incorporated in a cosmopolitan, Muslim *regnum* unobstructed by borders, [...] one devoid of a priestly caste, animated by the dogma of equality of the faithful, and respect of all religious faiths' (2008, p. 172). To bolster his view he cites two French historians of forty years ago, Jean-Henri Roy and Jean Deviosse, who even enumerated the specific benefits to Western Civilization of a Muslim victory over the Franks: 'astronomy; Arabic numerals; the corpus of Greek philosophy.' 'We [Europe] would have gained 267 years [...]. We might have been spared the wars of religion' (Levering Lewis, 2008, pp. 173-174).

2.3. Convivencia in Medieval Literature

Following Poitiers, Muslim Iberia continued its sporadic incursions into the Frankish lands, even as it attempted to quell its own mutinous Berber population. But in 750 an upheaval took place in the Arab that would determine the history of *al-Andalus*: a rebel Abassid faction in Damascus massacred the family of the Umayyad caliph declaring Bagdad the new Arab capital. Miraculously, in the turmoil of events, the Umayyad hereditary prince survived, fleeing to North Africa in search of support from his Berber brethren on his mother's side. In 755 Abd-al-Rahman reached *al-Andalus* to become emir of the independent Arab state of Cordoba, no longer part of the Muslim world now

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dominated by the Abassids (Menocal, 2002, pp. 5-7). This historical twist was to prove fortuitous, as Abd-al-Rahman brought with him not only Berber support but also political savvy and experience. Reigning over an unsettled but increasingly prosperous period, Abd-al-Rahman initiated the process of Cordoba's creative development with the construction of the Great Mosque, its distinctive 'forest' of columns linked by red and white paneled horseshoe arches—a motif copied from Visigothic architecture.[10]

The Arab world now split between Abassid rule in the Middle East and the Umayyad reign in *al-Andalus*, Christian Europe witnessed Charlemagne's rise to power and the *Reconquista* gaining ground in northern Iberia. Allied with the Christian kingdoms, and the Abassid ruler in Baghdad, against their 'common enemy,' Umayyad Spain, Charlemagne began his unsuccessful incursions into Iberia in the name of Christendom. Most notable was his failed attempt to seize Zaragoza when a group of Basques attacked his rear guard in the Pyrenees mountain pass of Roncesvalles, inspiring Frankish *jongleurs* to sing their accounts of the battle as they travelled from region to region. Written down anonymously in the mid-12th century, the *Chançon de Roland*, signature epic of the French people, illustrated the Christian-Muslim polemic known as the 'myth of Roncesvalles.'[11] Despite all evidence that this battle was fought exclusively by Christians against Christians, the poem depicts the 'infidel' Saracens (i.e., Muslims) routing Charlemagne's army as his dying nephew, the heroic Roland, feebly blows his horn to warn his men before expiring. Circulated throughout France, this 'bad press' intensified the vision of an adversarial 'other' that served to institutionalize Christian intolerance towards Muslims.[12]

An entirely different narrative unfolded on the other side of the Pyrenees. Having come to Iberia without women, the Muslim invaders had found themselves greatly outnumbered by the indigenous population so that, from the outset, an intermingling of ethnicities and religions, including intermarriage, was normative. This social factor conditioned attitudes all over Iberia, and is clearly reflected in Spain's oldest literary work, the epic poem *Cantar de Mío Cid* written around 1207, or about half a century after the *Chançon de Roland*. Based on the life of the Christian nobleman Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, a mercenary soldier who fought for the Christian king, as well as serving Moorish rulers, the poem makes him the legendary hero of the *Reconquista*. Remarkably, the literary Rodrigo is respected by the Moors for his just treatment of them: it is from them that he receives from the honorific title of 'Cid' from *sidi*, or 'lord,' in Arabic. He even has a close and trusted friend in the Moor Abengalbón. The antagonist role of 'the other' is reserved for the envious Count García Ordóñez who

plots against Rodrigo at court, and for his two cowardly, greedy and abusive sons-in-law, the Infantes of Carrión. With the sole exception of two stereotyped Jewish usurers, Raquel and Vidas, whom Rodrigo ignobly deceives in his dire need to obtain money for his army, individual characters in this epic poem are 'good' or 'bad' according to their behavior, not whether or not they are Christians (Lowney, 2005, pp. 136-142). This viewpoint is borne out by Levy's research when he observes that even in the North 'friendship between Moors and Christians was common, often leading to intermarriage, and before [...] the church began to assert itself, many a Christian knight adopted Islam out of motives of policy or economy, since being a Muslim meant comparative freedom from the burdens of taxation' (Levy, 1965, p. 29; quoted by Hitchcock, 2008, p. 316).[13]

If the tolerant attitude towards both Christians and Jews made it relatively easy for the Muslims to gain control of Iberia, another notable precedent in treating people wisely was set by the governance of Abd-al-Raman I. Hitchcock points out that: whether Christian, Muslim or Jew, everyone was governed by a strict and predictable legal code; to breach it was to incur civil punishment. Such egalitarian governance combining tolerance with *Realpolitik* resulted in a well-managed, progressive state with an educated population and all three religions worshipping freely. Until the establishment of the caliphate in the first half of the 10th century, the indigenous population, although living under Islamic law, was 'barely aware of the presence of Islam as a religion' (Hitchcock, 2008, pp. 317-318). There was intermarriage between Christians and Muslims, and Christians tended to convert to Islam because of certain civil advantages (Menocal, 2002, p. 28). Regarding the Jews, as Eliyahu Ashtor has observed: 'Never in the history of the Diaspora, except in the Andalusia of the Umayyads, had Jews known eight generations of continued freedom from intolerance and persecution' (Muñoz Molina, 1991, p. 172; our translation).

