

A Study on the Cultivation of Primary School Students' Cross-cultural Awareness—Based on the Schema Theory*

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Abstract—The cultivation of cross-cultural awareness for primary students is a key point in the English class. Apart from the traditional method, schema theory will be a new way for it. This paper investigates the current situation of primary school and analyses the problems in class. It explores the effective methods under the schema theory and provides relevant suggestions.

Index Terms—schema theory, cross-cultural awareness, primary school students

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, with the development of economy, the increasing intercultural contact is prevalent in the world. English, as an international language, has been widely adopted by many countries as well as in China. At present, English, an international medium, has been chosen as a major teaching course in China not only to help people to join the outside world but also to develop cross-cultural awareness which can guarantee a smooth international communication.

Without cross-cultural awareness, even though people can speak English well, they may not understand other people with different values and customs and carry on effective communication. What's worse, a cultural shock may arise and destroy the communication. As result, Chinese government along with other countries or organizations realizes the importance of cross-cultural awareness and regards it as one of the key competence in the educational program. In 2016, a study on Chinese students' six key competence specifically pointed out that the fifth key competence refers to the "an emotional attitude and value orientation to deal with the relationship between other countries". It is clear that students with cross-cultural awareness may hold open attitude to the difference and actively participate in international communication. Hence, from the primary school, it is necessary to cultivate cross-cultural awareness and enlarge cross-cultural knowledge in the teaching process.

However, the reality is opposite to the anticipation. On one hand, though many researchers carry out some studies on cross-cultural awareness, they mainly focus on university students and high school students. Most researchers pay little attention to the study of primary school students because they believe that cross-cultural awareness is an advanced ability which is largely beyond the ability of primary students. On the other hand, teachers in primary school seldom become aware that students need to form cross-cultural awareness when they begin to learn English. As a result, cross-cultural knowledge and awareness learning to large extent has been ignored in primary school English class. Contrary to cross-cultural learning, vocabulary learning and the structure of sentence learning become the hot spot in the class. What's worse, this class leads to significant deviation from Chinese culture and western culture and to the lack of background knowledge of western countries and civilizations, which finally ruins the English learning on the whole.

In fact, based on the cognitive development of primary students, they are curious about learning English and are good at imitating the world around, so it is the proper time to cultivate cross-cultural awareness in the English teaching. This paper will discuss how to cultivate cross-cultural awareness on the basis of schema theory and try to provide useful methods for the English class in the primary school stage.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Schema Theory

The word "schema" firstly appeared in ancient Greek philosophy and psychology, which was a bridge connecting the new concepts and perceived objects. In modern sense, the modern schema theory was proposed by German

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psychologist Barlett, who thought that people's memory was not static but need to integrate new things into the existing schema in brain. (Barlett: 1932) In 1970s, Rumelhart said all knowledge was packed in units and unit was the schema which was an abstract of knowledge.(Rumelhart:1977)Based on these above discussions, it can be concluded that schema is an abstract knowledge structure and the original schema will be quickly activated if the new information is imputed. Later, Rumelhart developed the modern schema theory and practiced it into reading process. He thought that any written material was meaningless and only readers can use their existed knowledge schema to build textual meanings. (Rumelhart: 1977) All in all, schema plays an important role in decoding and encoding the new information. In other words, schema is the cornerstone for cognition, reorganization and comprehension for new information.

