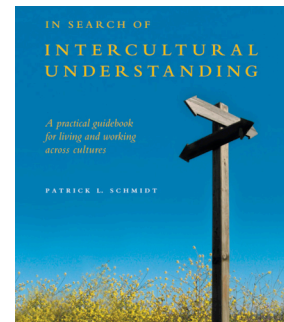


# In Search of Intercultural Understanding

## Book Review by George Simons

Reviewer	<a href="#">George Simons</a> , SIETAR member
Review	November 2007
Author	Schmidt, Patrick L.
Title	In Search of Intercultural Understanding: A practical guidebook for living and working across cultures
Publisher	Meridian World Press
Details	ISBN-978-0-9685293-1-7 Published 2007. Price: Euro 19.90



Congratulations to Patrick Schmidt who has produced a beautiful book, beautifully written, beautifully illustrated. *In Search of Intercultural Understanding* is in fact a simple, accessible compendium and workbook for learning the basics of intercultural communication in less than 150 pages. It fulfills the author's objective stated in the preface to "sum up the body of professional knowledge so that the average person can grasp the fundamental concepts and apply them to real cross cultural situations."

Why another book on the boilerplate we are all aware of and many of us use on a regular basis? Probably because unlike so many of the books in the field, the author has written for the average person, often an ESL reader who hasn't a clue and needs a few. The quality of writing, illustration and exercises are indeed for beginners—simple enough to provide a high school textbook for a course on learning about cultures that would be a teacher's delight. In fact I would recommend it as such. The stories used to demonstrate cultural lessons are simple, clear and impactful.

There is of course the inevitable level of abstraction found in the classical models of Hall and Hofstede that form the basis of intercultural knowledge, however until newly developing methods of dealing with difference become more widespread, there is a certain comfort for Western minds to have simple models into which to sort and examine their experiences, as long as they are clearly warned that the menu is not the meal and that cultural categories are tools for exploration rather than invitations to stereotyping and classification of others.

In other words, slotting difference into makeshift categories can be a useful and functional stage as one moves to deeper firsthand understanding and the development of empathy and real connections within cultural realities. Taking a constructivist approach in understanding and behavior is a practical step particularly where cultural realities are fixed and taken as absolutes.

The book addresses the nature of culture, of communication in the intercultural context, and proposes simple strategies and tools for overcoming the blocks and barriers experienced when working across cultures. It looks at best practices as developed and used by those who have succeeded in the political, economic and educational spheres.

The study of cultures is of course endless. We can never know it all, but are lucky to know enough to carry us through challenging situations, and for that this book provides a good road map. With this map, one can then look at the "tour guides" that provide us with the endless variety of

cultural destinations, the behaviors and meanings that we are likely to encounter in our travels, whether trekking the corners of the globe or surfing the corners of the Net.

To say that this book is simple and accessible perhaps belies the perspective or overview that it gives on the intercultural field. It at least introduces history and art as resources for illustrating and comprehending difference, which puts it far ahead of much intercultural literature. The only significant failing in completeness is the fact that religion is not really dealt with despite the fact that it is at the apex of cultural conflict in our times.

The illustrations and their use are excellent, though one has the sense of walking through the Rijksmuseum or other classical western collection along with panels of caricatures (usually found in the basement). One would like to see a wider world represented, particularly if accompanied by articulate glosses as the author manages to provide for the great number of the images found in the book.

In sum, the book is “culture easy,” however, not “culture lite.” Hopefully those who now have create a foundation of understanding from this user friendly handbook will be strongly moved to develop the curiosity and empathy, so needed in a world where we are spending more money on walls and fences than on dialogue across cultures.