2.4. Convivencia in 10th century Cordoba[14]

A center of Hebrew scholarship, 10th century Cordoba was the most populated and wealthy city of Europe with thousands of shops, paved and well lit streets, aqueducts, running water and hundreds of public bath houses. It had many hospitals, pharmacies, mosques, several universities, schools and a vast library of precious manuscripts. Concerned with hygiene and health, Cordoba's surgeons performed cataract operations, hysterectomies, appendectomies, etc., using anesthesia and with alcohol as disinfectant. Among its educated population were chemists, opticians, engineers, clockmakers, astronomers, architects, artists and artisans. *Azulejos* or colorful tiles with elaborate

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geometric designs decorated the courtyards of buildings. Cool fountains could be heard in the midst of lush gardens with palm trees, cypresses, citrus trees, jasmines, and cotton plants. The vast trade connections of *al-Andalus* had brought many new crops, fruits and vegetables to Iberia. Rich markets sold eggplants, artichokes, pomegranates, dates, figs, almonds, sugar cane, rice and coffee. There were silks and spices from the Orient, chess boards and beautifully carved pieces from India. Skilled craftsmen made lavish textiles, leather goods, ceramics, metals and glass. With the manufacture of paper the production of books and libraries flourished (Menocal, 2002, pp. 34-35). Poets, musicians and scholars arrived from Baghdad bringing poetry and songs, Arabic numerals, the decimal system, algebra, and the astrolabe. Unlike the feudal squalor of the rest of Europe, where only the clergy and some nobles could read and write, the people of *al-Andalus* were book lovers, intensely interested in law, science, mathematics and fascinated with the Arabic language. Through contact with the Arabic language and literature, Hebrew, an exclusively liturgical language, evolved into a secular idiom for writing lyrical and erotic poetry. Inevitably, as they watched and listened to each other, the 'three cultures' fused their contrasting styles into dramatic dances: *jotas* and *sevillanas* accompanied by rhythmic, pulsating sounds using major and minor tones.

2.5. Convivencia in 13th century Toledo

When the caliphate of Cordoba eventually collapsed from its internal weakness, *al-Andalus* became fragmented into rival city-states known as *taifas*. In that brief period of 'vibrant cultural innovation and political dysfunction,' (Levering Lewis, 2008, p. 346) the cultural center of Moorish Spain shifted to Toledo, which created its own version of *convivencia* through the formation of new hybrid groups: *mozárabes* (Christians in Moorish territories), *muwalads* (Christian converts to Islam), *moriscos* (Christianized Moors), *mudéjares* (Moors in Christian territories), 'old Christians' (direct descendants of the Visigoths), Sephardic Jews, converted Jews, *marranos* (Jews who practiced their faith in secret), to name but a few. Among the new cultural configurations resulting from the Christian conquest of Toledo in 1085, and its incorporation into the kingdom of Castile, were Arabized Christians who manifested all the characteristics of the defeated political enemy, which meant that they, as well as the occupying Castilians, had to make adjustments to find a *modus vivendi* (Hitchcock, 2008, pp. 315-318). Within this diverse and multilingual population Arabic was the language of prayer in the mosques, Hebrew in the synagogues and Latin in the churches, while on the street one heard *andalusī* (the language of the Spanish Moors), *ladino* (the language of the

Spanish Jews), and *castellano,* the Castilian vernacular consisting of a mixture of Latin with an abundance of Arabic words.

2.6. Storied versus 'Lachrymose' Convivencia

Historians usually divide the *convivencia* narrative into its Moorish period and its Christian phase, leading up to Spain's unification as a Christian nation. Those of a more romantic bent have tended to gloss over the darker aspects to idealize *convivencia.* Others, stressing the harsh reality of the pogroms and intolerance, hold the vision of a 'lachrymose' *convivencia* (Nirenberg, 1999, pp. 141-142). What is remarkable is that even in the red-hot kiln of hegemonic struggle between *al-Andalus* and the *Reconquista*, medieval Spain continued to forge its distinctive pluralistic character: sharing traditions and expertise, trading poems and stories, listening to each other's rhythmic music.[15] Despite violent conflict and difficult times, philosophy flourished as Maimonides and Averroes famously debated questions of faith versus reason. Paradoxically, even as Christians were fighting the 'infidel' and the *Reconquista* was intensifying its offensive, scholars from Paris and Bologna were flocking to Toledo in their search for Arabic know-how. Indeed, even after 1212 when most of Moorish Spain came under Christian control, both King Ferdinand III and his son, Alfonso X, continued their governance of tolerance and support of the Toledo School of Translators where Jewish and Arabic scholars were rendering classical lore into Latin for dissemination throughout Europe.[16] In fact, as Barbara Fuchs has indicated, even after 1492 and the fall of Granada, 'the official project of erasing the Moors from Spain' was countered by the material culture: the manufacture of Moorish textile design for clothing and home decoration, by the popularity of texts like the *Abencerraje* with its romantic and tragic connection to the Alhambra Palace, and especially by the enduring taste for *mudéjar* architecture. *Convivencia* seemed to be inextricably woven into the fabric of everyday life (2008, p. 5; p. 59).