The cultivation of cross-cultural awareness is not a simple process which is even more complicated than reading process itself. In the reading process, schema is the background knowledge to help readers to internalize new information into a new knowledge structure so the reading materials can be understood well. When students do some readings, they not only activate their knowledge schema but also culture schema, which is helpful for their reading process. The cultural schema is a branch of schema, proposed by Rumelhart in 1997, which means that a kind of knowledge schema originated from our cultural knowledge.(Rumelhart: 1977) Needless to say, when students encounter the cultural difference, they will stimulate their existed schema including language schema, content schema and cultural schema to interpret the current situation. However, their existed cultural schema alone cannot solve all the cultural obstacles, so the cultural schema heavily relies on the other two schema. From this perspective, in the English learning process, language and content schema is usually obvious but the cultural schema is invisible so it is not easy for students to build cultural schema. In other words, cultural schema needs to be built through the learning process. For students, much different cultural knowledge is subtly learned along with many words and sentences, and the establishment of cultural schema is also inconceivable. Therefore, it is significant to help students form a cultural schema and train it during the teaching process. After all, cultural schema will largely help people to adjust the appropriateness and effectiveness of their behavior in the cross-cultural situation. In short, as a new theoretical model, schema theory provides new prospects for cultivation of cross-cultural awareness.

B. Cross-cultural Awareness

Culture and language is a twin and cannot be separated as the society develops fast. As early as in 1921, E. Sapir clearly pointed out that "Language does not exist in isolation, and the existence of language cannot be separated from cultural".(Sapir: 1921) Since then more and more experts observed that culture and language cannot be apart from each other and more studies are related to the two aspects. In the 1950s, linguist R. Lado proposed a cultural reference model in linguistics and stressed the importance of learning foreign language and the importance of learning cultural and social knowledge. In the 1970s, the birth of communicative teaching method largely promoted the culture part of language teaching. In the 1980s and 1990s, the cultural teaching has occupied a bigger part in language teaching and pays attention to the cultural differences in foreign language. In the 2000s, cultural education has made a qualitative leap and the cultivation of cultural awareness has been paid much attention, which also has been put into educational curriculum by many countries. In all, many experts put forward many valuable opinions and have achieved profound progress in the study of cross-cultural awareness.

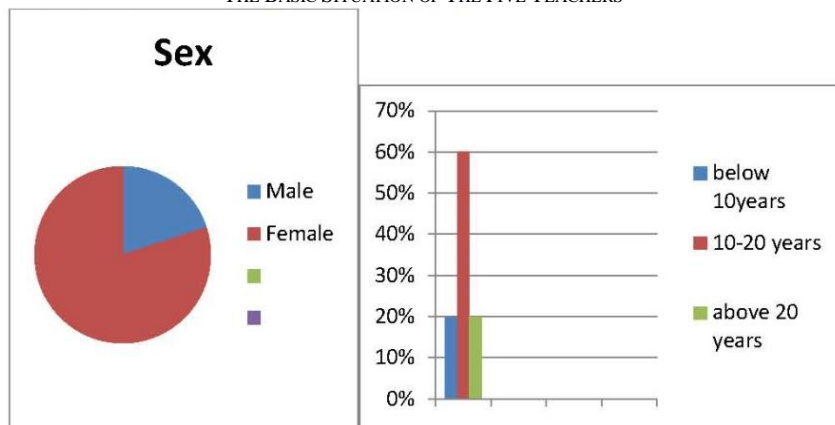
Hanvey firstly came up with the concept cross-cultural awareness in 1979 and pointed that cross-cultural awareness referred to the understanding of cultural background of both countries while doing cross-cultural communication. (Hanvey: 1979) Byram proposed that learning a culture of another country is based on the understanding of own culture and the comparison of their similarities. (Byram: 1997) In addition, the cross-cultural awareness is not only the mastery of knowledge, but also the ability to use it. From their classical statement, teaching language transforms its old ways and content. The primary change is that the relevance of language teaching and cultural teaching has become the normality in the education. For teachers and students, learning language is not only learning language itself and it also needs to combine the cultural habits of the target language country. In order to cultivate the cross-cultural awareness as well as accurate and decent communication, students need to understand the differences between different cultures and their differences in language use. As American foreign language teaching expert Winston Brembeck wrote in his book "to know another knowledge and not his culture is the very way to make a fluent fool of one's self"(Huang:42), cultural teaching has been greatly improved in the class. As a result, teachers will instill history, geography, traditions values and lives in class so that students will grasp the enough cultural knowledge. In addition to cultural teaching, the significance of cross-cultural awareness has been stood out. According to Anderson, the cross-cultural awareness is divided into three levels: the first is about the recognition of cultural phenomenon; the second is about the recognition of cultural differences; the third is about the understanding of other cultures from their perspective.(Anderson:1983) Actually, the three levels of cross-cultural awareness will be combined together and integrated into one. Cross-cultural awareness is a powerful supplement to linguistic knowledge and can help students better understand cultural phenomenon hidden in the language. Nowadays, the new curriculum reform in our country requires the teachers to pay attention to the all-round development of the students' comprehensive ability, and their overall quality development in foreign language teaching. In view of cross-cultural awareness, students finally need to learn cultural acculturation while doing communication with foreigners.

