Let’s make some little bets this year!

Each year around this time, the American education world is put on red alert through the release of the scores of the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA), which compares math, reading and science tests to our peers from 55 countries. This year was no exception, with the US landing somewhere near the average score on all three tests. Worse, it seems that each year, the US slips against countries such as Korea, Poland, and Finland, and far below the city of Shanghai (the leader in all three categories). And as a consequence, Americans are subjected to woeful predictions of the inevitable fall of Civilization As We Know It.

I tend to be a little less rueful than the pundits when it comes to this sort of thing. If we judge from the business sector alone, it’s hard to ignore the contributions some of the US’s most creative forces have made to the 21st century world economy. Those forces may have been supported by our nation’s school children becoming more proficient in retaining and applying established practices (which is a necessary and perhaps sufficient characteristic of educational systems highly proficient at teaching math, reading, and science), but there is something else Americans have going for them that give them a leg up. It’s what Peter Sims describes as the ability to make bets, and not just any bets, but little bets, bets that teach us from our mistakes without causing disastrous consequences. The American educational system, in contrast to some of the leaders on the PISA, has been fairly successful in encouraging students to take risks and to problem-solve using their own methods, breathing life into their right-brain capacities to create and discover.

It is not just in the US where this unconventional way of educating is taking hold. Indian physicist and software developer Sugata Mitra is responsible for one of the most fascinating and optimistic educational experiments I’ve heard of in a long time.

Continued on page 2...
“Mitra decided to see if a bunch of impoverished Tamil-speaking, twelve-year-olds could learn to use the Internet, which they’d never seen before; to teach themselves biotechnology, a subject they’d never heard of; in English, a language none of them spoke. ‘All I did was tell them that there was some very difficult information on this computer, they probably wouldn’t understand any of it, and I’ll be back to test them on it in a few months.’

“Two months later, he returned and asked the students if they’d understood the material. A young girl raised her hand. ‘Other than the fact that improper replication of the DNA molecule causes genetic disease,’ she said, ‘we’ve understood nothing’” (Diamandia and Kotler, 2012, Abundance: The Future is Better Than You Think, pp. 174-176). Perhaps needless to say, the young girl was underestimating what she and her fellow friends had learned. With a little tweaking in the experiment, these self-directive slum kids wound up demonstrating that they could average the same as high school students studying bio-tech at the best schools in New Delhi.

When Pit Corder published, “The Significance of Learners’ Errors,” 47 years ago, the field of Applied Linguistics gained an understanding that learners’ errors were not the result of faulty imitation, but were indications of learners’ attempts at trying to figure out a new language system. They were indications that learners were imposing regularity on their new language. Corder and his successors celebrated experimentation and risk-taking in language learning – and the millions of language learners around the world whose teachers understood that concept have been the better for it.

Here’s to the New Year 2014 and an educational environment that is not adverse to making little bets!

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Submit to the FLTmag!

With over 12,000 page visits since its launch in July 2013, the FLTmag is a wonderful source of news, tips and information on technology integration in the language classroom. Sections include magazine articles, guest blog entries from the most prominent scholars in the field, book and technology reviews, and interviews. Check it out and consider submitting an article! http://fltmag.com
New FLTP Workshops and the 6th Annual Share Fair

ALTEC is excited for another semester of great workshops. If you are interested in flipping your classroom, check out our new workshop on Flipped Language Tutorials with Camtasia Studio, which will be held February 12th and 13th in Hellems 152. For this workshop, ALTEC purchased nine licenses for Camtasia Studio, so this will be a great opportunity to try out this tool. And don’t miss Mark Knowles’ workshop on Developing Listening Comprehension Skills with Technology March 12th and 13th.

The 6th Annual Language Technology Share Fair will be held on April 25th, 2014. The Share Fair is a unique opportunity for graduate students and faculty to present on ways in which they use technology in their language courses. Fill out this form to submit your proposal: http://tinyurl.com/sharfair2014. Don’t hesitate to contact Courtney.Fell@Colorado.EDU to brainstorm possible presentation topics. This years’ guest speaker is Dr. Adrienne Gonzales, from the University of Denver who will be presenting on “Digital Tools for Differentiated Instruction”.

Course Re-Design Grant

ALTEC is now accepting applications for its 2014 course re-design competition (up to $750). The competition offers funding and assistance to faculty (including instructors and lecturers) for the design or redesign of a course using technology. Priority will be given to those who have never received an ALTEC grant before. Download and fill out the application form (http://goo.gl/dKDkW) and schedule a meeting with Mark Knowles by March 3rd to get feedback before you submit your final proposal. The deadline for the final proposal is April 18th.

Graduate Certificate Approval

In fall 2013, the Graduate Curriculum Committee unanimously approved an online graduate certificate program in technology integration in the language classroom. This program will be run through ALTEC and begin June 2015. The curriculum is composed of six fully online courses that will be taught by Edwige Simon, Mark Knowles and one additional adjunct instructor. The program will be open to language graduate students, in-service/pre-service language teachers at CU and beyond. For more information, please contact Edwige.Simon@Colorado.EDU.
CU Presentations at the Spring CCFLT Conference

The Colorado Congress of Foreign Language Teachers will be hosting their annual spring conference February 20th-22nd at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Loveland, CO. This year’s theme is “The Real World of World Languages: Language Use Beyond the Classroom.” On-site registration will be available. For more information visit http://ccflt.org.