3. THE LEGACY OF *CONVIVENCIA*: OUR MANDATE AS 21ST CENTURY EDUCATORS

Spurred by anxiety and suspicion surrounding the Black Death of 1391, Iberia's culture of tolerance began its steady decline towards its official end in 1492. Today, despite a lapse of more than five hundred years, the polarizing and adversarial vision of the West versus the 'other' imprinted during Charlemagne's time retains its hold over the imagination. Voicing his pessimism in an interview in *El País*, the medievalist Alan

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Deyermond spoke despairingly about what he saw as the growing 'separation among the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities' (Cruz, 2006; our translation).

And yet, the spirit of *convivencia* also continues to manifest itself in various and surprising ways. The influence of Iberia's *intrahistoria* remains vigorous, original and ubiquitous, and not just in Iberia but in many different parts of the world. It is strikingly visible in the distinctive neo-Moorish tiles of the various YMCAs that recall the bathhouses of tenth-century Cordoba. One hears it in the emotive and dynamic music of Spanish composers like De Falla, Granados, Albéniz, Joaquín Rodríguez, and even in the pulsating, syncopated tones of numerous non-Hispanic composers like Bizet, Ravel, Lalo, Copeland, Bernstein, Debussy, Rimsky-Korsakov, to say nothing of the many musical compositions entitled *Iberia*. One tastes it in savory saffron rice dishes. One witnesses it in children's enduring fascination with magical tales of flying carpets and treasure-filled caves; and in tourists awed by the beauty of the Alhambra Palace. The manifestations of *convivencia* in the world today are legion.[17]

It certainly begs the following question: how did this complex phenomenon of cultural interaction, this conflicted, uneven and yet storied *convivencia* prove so abundantly creative across the board, and so enduring? F. Scott Fitzgerald may have provided us with a clue when he said: 'the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time' (Menocal, 2002, pp. 9-10). Living in close proximity, imbued with their respective traditions, yet compelled by necessity to come to terms with each other, 'the three cultures' of medieval Iberia managed not so much in spite of their differences, but rather because of them, to create a remarkable *modus vivendi* by melding their contrasting life styles and beliefs, tastes and traditions, talents and customs to produce a vibrant and progressive, if imperfect, society.

Is it then so unrealistic to imagine that diverse communities at loggerheads in today's uncharted global world of rapid change and unprecedented challenges could create new ways to accommodate their differences in order to achieve the desired results?

Diverse communities in this 21st century globalized world will certainly need to come to terms with each other if they are to survive and flourish. As in every period of sweeping and dramatic change, our society is in the process of breaking out of antiquated, inadequate forms. We are being pressed by the new realities now confronting us at breakneck speed into creating new, inclusive structures, often with dislocating effects. Within this process of accommodation and adjustment, diversity is a key ingredient. By

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offering us the opportunity to grapple with difference and 'other,' diversity is providing us with a wider field of choices and challenges, combinations and configurations from which—like the pearl from the oyster—new integrations and syntheses can emerge, new creative solutions to problems of difference. To quote Jonathan Sacks, creativity 'has become the key to flourishing in the 21st century' (Sacks, 2003, p. 137).

If so, then our mandate as educators for the 21st century will be to teach for creativity with 'imagination [...] at the heart of the educational enterprise.' Indeed, because it is through the arts that we are able to participate in the lives of others, to feel their situation in ways that only the arts can reveal, it is the arts that we must use in our teaching as our instrument of inquiry, perception and representation (Eisner, 2002, p. 223; quoted in Locke, Terry and Riley, 2009, p. 489). To expand further on this idea, it is by interconnecting the arts with the sciences and the social sciences—by adopting an interdisciplinary approach to learning—that novel and original perspectives can be brought into the creative process in order to produce much needed breakthroughs.

4. TEACHING FOR CREATIVITY WITH AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK

It is time to take *convivencia* out of the dusty archives of history and make it work for us: informing academic disciplines, enriching students' aesthetic and moral sensibilities, expanding their vision, and strengthening their identity regarding the possibilities for productive interaction with today's reality. A dynamic culture of significant duration, lasting influence and high level of expertise in many fields of human endeavor, *convivencia* remains a unique historical reference point from which to research the present with a view to building the future. But how can such a remote historical phenomenon be harnessed to deal with today's issues? One answer might be to explore the connections between the various disciplines, as well as between medieval Iberia and our own contemporary society. With a view to complementing and/or supplementing existing curricula, we link *convivencia* to different academic subjects offering a variety of interdisciplinary topics for discussion:

1. **English:** *The Arabian Nights,* the poetry of the medieval troubadours, and other Iberian legacies like Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* had a profound influence on English literature and language, replete as it is with terms like *quixotic*, *picaresque*, and words of Arabic origin, e.g., almond, aluminum, alcohol, album, jasmine, coffee, alfalfa, magazine, candy, jar, soda, zero, alcove, etc.

Discussion topics: Can you trace the story behind the word *magazine?* Do you know any contemporary writers who have used Arabic influences in their work? How does attachment to one's culture translate into love of one's language?

2. Classics: After the fall of Rome, Greek literature, philosophy, works on medicine were translated into Arabic, and thence into Latin, by Hebrew and Arabic scholars of Toledo's School of Translators, and thus disseminated throughout Europe.

Discussion topics: English may be today's *lingua franca*, but what about tomorrow: will it be Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, Spanish, etc.? Explain.

3. Modern Languages: If we agree that language teaching in the 21st century needs to focus on accessing culture, furthering its appreciation, and creating productive exchanges (David and Gerard, 2006, pp. 85-94), Spanish could be taught as a unit featuring the history, art and literature of medieval Spain. Many Spanish words are of Arabic origin, e.g., *naranja, alfombra, almohada*, etc.; the poetry of García Lorca is patterned on medieval *romances*; even the literature of other Romance languages, such as the French *Chançon de Roland* and Corneille's *Le Cid*, or the Italian *Orlando Furioso*, often bears the imprint of medieval Spain.