III. THE CULTIVATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS

A. *The Investigation of Current Teaching Situation*

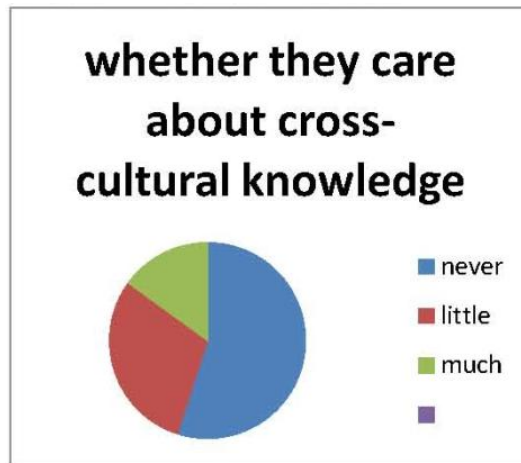
Cross-cultural awareness has been written into the National English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2011) which points out that cross-cultural awareness was a necessity for students including the systematic understanding of the history, customs, traditions, lifestyles and art, behavioral norms and values of the target language country. Most importantly, they are capable of understanding the difference between Chinese culture and Western culture, and adapting their cultural understanding according to other languages. However, in the real English class, the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness is seldom involved in teaching process. There are some factors accounting for this phenomenon. The first factor is closely related to teachers concerning their knowledge to cross-cultural teaching, their attitudes to cross-cultural teaching and their teaching methods to cross-cultural teaching. The following discussions are about the survey (questionnaire and interview) from 20 primary teachers who are mainly from 5 primary schools in Z city.

TABLE ONE
THE BASIC SITUATION OF THE FIVE TEACHERS



It is interesting to find that no matter how long they have taught in the primary schools, they hold almost the same attitude to the cross-cultural knowledge. Most of teachers don't care much about the cross-cultural knowledge and even aren't eager to receive further training about cross-cultural knowledge. Almost 70% teachers spend less than 30 minutes in expanding their knowledge about other cultures each day. The following questions and graphs can prove this:

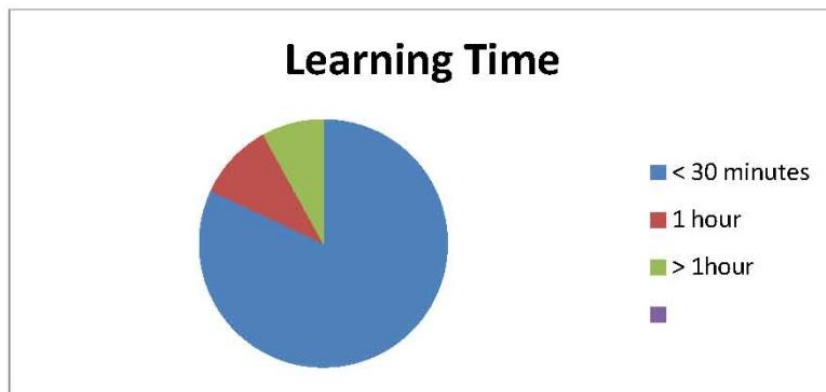
TABLE TWO
TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS



