

Editorial

Across so many cultures the beginning of a new year is celebrated in the months of January and February. January 1st (according to the Gregorian calendar) and the Chinese New Year are just a few examples. The New Year marks the end of one year, and the beginning of another. This beginning can be taken quite literally, as it marks the start of new life during the northern hemisphere spring. In some cultures, new year may perhaps be celebrated at another moment in time, such as the Thai Songkran festival which falls at the end of the hot season prior to the 'rainy' or 'green season'. Nevertheless, the common theme of new life often prevails.

Of course, the mark of a new year and the start of a new beginning is something all so familiar within the AFS network. With two major cycles a year, AFS participants start a new and exiting year abroad. An intercultural year brings many challenges and opportunities. While challenges are often immediate (e.g. homesickness, settling into a new family), opportunities and benefits will manifest in both the short and long term. Studying these challenges and benefits is what the Kaleidoscope project is really about. With the purpose to better understand the processes involved in intercultural exchanges, but also with an aim to further improve the intercultural experience of the exchange participants.

Finally, the idea of new life has also manifested itself for me in a very personal way. I had the good fortune to become the dad of Marie, a baby girl, in the beginning of February. Hopefully one day she will also get to enjoy a new year in the intercultural sense.

Nicolas



Dummy participants

We have now created a 'dummy' participant account for each AFS Partner in the project. The account will enable you to follow the project as a 'pretend participant'. If at any point you wish to change the e-mail of the account you can log in and change this online.

The account mimics the procedure for participants. You will have been assigned a 'host country' with travel dates. You may find it interesting to read the questions, to do this you will have to answer each question (but obviously, you do not need to give real answers). Importantly, if you do not complete the first or second questionnaire your account will be deactivated automatically.

E-mails and questionnaires have been carefully translated into 10 languages. Languages used across multiple countries (e.g. Spanish) have one single version, as a result the language may not always sound typical for your region. However, we have made every effort to ensure that these are clear and understandable for all countries.

Prize winners!

We had two prize winners for the January-February draw. Raquel, an AFS participant from Costa Rica, won a Kodak digital camera. Piyanan, an AFS friend from Thailand, won an iPod Shuffle.

Research Spotlight

How do students' expectations influence the evaluation of their exchange?

Previous research has shown that expectations about a sojourn can affect how the cultural experience is evaluated. Sojourners evaluate their experience differently depending on what they expected about their cultural journey and whether these expectations became a reality. More specifically, when pre-sojourn expectations match with the actual experience the sojourn is evaluated more positively. This is known as the **accuracy hypothesis**.

In the YP2010 project we aim to investigate a number of additional questions, here are two:

- 1) Is a match between expectations and experience always beneficial, or does this depend on the nature of the experience? For instance, it may actually be better to have lower expectations and be positively surprised, which would be a mismatch rather than a match.
- 2) Does a similar accuracy effect occur for re-entry into the home culture? Specifically, does a match between expectations about returning home and the actual experience make the return easier?

Obviously, the **accuracy hypothesis** has some clear practical implications for AFS, as both sending and hosting countries can influence a participants expectations of the exchange. This can also inform AFS's Quality Management programs—including better understanding Customer Service Evaluations (CSEs) in which respondents are ask about both their pre-experience expectations and post-experience satisfaction.

Status update: Uptake for SH YP2010

In any survey it is important to ensure a good response rate as this ensures generalizability and reliability of the findings. However, response rates can vary considerably depending on a number of factors. For instance, surveys given to employees can expect 60-90% return, whereas surveys of the general public typically have a response rate of 1-20%. In the YP2005 BFL study we had an initial uptake of 163 AFS participants (78%). Of these 163 participants, 75% remained engaged in the study over a 2 year period (57% of the original sample). In the current project we hope to engage at least 50-60% of all the YP2010 participants, and keep attrition (= drop out) to a minimum.

Throughout the project we will be monitoring participation rates. For the SH cycle we have computed participation rates per sending country (see table to the right). For each country two percentages are shown. The column labelled **% from sending** shows the percentage of overall sending participants who are active in the project. The next column, **% from uptake**, shows the percentage of uptake (opt-in) participants who are active.

The table shows great variance between countries, with the percentage of opt-in participants currently engaging ranging from 0% to 100%, with an average of 66%. We really appreciate that AFS Partners are putting a lot of effort into this, including those Partners with lower numbers! Some countries that have done particularly well for SH numbers (% from sending) are BRA, CAN, CHI, COL, FIN, HKG, HON, HUN, NZL, PHI, THA, and USA. It is also worth noting that 'opt-in' participants (% from uptake) from AUS, BOL, INA, IND, and MAS, are also showing high engagement in the project. At this point however we also need to focus our attention on the NH cycle. Due to a larger volume, NH will be even more influential in the study.

It is important to note that active participants may still drop in number over the coming weeks. This is because those participants who do not complete any questionnaire prior to their exchange will be made inactive. We do this for two important reasons. Firstly, pre-exchange data is crucial as a baseline comparison measure. Secondly, we can assume that participants who have not engaged in the project by the time they arrive in their host country are not interested in the project.