Discussion topics: Can you think of some common themes and influences that can be traced from one culture to another, from one language to another? What are some of features distinguishing Castilian from Ladino, Spanish from Italian, Arabic from Hebrew, Modern Greek from Ancient Greek, etc.? Comparing an old medieval *romance* (8 syllable Spanish ballad) and a modern poem by García Lorca, can you tell how the Spanish language has changed?

4. Art and Music: 'Nothing could be worse than to be blind in Granada,' a poet once said, speaking of the exquisitely sculpted Alhambra palace that inspired Washington Irving's *Alhambra Stories*. Many of Spain's architectural treasures represent a mixture of Gothic, Romanesque, Sephardic and Islamic styles. Similarly, Spanish music is a combination of Muslim, Jewish and Christian elements, and its strong popular element inspired many non-Hispanic composers to create their own versions of Iberia: Debussy, Bizet, Chabrier, Glinka, Copeland, etc.; in terms of music, we might think too of the strong gypsy strain of Flamenco dance.

Discussion topics: Why was the *laud*, or oval guitar, important for Spanish music? Can you recognize the special features of Gothic, Romanesque and Islamic styles of architecture? What building(s) in your city or neighborhood can you identify as representing a mixture of styles? Listening to Spanish medieval music, what instruments do you hear? Can you distinguish Sephardic music from Arabic and Christian music? Listen and watch some Flamenco guitar and dance: what musical elements can you identify, e.g., minor tones, *ostinato*, lyricism, etc.? What dance steps? What 'Spanish' motifs can you find in the modern music around you?

5. Science and Mathematics: Europe got its numerals, algebra, and advances in geometry and trigonometry from Moorish Spain. Muslims transformed alchemy from an occultist art into a scientific discipline by describing such processes as distillation, crystallization and evaporation. At the height of its prosperity Cordoba had 500 waterwheels straddling the Guadalquivir; it had lush gardens with fresh water fountains and cypress, citrus, fig and palm trees, as well as a variety of flowers, fruit, and vegetables. Its population included chemists, botanists, farmers, hydraulic engineers, astronomers, opticians, clock makers and physicians. Muslim surgeons performed all manner of operations, applying purified alcohol to wounds as an antiseptic agent. An astonishing collection of their surgical instruments is exhibited in Cordoba's Tower of Calahorra.

Discussion topics: What scientific concepts and/or discoveries can you name that come from the Middle Ages? How would acknowledging the multicultural contributions to the history of science be beneficial to students? What sort of cooperation among the sciences, social sciences and humanities might be needed to meet some of the challenges of the 21st century (e.g., creating alternative sources of energy)? What examples of cross-cultural cooperation, (e.g., Médecins sans Frontières or the Peace Corps) can you name?

6. History, Geography and Economics: Moorish Spain offered a stark contrast to the rest of feudal Europe in terms of hygiene, lit and paved streets, universities, schools, hospitals, and its many intellectual advances, not to mention the crucial role of Toledo's School of Translators in shaping the Italian Renaissance. It had a unified currency and a vast network of trade relations and cultural exchanges that included India and China. The manufacture of paper and glass, the importation of spices, silk and tea, and the game of chess, all contributed to making tenth-century Cordoba the most populated and progressive city in Europe.

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Discussion topics: Can you trace the expansion of Islam in the 8th century both east and west? Today which of these areas has the most significant numbers of Muslims? Describe feudal Europe in the 8th century. Can you hypothesize what the consequences might have been for Europe if the Muslims had won the Battle of Poitiers? How would modern Europe be different? When and how did gunpowder change military history? Can you trace the silk trade route from China to the West? Name several reasons why spices assumed such importance for medieval Europeans. What were some of the geopolitical considerations of twelfth-century Europe? Explain why petroleum has assumed the same importance in our own culture as spices did for the Renaissance. What other multicultural societies can you name? What are the factors that nurture and preserve multiculturalism? Conversely, what factors lead to its destruction? Can you name some benefits of multiculturalism that you have observed in your community?

7. Philosophy and Religion: Despite their differences, Islam, Judaism and Christianity shared the story of Abraham and were considered 'People of the Book' in Moorish Spain. There was freedom of worship in medieval Iberia; Cordoba and Toledo were centers of Hebrew scholarship; and religion and philosophy had equal status, as is evidenced by Maimonides and Averroes debating questions of faith versus reason.

Discussion topics: Where do you draw the line between religion and philosophy; philosophy and psychology; religion and politics? How can you structure a dialogue between conflicting ideas (e.g., creationism and evolution)? What common ground can you find between the different religions that you know? In what ways did *convivencia* shape life in medieval Iberia? Can you identify some 'boundaries' and some 'bridges' that exist in your community?

8. Technology and Communication: Since the Internet offers a wealth of information, images and music related to medieval Spain and *convivencia,* technology turns out to be an invaluable resource. Students can search for material, and select and download it into a student-created or student-run '*convivencia* website' where the information can be manipulated, edited, added to, embellished, and renewed in order to learn from it, make extrapolations, or use it for projects.