- 1) The first question is whether you care about the cross-cultural knowledge
A. Never B. Little C. Much
- 2) The second question is whether you are interested in getting training about cross-cultural knowledge:
A. Never B. Little C. Much

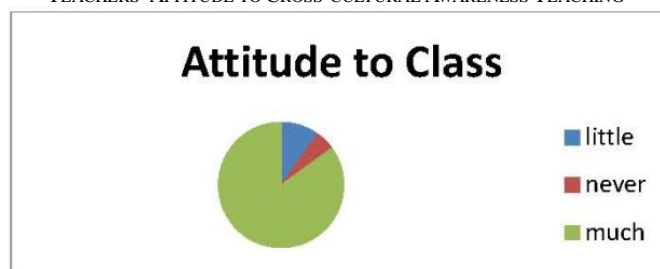


3) The third question is how much time you spend on learning knowledge about other cultures each day:
 A. Less than 30 minutes B. One hour C. More than one hour



From the survey, it is not surprising to find that teachers are not concerned about the cross-cultural knowledge as people expect. Furthermore, it is not difficult to find out a truth that teachers are not equipped with enough cross-cultural knowledge and lack the basic understanding about it. Even they are aware of it, they will not pay enough attention to it because they have been deeply influenced by score-orientation teaching model. In addition, they believe that they needn't get more training about it in that they will not communicate with many foreigners in daily life so it is useless to learn more about it.

TABLE THREE
 TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TO CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS TEACHING

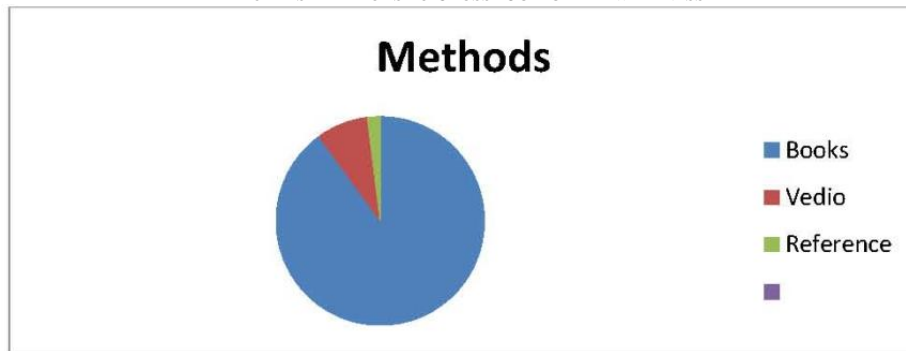


4) The fourth question is that whether it is conducive to English learning while teaching cross-cultural knowledge in class:

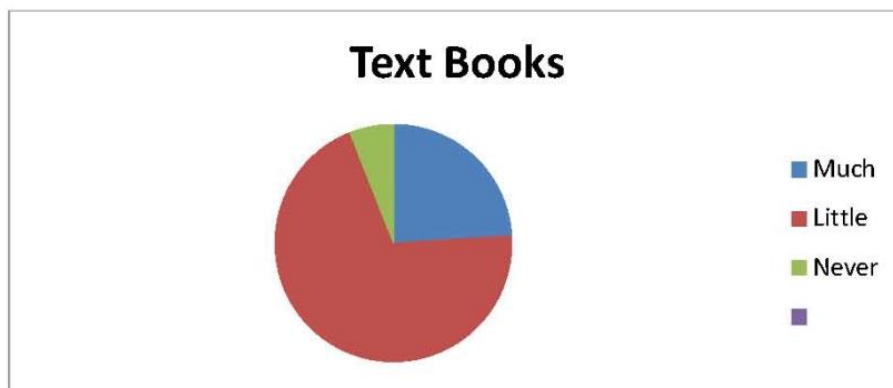
- A. Never
- B. Little
- C. Much

Different from the above survey, up to 85% teachers hold the positive attitude to the cross-cultural teaching and think that it is necessary to impart cross-cultural knowledge to students in class. They believe that cross-cultural knowledge will help students understand the text well, and make the class more interesting. However, in real class, due to the stress from the exam, teachers have to give up this part and spend more time on exam training.

