The Intercultural Training of Foreign Language Teachers. The Spanish Case

Mª Elena Gómez Parra
Antonio Raigón Rodríguez
University of Córdoba (Spain)

Resumen

La formación inicial de los nuevos maestros/as de lengua extranjera, así como de aquellos en ejercicio, ha de responder a las demandas sociales actuales. El hecho intercultural resulta innegable dentro y fuera de nuestras aulas. El nuevo rol del docente de lengua extranjera debe ser el de mediador intercultural entre las diferentes culturas presentes en el aula o entre la cultura propia y la de la lengua que enseña.

Palabras clave: formación del profesorado, formación intercultural, comunicación intercultural, enseñanza de lengua extranjera.

Abstract

Foreign language teachers training needs to be directed to attain the new social goals in the twenty-first century. This is the case of both active teachers and those still at university. Intercultural relations are present in our life and in our classes. The foreign language teacher new role is that of intercultural mediator, not only among cultures in the class, but also between his/her own culture and the culture of the second language.

Keywords: teacher training, intercultural training, intercultural communication, foreign language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Society in the twenty-first century is the result of the changes experienced in the twentieth century, by which, of course, we mean the technological, scientific and social revolution that culminated in the second half of the century. The events that have given rise to this new reality are unprecedented in the history of humanity; never before have human beings played such an active role in such important and diverse events, resulting in this type of social progress.

Migratory flows are one of the most important issues that society must face in this century. The flow of citizens of different nationalities means that society has many different *faces* (different ethnic origins) and *spirits* (different cultural origins). European citizens have seen their lives change, moving towards a plural, multicultural and therefore multilingual community. Thus, statements made about education last century are no longer valid. We cannot continue talking about education without mentioning cultural diversity. However, this situation is not acknowledged or accepted by the entire community. Aguado *et al.* (2003) argue that these changes that affect the classroom itself are rarely taken into account.

Education, by its very definition, must be democratic and plural. For P. Batelaan: «Education to promote democratic standards implies *intercultural education* as one of its main consequences» (2003: 2).

Logically, intercultural education would provide the plural and democratic dimension that is unfortunately still lacking. Hence, for education in this new era to be democratic, plural and manifold, it must first be intercultural. The term *Interculture*[1] has been defined by the *Council of Europe* (1989) as follows:

a) Equality of opportunities, development and democratization.
b) Mutual recognition of the culture of origin and host culture.
c) Prevalence of the host culture, whilst maintaining respect for the immigrants' mother tongue.
d) Emphasis of similarities over differences.
e) Equality of status between teachers from the immigrant's country of origin and those from the host country.
f) Acceptance of intercultural values.

In this plural setting proposed by the new Europe, language teaching acquires a special significance and therefore importance. The aforementioned social and cultural factors mean that language teachers must immediately adapt their training and curriculum to respond to this new reality. It is no longer

enough to teach just the language; the teacher must also be able to transmit the values, concepts and realities encompassed and reflected by that language. Furthermore, their role is no longer limited to the target language and culture. They must also be able to respect, understand and compare the various cultures present in the classroom with the target culture. Therefore, the foreign language should be viewed as a bridge to other cultures, as a sign of education *sine qua non* European citizens will be considered (or are already considered) to be *illiterate*. M. Byram (1989: 24) explains the importance of language learning for the individual's education:

> One of the contributions of foreign language teaching to pupils' education is to introduce learners to and help them understand 'otherness'. Whether it be in linguistic or cultural terms, learners are confronted with the language of other people, their culture, their way of thinking and dealing with the world.

This is our goal and teachers in Spanish *Education Faculties* must be aware of it. We already have children from different cultures in our schools who require a new teaching approach. Today's teachers must have their professional curriculum immediately adapted. The new challenges are here and their immediate consequences are already making their presence felt.

1. EDUCATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As we indicated in our introduction, the twentieth century witnessed a series of changes in many different areas, which have transformed society in the twenty-first century.

The social aspect of education is one of the key factors to understanding the intercultural process that is appearing in our schools.

The Spanish *Ministry of Education and Science* has released some very outstanding figures related to the increase of foreign students in the Spanish classrooms, almost ten-fold over the last decade. These data clearly indicate that twenty-first century migration policies have converted the Europe that we once knew into a mixture of diverse ethnic groups and cultures. *European Union* citizens have the right to travel, move to and start up a new life in any EU country. This means that our cities, towns and communities are beginning to change (or have already changed), reflecting this amalgam of nationalities (from both within and outside of the EU) and of course an assortment of completely different cultures and ways of looking at life.