The overarching goal of this framework of interdisciplinary collaboration is the creation of such an 'ambiance of *convivencia*' in which teachers and students partake of an enriched learning experience that stresses teamwork and cooperation. Students can pool

and integrate information from both the past and the present for the purposes of comparing and contrasting, exploration, discussion, and creative projects, such as:

- identifying pluralist societies across history and geography;
- documenting ethnic neighborhoods in one's own city;
- compiling a cookbook featuring recipes from diverse cultures and creating a 'food fest';
- outreach programs through religious organizations of all kinds to find common ground;
- a group visit to churches, synagogues and mosques to identify different architectural styles and features;
- a translation exercise to render a passage of poetry in different languages;
- a program in which students connect by email with other students around the world;
- a music and dance event featuring diversity;
- a photography project identifying features of different cultures;
- a discussion about different traditions and festivals.

5. STATE-OF-ART TEACHING: IMPROVISATION AND ACTION RESEARCH

Just as *convivencia* illustrates the interaction of diverse academic disciplines, styles, traditions and perspectives, so does our state-of-the-art teaching include: Sir Ken Robinson's ideas on creativity; those of Elliot Eisner on imagination; the techniques of Collaborate Learning, and especially Jacob L. Moreno's improvisation and role-playing methods (Blatner, 2009, pp. 1-8), in conjunction with Kurt Lewin's method of action research. Applied in combination, these methodologies offer contrasting guidelines. On the one hand, they provide students with the freedom to take the initiative and allow their imagination to flow—and nowhere more effectively than through role-playing. On the other hand, students are equipped with clear parameters, concrete knowledge and skills, critical thinking, selectivity and control. Above all, students are required to represent and express diverse points of view and engage in a free exchange of ideas, together with a willingness to build on other people's strengths. As such, students can create a collaboration wherein everyone feels stimulated to give of themselves and their ideas, however 'crazy' (Azzam 2009, pp. 22-26).

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At the heart of such a collaboration is Kurt Lewin's action research: 'an approach to problem solving and a problem solving process,' that is, a total process in which a problem situation is diagnosed, remedial action is planned and implemented, and its effect monitored, if improvements are to get underway' (Burns, 1994, p. 294; quoted in Locke and Riley, 2009, p. 492). This also involves Jacob L. Moreno's improvisation activities, reflecting a shift from the model of an 'active teacher imparting information and values to passive receptive learners,' since a [...] well-designed role-play provides a full learning experience consisting of 'cognitive awareness, affective or emotional response, and behavioral change' (McCaughan and Scott 1978, p. 22). Trained in Austria as a psychiatrist, Moreno introduced his ideas of psychodrama and group psychotherapy in New York in 1932, and for the next 40 years put into practice his Theory of Interpersonal Relations. Kurt Lewin, a German refugee in Palestine, on the other hand, initially devised his action research method to help people achieve greater gains in productivity, law and order in the workplace and the community. His aim was to develop democratic workplaces that included the active participation of the workers in the decision making process. He also wanted to raise the self-esteem of minority groups by helping them achieve 'independence, equality and cooperation' (Lewin, 1946; quoted in Adelman, 1993, p. 7). One of his first tasks in Palestine was to help new immigrants (before Israel was declared a state) adjust to their new environment (Adelman, 1993, p. 9).

5.1. The Freedom Theatre[18]

The legacies of Moreno and Lewin continue today with the children of the Jenin Refugee Camp through the *Freedom Theatre*. Its founder, a Jewish Israeli woman by the name of Arna Mer-Khamis, perceived keenly how the policies of occupation and Intifada were creating hostile, angry and bitter children who characteristically react to their situation with fantasies of revenge. She saw how their daily reality of endless violence and isolation was causing them to live with chronic fear and depression, deprived as they were of normal childhood play, experimentation, and healthy emotional development. What these children needed was a safe space in which to express themselves and grow: a program through which to develop the self-knowledge and confidence that would empower them to challenge their reality and take control of their future.

The result of Arna Mer-Khamis' initiative is the *Freedom Theatre,* a new form of action research effecting social change by means of an intense three-year extra-curricular

program where high school children of the Left Bank acquire the necessary skills to enter the world of theater and the performing arts. Funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperative Agency (SIDA), and in cooperation with the Arab American University, the *Freedom Theatre* gives these children a voice through theatre workshops, drama therapy and supporting multimedia activities. Combining therapeutic practices with high quality artistic productions, the program enables them to create plays in which they express themselves about a whole host of issues, from typical teenage concerns to the political problems that surround them, while connecting to each other, their audience and their particular situation. The first step to creative involvement is giving voice to their thoughts and feelings about their reality. As these kids begin to impersonate a variety of characters, both good and bad, they learn that they can create and recreate themselves: that they can be who and what they want to be. Through the magic of theatre they learn to embrace their reality and face the unknown. Imagining alternatives to their situation, they are able to gather confidence and set constructive goals. To date, the results have been significant in deflecting much destructive behavior: a shift in these children from wanting to be suicide bombers to focusing on developing themselves as constructive individuals in a competitive world.[19]

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5.2. Action Research and Convivencia

With the *Freedom Theatre* as inspiration and *convivencia* as a model of collaboration, the following activity illustrates the two-part process whereby young people engage first in 'research' to create an intellectual framework, then in 'action' through role-playing and self-expression, and thereby integrate the whole curriculum in an interplay of participant and context. 'Emphasis is placed upon how the participant's understanding

is affected, partly on the experience created by the learning game as a whole, partly on the (conflicting) perspectives of the game' (Duus Henriksen, 2010, p. 228). Socialization is the 'arena' where in-depth learning and reflexivity take place, as this is both an explicit and an implicit learning experience with multiple and varied goals, which are to:

- heighten awareness of our connectedness with history, our connectedness as human beings, and the central role of imagination and creativity in community building;[20]
- acquire factual information of an interdisciplinary nature;
- learn a variety of problem solving and language skills;
- interpret the reality of the medieval Iberians;
- interpret, simulate, and experiment with fictitious situations;
- suspend disbelief;
- treat moral themes, values, antipathies, suspicion, hostility, conflicts;
- sensitize students to conflicts, dilemmas, feelings, and different perspectives;
- create a 'safe' climate for innovative thinking to take place;
- facilitate self-reflection;
- gain insight into one's own creativity and its possibilities.