TABLE FOUR
TEACHERS' METHODS TO CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS



- 5) The fifth question is what method teacher will take in class to impart cross-cultural knowledge
A. Books B. Watch Video C. Reference Materials
- 6) The sixth question is how much text book you will use for teaching cross-cultural knowledge
A. Much B. Little C. Never



From the survey, it is clear that teachers pay little attention to the requirement of curriculum and seldom focus on imparting it in the class. Most of the time, they instruct the cross-cultural knowledge in a simple way (only instruct the basic knowledge within the book) and will not extend the study because they find that it costs much time to prepare the class and add some troubles to organize the class. Even though they believe that this will be helpful for students, they will not insist on that kind of teaching content. What's more, teachers often adopt the tedious way (teacher-centered teaching method) to instruct knowledge and lead to a dull class. For teachers, they are usually inclined to be limited in the materials and seldom ask students to find related materials after class which is of little use for exams. As a result, teachers mainly develop the four basic language skills and ignore the content learning so that cross-cultural teaching has been marginalized in the class. In the long run, students will be lacking in the ability to combine the language and culture into the real use.

The second factor is student. Firstly, most of the time, students are puzzled about learning goal so they usually show their uncertainty to cross-cultural knowledge, to say nothing of the cross-cultural awareness learning. Students are largely lacking in this aspect. The following discussions are about the survey (questionnaire) from 100 primary students (the grade 5) who are mainly from 5 primary schools in Z city. Here are ten questions about English-speaking countries referring to many aspects such as: basic geographic knowledge, greetings and so on.

Question1 and question2 are about geographic knowledge:

Question1: Where is the capital of the U.S.A?

A. Washington B. New York C. Los Angeles

Question2: Where is the capital of the U.K?

A. London B. Bath C. Cambridge

Question 3 and question 4 are about privacy:

Question 3: Can you ask other people's age?

A. Yes B. No

Question 4: Can you ask other people's marital status?

A. Yes B. No

Question 5 and Question 6 are about holidays.

Question 5: Which holiday does not belong to Americans?

A. Spring Festival B. The Christmas Day C. The Halloween

Question 6: What thing isn't related to The Christmas Day?

- A. Lantern B. Santa Claus C. Christmas Card

Question 7 and Question 8 are about greetings.

Question 7: What can you say when you see somebody?

- A. How old are you? B. Hello C. Have you eaten yet?

Question 8: What will foreigners say when they meet each other?

- A. What's weather like? B. Have your sister married?
- B. Where are you going?

Question 9 and Question 10 are about

Question 9: What do foreigners prefer to eat?

- A. Rice B. Bread

Question 10: What do foreigners prefer to drink?

- A. Tea B. Coca Cola

TABLE
CROSS-CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRY (ENGLAND AND AMERICA)

	Right (percentage)	Wrong (percentage)
Question 1	24%	76%
Question 2	70%	30%
Question 3	45%	55%
Question 4	57%	43%
Question 5	88%	12%
Question 6	90%	10%
Question 7	50%	50%
Question 8	65%	35%
Question 9	89%	11%
Question 10	78%	22%

Based on the survey, it is easy to find that primary students have gained some knowledge about foreign cultures especially holidays. However, referring to some greetings and values, more than 50% students are confused about it and they always infer cross-cultural knowledge from their Chinese culture. This survey clearly shows that cross-cultural knowledge learning in class is far from the requirement in the curriculum and can't meet the practical use in real conditions. Aside from the basic knowledge, students are also uncertain about the non-verbal behavior in the cross-cultural situations, such as, the facial expressions and body language, which is harmful for the communication. During the interview, students show their enthusiasm to learning new information so teachers need to make use of this characteristic. Besides, students are more familiar with American culture and they have shown a kind of stereotype to foreign culture which will lead to future communicative failure.