Be sure to support the CU Boulder community by attending presentations by Alison Hicks (Norlin), Anne Becher (Spanish), Giorgio Corda (Italian), Marcelo Schincariol (Portuguese), Mary Long (Spanish), Saskia Hintz (German), Skyler Artes (French), Courtney Fell (ALTEC), Edwige Simon (ALTEC) and ALTEC’s graphic designer Anna Cook for her first-ever solo conference presentation.

SLA Reading Group

This spring semester, the Second Language Acquisition Reading Group is meeting monthly on Wednesdays, January 22nd, February 19th, March 19th and April 16th from 3:15pm to 4:30pm in Hellems 152. Each reading group member has the opportunity to present an article or a book chapter that they find pertinent and thought-provoking. Please contact Mark. Knowles@Colorado.EDU for more information.

Media Library Updates

Happy New Year from all of us at ALTEC! We are excited for the start of the spring semester and the updates and changes it will bring to the Media Library. In order to reorganize and update our catalog, many outdated VHS movies will soon be replaced and/or converted into DVD format. We are also coordinating with Norlin to include a portion of our foreign language materials in their online catalog. This will help to highlight the availability of ALTEC’s materials on a campus-wide level. In addition, our Media Library will also be replacing the current iMac OS X desktops with 19 brand new Mac desktop computers over spring break. Be sure to stop by and test them out. Finally, we look forward to major room alterations to the library coming around spring break - more news to come!
GSLL Kaffeeklatsch on April 11th

Join us April 11th, 2014 for a Kaffeeklatsch! ALTEC, Ross Etherton and the Department of Germanic & Slavic Languages and Literatures are co-hosting this coffee and conversation hour for a group of German exchange students who will be visiting from Bear Creek High School in Jefferson County. Their teacher, Amy Flynn, as well as their US host partners will be visiting CU’s campus that day and we want to give them a big Buff welcome. Please join us if you would like to practice your German!

Contact Courtney.Fell@Colorado.EDU

Spring Non-Credit Language Classes

New Year Resolutions
1) GO TO THE GYM MORE
2) BE MORE ORGANIZED
3) LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE AT ALTEC

New Year’s Resolution? Why not make it something you can actually look forward to? How about travel more… or travel, period! Why not learn a new language or brush up on an old one? ALTEC is standing by to help you reach this goal. The spring language classes kick off the week of January 27th. We are offering over 10 classes in languages such as French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and even Swahili! The ALTEC language program offers summer classes as well (check our website for updates). Many thanks to the dedicated students and instructors who make this program possible year after year! To register and view the full course list visit altec.colorado.edu/languageclasses or contact Courtney.Malone@Colorado.EDU

K-12 FLTP Updates

The K-12 FLTP, a K-12 version of the FLTP held on Saturdays, is well on its way, with three day-long workshops completed in the fall and three more to go this spring. The spring workshops will feature three guest speakers, including Toni Theisen, 2011 ACTFL Foreign Language Teacher of the Year and immediate past president of ACTFL. Her presentation is scheduled for March 15th at noon in Hellems 145 and everyone is welcome to attend. Again this year, the K-12 FLTP group will join the on-campus FLTP participants as well as the TESOL Master's students for the two-day portfolio intensives on April 5th and 12th.
LSP Conference Reminder

Registration is now open for the Second International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), to be held at CU-Boulder from April 17th - 19th. Entitled “LSP Studies: Theory, Methodology, and Content Development,” the symposium will feature 36 presentations about the pedagogy and the curricular implications of LSP. Presenters come from both national and international institutions as well as Colorado. The symposium is sponsored by the President’s Fund for the Humanities, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, ALTEC, the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, the Program on International Affairs, Leeds Global Initiatives, and Engineering International Programs at the University of Colorado Boulder along with the University of Colorado Denver CIBER.

The symposium events will begin on Thursday afternoon with a workshop offered by ALTEC. The symposium will also feature two keynote speakers. Gwendolyn Barnes-Karol, Professor of Spanish at St. Olaf College, may be best known for her work with St. Olaf’s Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum Program, collaborating with colleagues from anthropology, history, political science, and religion to add Spanish language components into courses taught in English. John Grandin is a Professor of German and Director of the International Engineering Program at the University of Rhode Island, through which students complete simultaneous degrees (BA and BS) in German, French, Spanish, or Chinese, and in an engineering discipline. More information about the conference, including how to register, the complete program, and a special registration code for CU System faculty, staff and students can be found at http://altec.colorado.edu/lsp/.

Reminder About Course Fees Materials Requests

Need a movie, CD, or audio materials for a language class? Make a request to the ALTEC course fee committee! First, check our catalog by visiting ALTEC’s website to make sure ALTEC does not already own the resource (http://altec.colorado.edu/catalog). If we do not own the material, fill out a course materials request form, available online or in the multimedia library (Hellems 159). The request form must be approved and signed by your department chair, and then given to either your course fee representative or dropped off at ALTEC. Questions? Contact your course fee representative:

- Asian Languages and Civilizations: Jin Chen
- French and Italian: Tina Pugliese
- Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures: Patty Schindler
- Spanish and Portuguese: Susan Hallstead
- American Sign Language: Willard Moers