Education institutions at all levels are directly responsible for transmitting the traditional social and cultural values found in their immediate setting, whilst comparing them with different social and cultural values (which must be respected) also present in that context. From primary school up to university, teaching staff must take on the responsibility of integrating students of different origins. Teachers must be able to respect diversity, guarantee equality and convey the values of this sociocultural framework. This may not be an easy task, but it is certainly unavoidable.

P. Batelaan (2003: 10-13) defines the three fundamental areas (*Curriculum, Governance and management,* and *Teacher education and training*) which must be synchronized for the definitive implementation of intercultural education in classrooms and society. He states that the following elements are vital in teacher training: *dealing with diversity, learning to live together and quality education.*

Following the guidelines drawn up by the *European Union*, our aim is to propose actions and strategies in the field of foreign language teacher training based on interculturality. We are facing some serious challenges and our teaching staff must have the necessary resources to manage cultural diversity.

2. Scope of this Study

We will base this analysis on the foreign language teacher training curriculum used in Spanish *Education Faculties* and *Teacher Training Colleges*. Future teachers currently study a diploma course (which lasts three years) and which under the new curriculum will be upgraded to a degree course (lasting four years). It is not our intention here to compare these two qualifications or their curricula, but rather to suggest certain actions that must be implemented in order to include aspects related with interculturality. We believe that it is the right time to implement such changes since Spanish curricula are currently being negotiated; the relevant authorities could bear these aspects in mind and include this "intercultural awareness" in the new curricula and also in political discourse.

Alcalá del Olmo (2004: 91) goes a step further in his conception of this phenomenon and explains that intercultural education is not only limited to the formal sphere:

> El fenómeno de la interculturalidad afecta a toda la educación, con independencia de su modalidad, es decir, formal, no formal e informal, puesto que la acción educativa intercultural puede llevarse a cabo en la escuela, en la familia, o fuera de ambos contextos.

We fully support this statement and believe that, *stricto senso*, interculturality appears in all spheres of life. Therefore, logically, education should be global in order to achieve its intercultural aims. However, we do not have room here (and it is not the purpose of this article) to include such a broad reflection. We believe that this universalistic project should be tackled in a more ambitious study and requires much more in-depth discussion. Our proposal consists of two complementary fields. It is a *global* and *reciprocal* conception of the intercultural education process. The following figure provides a graphic representation of our approach:
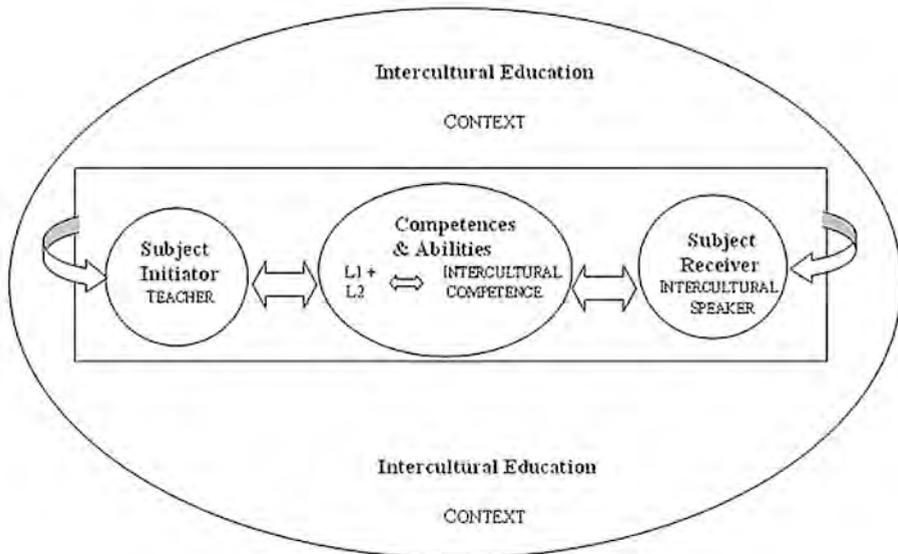
The sphere we are dealing with here is defined as *Intercultural Education*, meaning the field of work (or context) and the (whole series of) actions that must be implemented. *Intercultural Education* is completed with three additional factors: firstly, the *Subject Initiator* of the action. The use of the term *Subject* does not mean that students do not also play an active part in their own intercultural education. Hence, students in this model are called *Subject Receivers*. Intercultural *Competences & Knowledge* are at the centre of the diagram, representing the nucleus or the heart of this process. They are flanked on either side by double arrows indicating reciprocity and continuous interaction between the two agents that surround them (the teacher and the student). We believe that *Competences & Knowledge* are influenced (and hence adapted and modified) by the characteristics of the two agents themselves which are in turn influenced (and in the same

