

Reconstructing an Example of the Cultural Experience

Knowing How	Knowing About
Stage Description: Participation - This is the experience of interacting with an aspect of the culture. This stage involves developing skills and cultural behaviors.	Stage Description: Description - This is the act of gathering information about a cultural aspect. The result of this stage is cultural knowledge.
Example: As the months went by, I saw dancing in different contexts including bars, daytime concerts in the city park or other public areas, and family parties in which even the grandparents and small children danced. By asking people around me, I learned the names of the most common rhythms like cumbia, salsa, merengue, bachata, etc, and started to notice some of the differences in the movements people made. At a family party, a few months later I experienced my first “comparsa”. That was yet another kind of dance experience that was overwhelming at first but as the years went by, I saw that it was highly ritualized and comparsa dancers typically follow a predictable series of steps during their 15 to 20 minute routine and it usually finishes with people making a chain and going through a human tunnel.	Example: When I first moved to Costa Rica in 2008, one of the aspects of Costa Rican culture that immediately stood out to me was the importance of dancing. I observed Costa Ricans dancing in nearly every party or social event that involved music and I was both impressed by their dancing abilities and seeming lack of inhibitions but I was also extremely uncomfortable whenever people began dancing because I was worried that I would be expected to join in. I'm a pretty reserved person and dancing is not a part of my culture. I realized that there were different dance moves for different rhythms and when a new song came on, people would immediately adjust their dancing style and continue. There were several uncomfortable moments when female friends “forced” me to dance with them and it became apparent that I had no idea what I was doing.
Knowing Why	Knowing Myself
Stage Description: Interpretation - This stage involves exploring the perspectives connected to the cultural aspect, many of which are implicit. The result of this stage is cultural understanding.	Stage Description: Response - This stage involves reflecting on your experiences, examining how you personally feel about the cultural aspect and making a decision about whether or not you want to adopt it. The result of this stage is self-awareness.
Example: My friends could not understand why I was so embarrassed to dance when everybody else was doing it or why I was so stiff and unable to follow even basic movements. I realized that dancing is a highly social activity and Costa Rican culture values family and friends and doing things together. The foreign-sounding rhythms of tropical music are sounds that they are intimately familiar with since they have grown up with them their whole lives. US culture is based on Puritan Christian values that view the body as corrupt and sinful. Even though we are no longer such a highly religious society, there's still a sense of shame and embarrassment associated with dancing, especially what we perceive as “sensual” or sexually suggestive movements in some of the dance rhythms popular in Latin America. I realized that Costa Ricans do not share these perceptions and simply view dancing as a fun way to participate in social events as they celebrate the body and life in general.	Example: Long story short, I'm the weird one here. I'm the one who is concerned with how I look when dancing, not the other people at the party. I realize that it is not only okay for me to dance but it is expected, at least among my wife's family. However, I still find it uncomfortable and despite years of mini-dance lessons from my wife and friends, I have never been able to learn the basic steps and I'm fine with that. If I absolutely have to dance, I will do it but I don't feel quite so embarrassed as I used to and I just laugh and apologize when I step on their feet. I still don't love dancing but I definitely understand its role in Costa Rican culture much better than I did when I first moved here.

When you finish, [CLICK HERE](#) to check your answers.

Stages:

- **Knowing Why**
- **Knowing Myself**
- **Knowing How**

Stage Descriptions:

- **Stage Description:** Description - This is the act of gathering information about a cultural aspect. The result of this stage is cultural knowledge.
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Stage Examples:

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