We assume a multicultural classroom of high school students who will be engaged in this project for a period of four weeks: two weeks for the 'research' part and two weeks for the 'action' part. The teacher acts as facilitator, guide, and source of information. Internet access is available.

The Research Part involves the full classroom and has several components:

- The teacher gives the class an overview of the project explaining its two parts, stressing the interdisciplinary nature of the project, and what will be expected of the students.
- During the first 5 days the teacher presents a survey of the history of *convivencia* answering five basic questions: where, when, who, why, how. This can be done in a variety of ways, i.e., lectures, printed materials, maps, poetry readings, video presentations, listening to medieval music or *ladino* songs, etc., and supplemented by field trips to museums, local churches, mosques, synagogues, ethnic neighborhoods, tasting of different foods, etc.
- Students are made aware of a variety of *convivencia* topics and asked to choose

one that they would like to research, e.g., geometric designs, architecture, cartography, agriculture, mathematics, medicine, the Alhambra, battles, historical figures, Islam, philosophy, poetry, gardens, the Castilian language, Ladino, clothing, cuisine, bath houses, plants and flowers, the Toledo School of Translators, tolerance vs. intolerance, money, trade, shifting borders, laws, taxes, *El Cid*, music and songs, dances, education, history of a specific city or region, the *judería* or Jewish district, intermarriage, taxes, the *taifas*, the Cordoba Mosque, the Cathedral of Toledo, *El Tránsito* synagogue, the medieval marketplace, paper making, mathematics, the role of women, laws, what was happening in the rest of Europe, astronomy, engineering, navigation, the astrolabe, Maimonides, etc.

- For the next 3 days each student does research using books, the Internet, and digital databases, etc., in order to produce a paper or body of material containing text, images, music, etc.
- During the final 2 days of the Research Phase the class organizes itself to create its own '*convivencia* website/blog' into which to download their various media. Students partner to take on tasks, e.g., setting up the website or blog; organizing the material into groups, e.g., 'science,' 'arts,' 'society,' 'religion,' 'language, 'literature,' etc.; editing; downloading images or music to make the website or blog attractive and user friendly.
- The function of this website is twofold: to serve the present class as a resource to use during the next phase, as well as to be a 'legacy' for next year's class, in the same way that *convivencia* is serving them.

In the Action Part the teacher tells the class that they will be doing an activity of dramatic improvisations: they will be playing at being imaginary medieval Iberians. 'Human behavior,' the teacher explains, 'may be viewed as a dynamic process of role taking—the individual is socialised into his varied roles by [...] receiving messages about the assumptions and expectations [...] by others in reciprocal roles [...] to respond in ways that may be [...] a compromise between his own perceptions and expectations and those of others' (McCaughan and Scott, 1978, p. 24). This bespeaks a tension between the needs of the individual and those of society. Accordingly, their role as 'medieval Iberian characters' will represent this tension or conflict within their group. It will also represent a three-way split for each student as:

- Person: the student's personal beliefs, habits, feelings, goals, likes, dislikes, etc.;
- Character: the fictional person and perspective they will play;

- Role: the particular interpretation they will give—usually a merging of the personal perspective with that of the fictitious character (Duus Henriksen, 2010, p. 237).

The teacher now divides the class into groups of five, careful to include in each group students representing different forms of diversity, e.g., ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, language, a special talent or disability, socio-economic background, physical handicap, etc. Then the teacher asks each group to brainstorm the aspects of *convivencia* they consider salient, including each student's special interest and research, while one student writes these diverse facts on a blackboard.

The students in each group are now asked to imagine themselves as 'medieval Iberians' and to create a 'mental map' of their world. How do they each see themselves; what are their name(s)? What would their imaginary projections consist of? What religious group would they belong to; what language(s) would they speak? Where would they live; what would they do; what foods would they eat; what clothes would they wear? What would they do for fun, and who would their friends be? How would they relate to their parents? What would their education consist of? What kinds of problems or conflicts would they have? Each person writes a 'portrait' of his/her *persona* in this imaginary 'play' on paper.

As each individual 'portrait' is created, the teacher suggests ways of 'freeing' the students to find expressiveness through analogies, metaphors, onomatopoeia, sound effects, visual thinking, mimes, references to TV shows, movies, childhood memories—anything that works—in order to describe, discuss or present their imaginary representations.

The next step is for each group member to give their 'medieval' character a specific 'conflict' or describe an imagined problem situation (i.e., something personal, family related, about school, friends, 'other'—something real or fictitious, seen, heard or read about). The group now receives instruction regarding the organization of the group role-play, whose aim is to give voice to a conflict; time: up to 15 minutes per student; procedure: to take turns expressing themselves until all five group members have completed their play; follow-up: to improvise responses amongst themselves; warm-up: to rehearse individually before the teacher (Ladousse, 1987, p. 30).