Secondly, students' attitude to cross-cultural awareness is of the same significance in learning English and forming their cross-cultural awareness. The following survey will account for the findings. Here are four questions for students:

Question 1: Do you think the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness is useful for learning English?

- A. Very much B. Little C. No

Question 2: Are you interested in learning foreign culture?

- A. Very much B. Little C. No

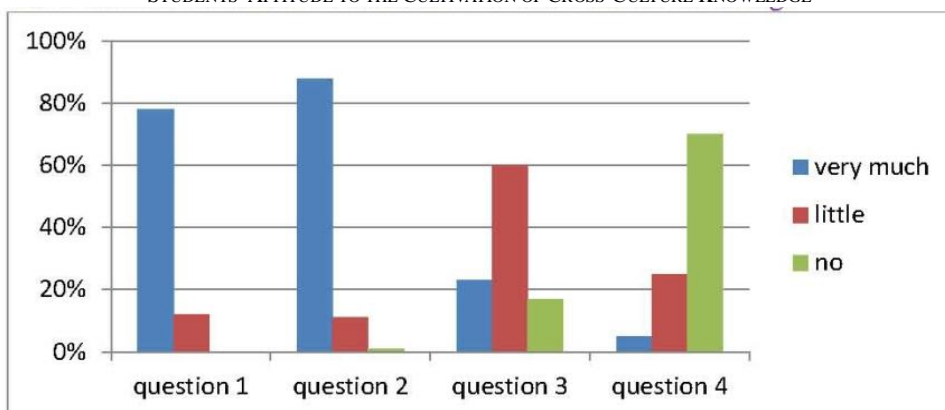
Question 3: Will you spend some time learning foreign culture?

- A. Very much B. Little C. No

Question 4: Have you got cross-cultural knowledge from teachers?

- A. Very much B. Little C. No

TABLE
STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TO THE CULTIVATION OF CROSS-CULTURE KNOWLEDGE



From the table, it can be easily seen that more than 80% students admit that the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness is useful but few of them think that it is useless because it is not examined in the exam. Furthermore, due to the current examination system, even though students are interested in learning, they will not devote to it. They are willing to learn useful words and sentence structure rather than the cultural knowledge. Additionally, students cannot get enough cultural knowledge from teachers which also hinder their development in this aspect.

In summary, students need to be told the importance of cross-cultural knowledge and be imparted enough cross-cultural knowledge on the basis of their English level.

B. The Cultivation of Cross-cultural Awareness under the Schema Theory

In the light of cross-cultural awareness teaching, many teachers try different methods in class. From studies afforded by some teachers, Weiwei Sun (2018) emphasized that cultural assignment can make up for the shortcomings so it is necessary to supplement enough cultural knowledge. Siqi Huang shared (2016) the same opinion on with Sun in her paper. Lijun Zhu (2008) analyzed the characteristic of cross-cultural awareness and put forward experiencing teaching method. Actually, in this paper, the author plan to discuss the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness based on schema theory. As is known to all, schema theory can be compared to a huge system which can store much classified knowledge in human's brain. When people receive new information, the brain will set up a new schema or send the new information to the pre-existed schema. According to this theory, people can stir related knowledge to understand new knowledge. In other words, the pre-existed knowledge will help students to learn new information. Students in primary school have strong curiosity to learn new knowledge while they are inclined to forget the new things quickly. In this aspect, fully using schema theory is helpful to students to cultivate cross-cultural awareness.