measure adapted and modified) by these *Competences & Knowledge*. The fundamental content of this section consists of the languages[2] that form part of the curricular content and its most immediate aim: *Intercultural Competence*, which is the culmination of this content.

The second subject (called the *Receiver*) is the ultimate objective of the entire process, meaning that the fundamental aim of *Intercultural Education* is to *educate citizens* so that they become *Intercultural Speakers*. To the right of the student, there is another double arrow, which indicates reciprocity and interaction with the *Teacher*, whilst also completing the educational circle.

3. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS AND GENERAL ACTIONS

Firstly, the abovementioned general concepts, which form the required theoretical foundation, must be defined, so that general actions can then be suggested for the inclusion of *Interculture* in the foreign language teacher training curriculum.

3.1. General Concepts

Foreign language teachers must possess a set of skills and competences that enable them to act as intercultural mediators in the classroom; skills and competences that are influenced by a series of factors, which are important in order to gain a complete understanding of the process. We will list and define them in the following sections.

3.1.1. Intercultural education

Firstly, the meaning of *Intercultural Education* must be clearly defined. In order to do so, we will compare it with a similar term, so that the differences can be contrasted: *Monocultural Education*. By this we mean the type of education given, for example, in *Culture and Civilization* programmes about the second language or in foreign language subjects that include cultural contents. *Monocultural education* brings the students closer to the target culture, without offering a comparison between two or more cultures. Alcalá del Olmo establishes a series of principles on which *Intercultural Education* is based: "empatía, solidaridad, respeto intercultural y oposición al nacionalismo" (2004: 96). *Intercultural Education*, therefore, is the context in which we are working. It is an educational context in which several cultures could be present, not necessarily just two of them, (*source*

culture and *target culture*); the students could come from as many different *source cultures* as there are nationalities present in the classroom. Hence, the *target culture* is a unifying factor, since the pupils (regardless of their origin and *source culture)* start out from a situation of equality in second language learning, which we believe is extremely beneficial for cultural integration. In this plural setting, the task of language teachers[3] is not only to convey knowledge about the *target culture*; their primordial function is to be able to integrate the target culture with the students' different source cultures. In this integration (in the praxis of *Intercultural Education),* we find aforementioned values of heterogeneity, diversity, equality, interaction, solidarity, respects and empathy.

3.1.2. Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is no longer a new concept in education or language teaching. Its definition encompasses five elements (Byram 2000):

- "Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
- Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
- Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.
- Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
- Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries."

As we can see, *intercultural competence* is very broad and gives the individual the necessary skills and competences to accept, understand, assimilate and compare diversity. It is the fundamental element of analysis: the aim is to educate students so they become *interculturally competent.* This means that the teacher must also be so: therein lies the heart of the matter.

3.1.3. Intercultural Speakers

The definition of this term completes the triad of concepts on which our proposal is based. Hence, once the limits of *Intercultural Education* (context or sphere of application) have been established and a definition of *Intercultural Competence* (skills and competences to be acquired) has been reached, the next and definitive step is, in essence, the fundamental aim of the process: to educate *Intercultural Speakers* (receivers of the action). This term was coined by Byram & Zarate in 1994 to refer to an individual who will have the ability to 'relativize' his or her own beliefs, values, practices and customs when confronted with the new reality of the foreign language. Later, Byram and Fleming (1998: 7) defined it as someone who is able to mediate and establish a relationship between cultures; able to explain and accept difference.

As we can see, the authority of the Chomskyan native speaker has been eradicated. It is no longer a model to be imitated because, quite simply, there is no place for it in this new conception. C. Kramsch (1998) spoke of the native speaker as an outdated myth.

3.2. Changes to the Curriculum

We will now suggest a few fundamental changes that need to be made to the foreign language teacher training curriculum. This curriculum must necessarily involve intercultural aspects, which enable future teachers to give meaning to this model.