At this point the teacher interviews each child 'in role' to help them feel 'safe,' give feedback and encouragement, and provide 'warm up' time to really get into their role (Blatner, 2009, p. 2-3). What is essential is that the student give voice to his/her conflicted *persona* in a dramatic and expressive way using intonation and gesture to the fullest. The teacher might also suggest using certain dramatic devices, like having the players make 'asides' in which the character makes comments to the 'audience' while the other characters pretend not to hear, or do a 'role reversal' in which the players offer each other a mirror, a different perspective, an occasion for empathy (Blatner, 2009, p. 4).

Once all the students in the group are ready, they each take turns playing out their individual role of 'medieval-characters-in-conflict,' while the rest watch and listen. After all the 5 role-plays have been presented, the students are ready to: improvise responses; discuss each conflict by asking questions; offer contrasting or analogous experiences; do a 'reversal of roles;' express empathy, annoyance, identification or understanding; and comment on the delivery.

Now the group brainstorms to find and discuss creative solutions for each of the conflicts presented. Imagination is a key element and all possibilities are valid. Once the range of creative solutions has been exhausted, each group member works separately to represent his or her creative solution of choice by means of some form of language art: a song or poem, a letter, a dramatic monologue or dialogue, etc. For their language arts presentation individual students can 'borrow' each other as needed (e.g., for a dialogue), and use props either made by the students or brought from home (e.g., moustache, thick glasses, hat, high-heeled shoes, head scarf, star of David, crucifix, etc.).

The final portion of this action research is a full-fledged discussion within the group regarding the entire project, and what they have been through. Students note its strengths and weaknesses, ways it can be improved, and their feelings about working in a group. They talk about their various imaginary characters, their conflicts, and how their exchanges about creative solutions contributed to their presentations. They discuss whether, or how, imagining themselves as 'medieval Iberians' freed them in any way; whether it connected them to the past; differences and similarities they experienced between the past and the present, etc. Finally, they speak of what they have learned about themselves and each other. Have any of their opinions changed? Have they experienced a shift in perception? What are their thoughts about their own creative abilities and those of the other members in the group? How and in what ways has the

group benefited (or not) from working together; what if anything has changed in their relationships to each other?

For the learning experience to be a full one, it is expected that the entire process—the combination of the intellectual knowledge, the role-play, the feedback and discussion—facilitate in the student a self-reflection leading to a shift in perspective and/or a deepening of thought.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has its foundation in the strained, divisive relationships among Muslims, Christians and Jews that have come down to us from the Middle Ages and are still in evidence today. In attempting to deal with this issue of the 'other' we have chosen to focus on Iberia's *convivencia* as an example of a tolerant and productive—albeit imperfect—society, in order to explore how it can serve multicultural education in both state and private schools. We have provided teachers and students with examples, information and methods regarding the central role of diversity in creativity. We have also stressed the need to find new and creative ways to deal with the unprecedented challenges confronting us on a global scale. A rich and complex image of interaction and sharing among diverse cultures and people, *convivencia* offers us a distant mirror of our own global village, reminding us that our multicultural issues are not exclusive to the modern world, and that we are all interconnected and interdependent, and thus in need of cross-cultural sharing and cooperation.

Perhaps most importantly, the social, intellectual and artistic richness of *convivencia* reminds us that the creative solutions our rapidly evolving global society requires have to do with building community, and that it is by including and combining contrasting ideas and divergent modes of thinking that we can arrive at new syntheses and needed innovations. Our hope is that the multi-disciplinary appeal of *convivencia* in the arts, the sciences and the social sciences will inspire educators and encourage students to brainstorm, experiment, forge new relationships and create new connections within their own community—and that these endeavors will empower and enable them to confront the challenges of the 21st century from a perspective of nuanced thinking and tolerance.

Notes

[1] As María Rosa Menocal explains: 'It is about a genuine, foundational European cultural moment that qualifies as 'first rate,' in the sense of F. Scott Fitzgerald's wonderful formula (laid out in the essay 'The Crack-Up' [namely that] the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time' (2002, pp. 9-10).

[2] See also David and Gérard (2007) citing from 'Convivencia: the goal of conviviality' by Lourdes Arizpe <http://www.lourdesarizpe.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=48>.

[3] Elka Klein (2006, p. 13) refers us to see *Convivencia: Jews Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain* New York: George Braziller, 1992, published in conjunction with an exhibition also named 'Convivencia' held at the Jewish Museum in New York.

[4] Klein cites Norman Roth 'The Civic Status of the Jew in Medieval Spain' in Paul Chevedden (Ed.), *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Robert I Burns, S.J.*, vol. 2, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 139; See also Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) p. 9.

[5] Klein cites Benjamin R. Gampel, 'Does Medieval Navarrese Jewry Salvage Our Notion of Convivencia?' in Bernard Doc Cooperman (Ed.), *In Iberia and Beyond: Hispanic Jews between Cultures*: *Proceedings of a Symposium to Mark the 500th Anniversary of the Expulsion of Spanish Jewry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), pp. 97-122. See also David Nirenberg (1996) *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. Princeton University Press, pp. 38-40.

[6] See Klein (2006) and her review of numerous sources and definitions of *convivencia*. Other critics have even emphasized the impossibility of defining *convivencia* without including the many variables involved, such as cultural rigidity, historical events, demographics, ecology, and boundaries of various sorts.

[7] With the exception of the silk route from China to India and Russia and the trade center of Byzantium.