1. Building Cultural Schema for Students

Actually, students in primary school haven't started to get any chance to develop their cross-cultural awareness or they even don't have enough knowledge. Combined with the previous study, firstly, teachers should promote their cultural awareness. On one hand, teachers need make full use of class and textbooks to instill necessary cultural knowledge to students to help them build cultural schema. During the interview, in order to get high marks, most of teachers give up this cultural teaching which is badly needed in English learning. For example, holidays are good examples for students to learn western culture so teachers need provide comprehensive knowledge to build the new scheme for students. It is pity to see many teachers miss the good opportunity to show western culture and only introduce some simple words on the surface. In fact, students are willing to receive more interesting information rather than words or expressions. On the other hand, teachers need to insist on indoctrinating cultural knowledge after class because building a new cultural schema needs a long time and repetition. In view of it, teachers can assign a certain number of homework for students so that they can add more into their cultural schema. For example, students can find some short video or cartoons about holiday to make deep impression on this new schema. After all, watching rather than books is more intuitively for primary students to build cultural schema.

In summary, building a new cultural schema is not an easy thing for students so teachers need to be attention to some problems. In the survey, there are two aspects are harmful for building schema if teachers neglect them in class: the usage of textbooks and the teaching methods. For textbooks, teachers need to classify it according to students' current level and build own unique cultural schema. Through this, students can grasp cultural knowledge step by step and cross-cultural awareness will gradually appear. For teaching methods, the straightforward teaching method will lead to the dull class and even destroy class. As for cultivation of cross-cultural awareness, teachers try to set up the real situation to enrich students' cultural schema. To primary students, besides creating the similar conversation, singing and chanting are also interesting which contain enough knowledge so that teachers need to dig out various teaching methods.

2. Comparing Old Schema and New Schema

In the above part, the importance of building new schema has been stressed. In fact, culture is not totally new for primary students because they have their old cultural schema so they will activate their old schema while building a new one. As it known to all, the old schema and the new schema have similarities and differences so it is a useful method to cultivate cross-cultural awareness when students learn to compare the old schema with new one. In the first place, Chinese culture has something in common with western culture so students can easily grasp new cultural notes when they can activate the old schema. For example, Chinese spring festival and the Christmas day have the same function: family together. When Chinese students meet foreigners, they can understand their behavior and communicate well in that the old schema helps students to build the same schema and foster the cultural communication. In the second place, Chinese culture has little in common with western culture so students should be attention to the old schema. Generally speaking, the improper use of old schema will become obstacles in the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness. For example, greeting is a common phenomenon in communication. In this case, the original cultural scheme of students will affect their cross-cultural communication. When they meet foreigners, they will subconsciously stir their old schema and say the following expressions: "Have you eaten your lunch?" or "Where are you going?" These expressions adequately show that students don't build the new cultural schema and they are not equipped with the cross-cultural awareness. In this situation, teachers need to introduce the new schema and help students to do the contrast between the two ones. Only through the contrast, can students remember the new schema and raise the awareness to finish the communication.

To sum, cross-cultural awareness requires students to understand the cultural phenomena from the foreign language perspective. For students, when they meet the obstacles, they need to admit the cultural difference and get used to adopting new schema to solve problems. In the real communication, many cultural patterns in the brain of students will be stirred consciously or subtly, so students can use the accumulated schema to extract the proper information to deal with problems. In the cross-cultural adaptation, students need to identify the different social situations and show the appropriate behavior with the help of old and new schema. Students need to decode the different cultures under the same scenario or the same behavior under the different cultures, and then encode new schema to finish the cross-cultural communication.

IV. SUMMARY

In short, as a new theoretical model, schema theory has shown new prospects for cross-cultural communication research. Schema theory especially the construction of cultural schema is of significance to language teaching. In this teaching process, teachers are aware of cultural teaching and building cross-cultural awareness which is good for students to understand language well and become a competent communicator. What's more, the primary students are easily influenced by outside changes so their learning schema is not static and changing continuously because primary students will grow up and transform their old cognition. Thus, in the teaching process, teachers need pay attention students' growth and adjust schema theory to raise cross-cultural awareness.

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