The theoretical foundation of the *intercultural curriculum* must be based on a different concept of the teacher from the one we are accustomed to. Here is a brief history of the most recent teaching models applied in our school settings, as well as the opinions of certain authors about them. Education must leave behind teaching models that were successful in their day but which are simply no longer applicable in today's society. For example, learning theories of the twentieth century in which the student was considered a mere 'receiver' of knowledge that the teacher (viewed as the 'container' of wisdom) would transmit. One such theory was the *techno-rational theory* of teaching applied in the 1970 Spanish *General Education Act*, which was influenced by Skinner's behavioural theory (1957). According to this model, the teacher's role is restricted to planning actions and activities that are carried out in the classroom and the results are assessed at the end of the process without further consequence. *Interpretative-symbolic theories* (influenced by Piaget 1923 and Ausubel 1978, among others) are similarly no longer valid. According to these theories, the learning

process is a collaborative effort between the teacher, student and parents. The focus of learning in this case is the process and not the product, which sparked criticism on the part of the students' parents, who wanted to see tangible results in their children's education. The *reflective model*, slightly more in line with the approach required by the intercultural model, establishes guidelines so that the teacher performs a detailed analysis of the teaching actions carried out in the classroom. The teacher draws conclusions from this analysis, which are then used to improve the process in the next stage. This model, therefore, refers to teachers as *researchers* (Stenhouse 1987) *in action* who require previous training so they can apply the relevant techniques in their analysis and conclusions about the teaching and learning processes that take place in the classroom.

Finally, according to *critical theory*, teaching is merely an analysis of the reality found in the classroom, school, community or society into which this process is inserted. Therefore, the teacher's job is to ensure that the students achieve personal and collective independence at the same time. It is a social process, mediated by a socio-cultural reality and which is constructed through ideology and social interaction. Its function is not only to understand reality, but also to be aware of it and be able to change it. Leading figures such as Apple (1986) and Popkewitz (1980) have had a great deal of influence on this method which, as we can see, would also have much to say in terms of the intercultural focus of teaching.

Edelhoff (1987) believes that there are three characteristics that a foreign language teacher must possess in order to provide an intercultural education:

a) *Attitudes:* including a willingness to learn.
b) *Knowledge:* studying their own country in greater depth; knowing how their own language works in communication and how to use it effectively.
c) *Skills:* mastery of the basic communicative skills for negotiation, among others.

We fully support this approach and believe that this model is completely compatible with our proposed changes to the curriculum outlined in the following section. We will therefore combine these ideas with ours.

Vez & González (2004: 374), on the other hand, believe that the professional profile of the new teacher should include the following specific characteristics:

- "Proficiency in the target language.
- Knowledge of, and a positive attitude towards, the target culture.
- Knowledge about language as a system and as a social construct."

We differ slightly from these opinions in that we do not believe that the new teacher needs to have completely mastered the target language. Foreign language teachers in primary schools need only to have mastered the language they teach and to use it as the *lingua franca*. We believe that in a foreign language classroom, the foreign language itself becomes an 'equalizing' factor in the students' curricula. In other words, they all start out from the same situation of equality in relation to the other language, and the teacher should use it to communicate with all of them, regardless of the origin or mother tongue of each student.

We shall apply some of the ideas that support our proposal in order to describe the changes we believe should be made to the foreign language teacher training curriculum.

3.2.1. The Teacher's Own Culture

A teacher who receives intercultural training must begin by being able to identify the characteristics of his or her own culture, although this idea might seem somewhat paradoxical. We believe that, in order to respect, understand and be able to transmit another culture, we must first be able to understand, respect and transmit our own culture.

As we mentioned before[4], the fundamental condition *sine qua non* teachers cannot be faithful transmitters and mediators of cultures, is to begin by understanding and explaining their own culture. Therefore, the teacher training curriculum should include courses or subjects in this area. By this we do not only mean the subjects that already exist, such as 'Spanish Language', 'Spanish Semantics' or 'Spanish Morphosyntax'. We believe that there should also be subjects with general cultural content. It is not just a case of learning to analyse and structure one's own language (although this is also necessary); one must learn basic cultural notions such as the country's history, major religions, culinary traditions, regional diversity and typical dances. All aspects that are part of the daily life of a country are important in cultural analysis.