[8] They did more than that, as we learn from two unique coins in the numismatic record, gold dinars minted in 712, a year into the Muslim invasion. These coins provide telling material evidence about the conquest, especially as regards the question of political authority, the transition of power and the acculturation that took place from the beginning. Minted under Islamic auspices, these two gold dinars communicate the Muslim faith in both Latin and Arabic, and using Arabic as well as Roman numerals. As such they represent not just a radical departure from Islamic standards of the time, but a new priority. They reveal, as Anna Balaguer (1979) has indicated, 'the pattern of interaction that existed between the Islamic rulers and their Christian subjects,' as well as Islamic hegemony over both Christians and Arabs, including the Berbers, Syrians, and Egyptians in their ranks. Knowing themselves outnumbered and thus in a weak and threatened position, the Muslims understood that, in the absence of a common language, they needed to use Latin to communicate effectively their role as new rulers to the local people – a tactic that must have furthered their early efforts at political consolidation in Iberia.

[9] Roger L Martínez cites Anna Balaguer, 'Early Islamic Transitional Gold Issues of North Africa and Spain in the American Numismatic Society.' *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 24 (1979): 225-241; in 'In God's Name: Authority and Accommodation in Early Medieval Iberian Islamic Coinage.' Unpublished paper presented at The Heritage of the High Caliphate: Dinars, Dirhams and Coppers of the Late Umayyad and Early Abbasid Periods, ca. 700-950 Conference, American Numismatic Society New York, NY, 25/06/2004. <http://www.Rogerlouismartinez.com/.../HistoryArabWorld-lecture.pdf>.

[10] Another innovative element was the *quibla*, or orientation of the Cordoba Mosque, which was not towards Mecca, as was traditional, but in the direction of Damascus, as a symbol of Umayyad legitimacy (Menocal 2002, pp. 59-60).

[11] See Levering Lewis (2008); Lowney (2005).

[12] See Lowney's (2005, pp. 121-128; 136-142) detailed treatment of Roncesvalles and of the two competing visions represented by the two epic poems: the *Chançon de Roland* and the *Cantar de Mío Cid*.

[13] It has been said that Spain was the only European country that did not go on the Crusades since it had its own crusade within its borders. Research tells a somewhat different story. In his discussion on Christian-Muslim relationships, Richard Hitchcock (2008) makes clear that conflict within the Iberian Peninsula was motivated by territorial considerations, and not by religion, until the second half of the 11th century when the climate of Europe became altered as a result of the crusading initiatives. There was no incentive, until the mid-tenth century, for the indigenous population of *al-Andalus* to adopt the Islamic faith; nor was there any campaign on the part of the Muslim rulers to encourage such conversion. For the first two and a half centuries of the Islamic presence in Iberia, the Christian and Jewish populations lived under the *dhimmi* status spelled out in the Koran as protected 'People of the Book.' Christians and Jews were free to practice their respective faiths, albeit subject to payment of an annual tax called the *jizya*; and worship in churches and synagogues was allowed. There is ample evidence of such places of worship within a short radius of Cordoba (Levy, 1965, p. 185; quoted by Hitchcock, 2008, p. 316).

[14] Even as the great Cordoba Mosque faced Damascus, nothing prevented the Andalusian Umayyads from engaging in vigorous commercial and cultural exchanges with Abassid Baghdad. It was through Abassid translations of the Classical Greek texts that knowledge of Galen, Avicenna and Aristotle reached *al-Andalus*—a process accelerated when unity within the Arab world was achieved around 912 under the brilliant caliph Abd al-Rahman III. By this time Cordoba had a population of probably one million and was rivaling Baghdad in luxury. The new caliph's contributions were numerous: he doubled the size of the great Mosque and built the beautiful palace-city of Medina Azahara, named after his favorite wife, on the outskirts of Cordoba. He also halted Christian raids from the North, created a substantial fleet, and extended his power to northern Africa. Irrigation transformed agriculture in southern Iberia, and in the mountains mineral wealth was found. By the time his son Hakim became caliph, Cordoba had reached its highest degree of economic prosperity and culture (Trevelyan, 1984, pp. 15-16).

[15] For an example of the mixing of styles in medieval Iberia, see David and Muñoz-Basols (2011a) on the *Sarajevo Haggadah*. See also David and Muñoz-Basols (2011b) for information on diasporas and multicultural societies.

[16] So important was the multilingual culture of Toledo that the epitaph on the tomb of King Ferdinand III was inscribed in Latin, Castilian, Hebrew and Arabic.

[17] This essay was already complete when we received news of the publication of a new book by Oleg Grabar and Benjamin Z. Kedar (2010), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*, Austin: University of Texas Press, which is a collection of essays, authored and co-sponsored by Israeli and Palestinian experts and institutions, featuring the contradictory perspectives of Muslims, Jews and Christians.

[18] Our information about *The Freedom Theatre* comes from two sources: a presentation given by Juliano Mer-Khamis at the Trinity School in New York City in April 2009; and *The Freedom Theatre* website. Permission for the reproduction of the pictures has been granted by Juliano Mer-Khamis, General Director of *The Freedom Theatre*: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/>.

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[19] In line with the action research ideas of McNiff (2002, p. 15; quoted in Locke and Riley 2009, p. 495), it is 'an inquiry by the self into the self [undertaken in the company of others acting as] research participants and critical learning partners.'

[20] In their article, David and Gérard (2007, p. 85) state that to meet the requirement of a rapidly evolving global society, education in the 21st century needs to be both interdisciplinary and cross-cultural, and that the role of language teachers is to teach language 'not as an end, but as a means for acquiring cultural information and promoting tolerance.' Technology having made us highly interactive and interdependent, 'it is essential that we understand each other.'

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