High response rates in survey data are very important. In the YP2010 study we are aiming to engage 50-60% of all SH and NH participants.

Table: overview of SH YP2010 participation

	% from sending	% from uptake
ARG	0%	0%
AUS	24%	93%
AUT*	-	-
BFL*	-	-
BFR	0%	0%
BOL	40%	100%
BRA	84%	87%
CAN	88%	88%
CHI	81%	77%
CHN	0%	0%
COL	89%	85%
CRC	74%	79%
CZE	0%	0%
DEN	5%	50%
DOM*	-	-
ECU*	-	-
EGY*	-	-
ESP*	-	-
FIN	83%	85%
FRA**	38%	57%
GER	34%	77%
GHA*	-	-
GUA	17%	25%
HKG	100%	100%
HON	80%	80%
HUN	100%	100%
INA	57%	100%
IND	44%	100%
ISL	50%	56%
ITA*	-	-
JPN**	44%	70%
MAS	76%	83%
MEX	50%	50%
NED*	-	-
NOR	68%	74%
NZL	87%	91%
PAN	60%	75%
PAR	52%	54%
PER	0%	0%
PHI	100%	100%
POR*	-	-
RUS	50%	50%
SUI	68%	77%
SWE	50%	58%
THA	90%	92%
TUR*	-	-
USA	86%	97%
VEN	29%	25%

* These partners have no SH sending.

** Due to some technical difficulties, participants of these countries were delayed in their responding.

Previous research: Acculturation & adaptation

Acculturation is the process of an individual changing or adapting to a new host culture. But, how can acculturation be defined and how can it be measured? Cultural researchers, such as Prof Colleen Ward (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand), have proposed two distinct types of acculturation or adaptation, one psychological and the other socio-cultural.

Psychological adaptation relates to well-being, feeling content and not being stressed out by the new cultural environment. **Socio-cultural adaptation** relates to the more social and practical aspects, such that cultural travellers learn to behave appropriately in the new culture, in line with cultural norms and customs. Although related, these two types of adaptation may occur at different times to each other during an

exchange. Thus, individuals may show one type of adaptation quicker than the other.

In one study Colleen Ward and colleagues compared adaptation of exchange students travelling to a culturally similar country with students travelling to a culturally different country. Interestingly they found differences in how well these two groups adapted socio-culturally. However, there was no difference in how well they adapted psychologically. This suggests that although it may have been harder to adapt behaviourally (in terms of language, social interaction) to the culturally different country, exchange students nevertheless were equally at ease with the experience.

Both types of adaptation will also be measured in the YP2010 project.

Special feature: Research design

The Kaleidoscope project is quite unique in its design and magnitude. It is the first research study of its kind that takes such an extensive approach to the investigation of intercultural exchange. Two main methodological strengths of this project are its participant diversity and research timeline.

Participant diversity

Many different sending and hosting countries will be represented in this project. Importantly, participants will provide a vast range of sending-hosting combinations. This makes the project data very rich for many reasons. In particular, this allows us to look at the differences between two countries in terms of their culture and test what is the impact of bigger or smaller differences for the exchange.

AFS participants are also invited to nominate friends to join the project. These are friends remaining at home during their exchange and thus serve as an ideal comparison group.

Research timeline

Participants are asked to complete online questionnaires at 9 distinct time points, spread across approximately 19 months, before, during and after their exchange (see Figure). The timing and number of questionnaires makes it possible to see how participants were before their exchange, when different effects occur during, how they change over time and what happens when they return home.

Importantly, this design also allows us to investigate cause and effect. For instance, what pre-exchange variables predict good adaptation? Or, how do the first months of the exchange influence the rest of the process?

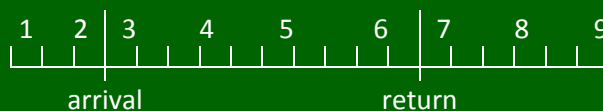


Figure: Overview of questionnaire timeline (1 unit = 1 month)

Project calendar

Action reminders for SH cycle

Don't forget to keep applicant details updated, especially for Early Return and Program Release etc. We receive these updates daily.

Action reminders for NH cycle

With preparations for the NH cycle underway it is really important to advertise and promote the project to applicants of NH YP2010 programs. We have put together a number of materials for this purpose. To inform staff and volunteers we have made a Fact Sheet (see [FactSheetForVolunteers.pdf](#)).

To tempt participants to the [Kaleidoscope website](#) there is a promotional flyer (see [FlyerForParticipants.pdf](#)). Also, we have made a video which explains important elements of the project and includes a message from Tachi Casal (see [video website](#)). This video could be used during pre-departure applicant meetings.

Many partners will be aware of the new addition to Form 6. This includes a short paragraph about the project and gives applicants the opportunity to 'opt-out' of being invited to the project. Hopefully, with your help most applicants will be enthusiastic about participating in this project and will not opt-out!

Feel free to contact either Kali or Nicolas with any questions about the Kaleidoscope project or this newsletter. Email to: yp2010@essex.ac.uk

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