Edelhoff's analysis mentioned earlier fits in perfectly with this idea. New teachers with an *intercultural profile and vocation* must have the necessary *attitudes* to learn about, appreciate and accept basic notions of their own culture; they must also have advanced *Knowledge* about their own culture and of course have master the set of *Skills* that will enable them to establish effective communication.

However, there is an aspect that must not be neglected: *diversity in unity*. Within the culture of any one country, there are clearly significant differences that enrich it. Culture (even from a single country) is not uniform, even though

we are not always aware of this fact. For example, no one could deny that culinary traditions in Galicia are completely different to those in Andalusia or Navarre. Similarly, traditional regional dances in Aragon are different to those in the Canary Islands or Mallorca. It is also true that the Spanish language has dialectal differences that, far from posing a problem, enrich the expression of their speakers. These cultural differences must be taken into account by language teachers. K. Risager (1998) describes an experiment carried out in England and Denmark to research the way language teachers work in secondary schools. Professor Risager summarizes the situation as follows:

> The teachers' understanding of culture can be described at different levels, and I have touched upon two: how they describe the word 'culture', and how they describe their pedagogical practice in relation to personal cultural encounters. At the former level the understanding of culture points in a certain sense backwards towards the traditional concept of the national (or the single) culture. At the latter level the understanding of culture points partly to the future, by describing practices that can be related to the multicultural and the transcultural perspective. (1998: 253-254)

Clearly, the general conception of 'culture' on the part of the teaching staff is related to general issues that affect the life of a country and which are, as a general rule, common. In the definition of this term, there seems to be no room for the cultural diversity of a country. However, when this concept is applied to the classroom, there seems to be a general consensus about intercultural practices. So where is the misunderstanding?

3.2.2. The Culture of the 'Other'

As we saw before, the *Reflective model* of teaching believed it was fundamental to train teachers so they would be able to analyse and draw conclusions, effectively making them *researchers in action*. We consider this part of the teacher training curriculum to be fundamental, because we believe that their training should provide them with a set of appropriate research strategies about the cultural differences found in the classroom. This would avoid the risk of education falling into social "inequality".

The specialist literature contains many references to this issue. From Rey (1986) to Alcalá del Olmo (2004), many authors have considered the idea that teachers should receive prior training following an intercultural model. Therefore, in their training curriculum, there should be generic subjects about the languages and cultures they are most likely to encounter in their classrooms. Immigration

patterns are different in each region and this should (at least partially) determine the teacher training curriculum. The contents we propose for these subjects would be the same as described above in the section on the teachers' own culture. This concept of *Culture* is understood as the set of actions and options that are characteristic of a citizen's everyday life. By this we mean not only the important historic events and the language and literature of a country, but also their culinary tradition, regional dances and dress, all the aspects that, either consciously or subconsciously, are integrated in the everyday life of a human being. This idea concurs with Gibson's contribution (2002) to the intercultural model, what he terms the 'cultural iceberg', meaning that culture can be defined by the characteristics that are visible at a glance, but one must also take into account what lies beneath the water, aspects that are there even though they cannot easily be seen.

Therefore, being able to recognize all these aspects in the life of the 'other', in order to respect them and integrate them into one's 'own' life, would be 'a giant leap for mankind'[5]. In reality, it would involve educating individuals in fundamental and essential values such as peace, respect, diversity and union. In reality, it would involve EDUCATING.

CONCLUSIONS

We would like to conclude by reiterating our initial argument: teachers in the twenty-first century require new characteristics as *intercultural mediators*. This concept, *Interculture,* is new in our society (even though many teachers already refer to it and incorporate it into their classroom practices), and therefore, it requires curricular adaptation and appropriate policies that would enable us to work with a plural, multicultural, and above all, ever-changing society. Foreign language teachers must accept their role and understand this diversity. We believe that their aim is to *educate intercultural speakers;* hence, the teacher training curriculum must include two complementary areas:

a) *Real and in-depth knowledge of their own culture:* meaning all the national characteristics that give form to this knowledge. In this section, it is important not to forget *identity in diversity,* the set of regional differences that make up national identity.

b) *Real and in-depth knowledge of the 'other' culture:* meaning all the characteristics of the students that also give form to this knowledge, moving away from stereotypes. The same parameters of knowledge should be applied for both cultures.

The combination of these *knowledge corpora* should have an optimum result: the ability to understand, accept and adapt the characteristics of both; in addition they are provided with the necessary skills to face this new challenge. Our approach, which is far from being simplistic, would first entail raising the awareness of the language teachers themselves, a task that should be backed up by clear and committed policies. We must not forget that teachers are in the "first line of fire" in the field of education, and are always the first to receive the changes that occur in society. Therefore, they should also be the first to receive the relevant training in order to be able to tackle them, even though history proves that this has never been the case.

Wilson (2000) describes an experiment about teacher training, delivering courses to teachers in rural parts of South Africa. This article is a good example of how *Interculture* should work on all levels, since the technique that they eventually used to adapt to one another was, firstly, being able to recognize their own identity, and then being able to recognize the identity of the 'other'.

We would like to end with an idea that has run through this article and which, even though it has not been explicitly mentioned, forms the backbone of this paper: we will never be able to deal with diversity until we are capable of acknowledging the richness it has to offer. Europe is not a uniform concept; nations are not made up of ethnic groups and societies do not share lifestyle habits. When we can accept diversity in unity without considering it a threat, we will be able to integrate the culture of the 'other' into our own culture.

Perhaps the ultimate aim would be a *'Panculture'* in the etymological sense of the word, on the understanding that this *'Panculture'* would be different in each country, made up of different realities, groups and social customs.

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NOTES

1 *Interculture or Cross-culture*. Both terms refer to the same fact and are used indistinctly in the literature.

2 For reasons of space, we have only included the *mother tongue* (L1) and the *foreign language* (L2) in the diagram, which are the two most immediate and necessary languages, but we must not neglect the appearance of a (more or less finite) series of languages in this process.

3 In this article, we use the term "language teachers" to refer to primary and secondary teachers, as well as teachers at language schools in general, all of whom are responsible for teaching a foreign language.

4 See section 3.1.3. in which the concept of an "intercultural speaker" is defined by Byram.

5 Permit us to humbly use the words uttered by Neil A. Armstrong as he set foot on the moon for the first time on the 21st July 1969.

The language. Yes, you're seeking out teaching English in Spain programs because you want to teach English to Spanish-speakers. But teaching abroad is also a great way for you to learn a language! After all, food is an integral part to the Spanish lifestyle and social life, so why not take advantage of all its beautiful, open markets and tapas bars? The diversity. Each town, city, and region of Spain has its own, unique culture and traditions, filling every corner of Spain with different ways of living. In the case of Greenheart Travel's teaching jobs in Spain for Americans, this couldn't be more true. Through this program, your entire teaching experience will be through your homestay, where you'll live and tutor your homestay family in English. The methodology of teaching and learning foreign languages has always paid great attention to the use of modern technologies which allow the outside world to go beyond the classroom limits. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are inextricably linked with the advent and development of the Internet, which allows the text, image and sound to be transmitted over huge distances in a matter of seconds. - Theoretical, methodical and psycho-pedagogical bases of foreign languages teaching with the use of multimedia means, ICT, mobile technologies; - Methodology of scientific and pedagogic researches. 6 FINDINGS. It also brings the participation in intercultural communication on the basis of interactive technologies closer to natural communicative situations. The institution Spanish teachers work for tends to be part of the public educational system and offer general secondary education, and in some cases also vocational education. The presence of ethnic minority community children in these schools is not very significant; most of the respondents (42.86%) underline their absence, a large number of them (40%) consider their presence scarcely noticeable (1-10%) and a minority (17.15%) deems their presence to be somehow representative (10-50% of school children). How keen are they to introduce the intercultural in their classes? Figure 1. Teachers' views regarding the objectives of foreign language education. 88. L. Training Future Language Teachers to the Development of 21st Century Skills for Learners Using Digital Indira R. Abdulmianova FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION.TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING ISSUES PROCEEDINGS 2019, Volume 6, RUDN University. Development of Creative Writing Skills in English with the Use of Social NET VKontakte Victoria A. Skakunova FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION.TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING ISSUES PROCEEDINGS 2019, Volume 6, RUDN University. Intercultural education. Every language conveys and is a vehicle for culture. Taking into account the cultural dimension of the languages present and taught in schools is a fundamental – and particularly delicate – aspect of plurilingual and intercultural education. Today's children are exposed to cultural diversity at an early stage, both in a social context and when starting school. The intercultural aspect of school education constitutes a space where children can come together, make contact and interact with difference and otherness. It also contributes to their preparation for community l