(0:00:03) Jean: You are listening to the CeTEAL
(0:00:06) Community podcast. Welcome, to the CeTEAL
(0:00:10) Community podcast. This is our inaugural
(0:00:14) podcast. My name is Jean Bennett and I'll
(0:00:16) be your host for this podcast. Today our
(0:00:19) guest is Alex Hogue. He is a lecturer in
(0:00:22) the German languages at Coastal Carolina
(0:00:24) University. I will be speaking with Alex
(0:00:27) about his interest in role-playing games
(0:00:29) and intrinsic motivation in the
(0:00:31) classroom. Alex recently wrote an article
(0:00:34) by the same title for the CeTEAL
(0:00:36) January/February newsletter. The
(0:00:38) newsletter can be found on our website.
(0:00:41) Welcome Alex.
(0:00:43) Alex: Thank You, Jean. I'm glad to be here.
(0:00:45) Jean: I will be asking Alex some
(0:00:46) questions on the topic of role-playing
(0:00:49) games. As this topic may not be too
(0:00:52) familiar with some listeners, and I also
(0:00:55) will be asking questions about the
(0:00:57) intrinsic motivation. How does this work
(0:00:59) in role play and what rewards do
(0:01:02) students come away with? Alex why don't you
(0:01:05) tell me a little bit about how you
(0:01:06) became interested in games and
(0:01:08) specifically games for learning.
(0:01:10) Alex: I've always had some interest in games.
Unlike, (0:01:14) many people who are interested in the
(0:01:16) humanities, I didn't read a whole lot of
(0:01:18) fiction growing up, but the fiction that
I did read and really latched onto were choose your adventure gamebooks and from there it sort of morphed into game nights with family and then playing various board games role-playing games card games with my wife.

Jean: Oh awesome. I remember those adventure books my kids had those and they would pick a path or choose a path. Was it something like that?

Alex: Yeah, so you get to when you get to a point in the story where the protagonist has to make a choice, either do A or B you get the choice. You can choose to turn the page 82 to choose the option A or to choose option B turn to page 54 or whatever. Jean: That's great what do you feel was your intrinsic motivation from this game and role playing? Alex: Autonomy and some influence over the story. You know games are they're sort of the medium of my generation. You know rather than having a story given to us we want to be part of the story and influence the story. Jean: And have you done any research in terms of gaming and how it works in learning. Alex: Yeah, so there were a series of articles that came out in around foreign language pedagogy around the late 80s to early 90s. These focused on either short role plays or they also made the distinction between role plays and simulations. Simulations were more larger basically they involved more choices to be made more autonomy on the part of the learner. Whereas straight role-playing activities would be more controlled and used a very targeted set of grammar points or vocabulary. After that things moved into the communicative method which held on
for probably 10 or 15 years and now we are find ourselves in an odd sort of post mythological era and I've seen the adaptation of role-playing games into the foreign language classroom as sort of a natural successor to the communicative method. So where the communicative method wants to teach language to authentic communication I want to take it a step further and have my students imagine they are actually in Germany communicating with Germans using what they've learned in the more controlled classroom to then sort of be thrown in the deep end but always with me there who and I can help guide them. Well it kind of sounds like it's almost like an immersion this game or role-playing immerses them into the language itself. Alex: For an hour and 40 minutes on Mondays yes, my students are immersed in in the culture of Germany, where they need to do menial errands, everyday sort of tasks that require more language than they thought they would need, whether that is going to purchase a cell phone or register at a university or anything like that. It becomes more complex then then it seems right off the bat. Jean: Now I guess I'm thinking as you're talking and I would say for students talking and I would say for students then what sort of motivation or what sort of anecdotal stories might you have about how students take that intrinsic motivation or do you see that like bubbling up within them when they're involved in this. Alex: Yeah that was one of the things I was worried about when I did my test run. I did a
A test run of the role-playing game format in the German language for students at German club last semester and sort of proof of concept for me but also see if they would actually respond to be interested. And it worked. I was pleasantly surprised that the students cared even though the effects were not real and there was no grade attached to it. Right they cared about their presence in the game, they cared about the autonomy they felt, and even though it was just a one-off session and we stopped mid-story they wanted to keep going. Jean: Don't stop the story keep moving forward. Yeah, I hate that about gaming, it's like when the game stops for some reason and then you hope to get back to that point. I guess you would see that a lot with with your students then. Alex: Yeah Jean: Can you explain in the classroom situation then what would be a typical session in terms of this role-playing, how would you introduce it and then the role students would take on within the class.

Alex: Well, I created short little character sheets to try and bring the whole Tabletop, pen and paper role-playing aspect into the classroom. So, students create character sheets for themselves, that list out their qualities the things they're interested in, what they have on them at the time, their running bank because they have to keep track of their own money also. And so at the beginning of each class I'll sit down and have my paper spread before me, and I have all of the authentic forms or green bank accounts, registering at universities things like that because experiencing
the bureaucracy of Germany is experiencing a lot of the headaches of being an exchange student in the country. And there is value there so, Jean: It keeps it real. Alex: Exactly yeah, the feeling slightly overwhelmed but then working through it is the very real aspect of, of the roleplay of being in the foreign language country. So, I will set out to tasks before the students say okay today you need to get a cell phone because not everybody has a functioning carrier in Germany. You need to meet your contact at the University and register for classes. You need to go to the grocery store get some food so you have something to eat and you need to go to the bank and set up a bank account so your stipend they will be receiving every game month will have somewhere to go. After that, it is up to them what how they want to order this, which they want to do first, and I just create the world that they say they want to exist in. Jean: So, then they have to partake in that world. I really like that. I like that again that there is autonomy for them to make those choices. Alex: And there are consequences to actions you know. If they decide to go to the supermarket first and get their food, they’re carrying around bags of groceries to the bank and to the university and that’s they will feel uncomfortable by doing that and I will make it take longer for them to get places. Jean: I really like that. I wish I had language class that did something like that. For me, there’s that intrinsic motivation then for me to I really want to do well in this and I want to be
successful and I want to be able to feel all of those daily life's and function within that so yeah thanks thanks for bringing that students. Alex: I'm glad that they're interested in in allowing me to try this potentially wacky idea of maybe we can use role-playing like it extended real pseudo-immersion roleplay as a conversation class. Jean: I would imagine a faculty member might think about, okay I see how that might work in your classroom. Could you give us an idea or just a generalization about how maybe other faculty might be able to use that in any type of curriculum. Alex: Off the top of my head, classes like philosophy or political science or communications these fall naturally into possibilities for adapting the roleplay format. I actually went to a panel at the Comics and Popular Arts Conference in Atlanta, that was called would, I think it was something to the effect of Would Kant kill the Goblin King Jean: Oh my Alex: And the instructor (0:09:36) basically set up a traditional fantasy role-playing scenario but gave the participants options based on european philosophy. So, there was a character who was based on Kant’s philosophy the moral deontologist, versus a character based on Hume’s ethical philosophy, and you know where would they clash, how would they have arguments, and where would the outcome be after these things where you know a king has been kidnapped and by goblins and the town needs to rescue its monarch how do you do it where do ethics lie. Jean: Yeah, I could definitely see that working. I would like to be involved in something
like that too.

Alex: The panel was so involved it was hard to, hard to get a word in actually. (laughter) Jean: Oh Wow. (0:10:27) What would my first step be, if I wanted to now do this in my class? What would what would you recommend? Alex: Start small.

J : Okay.

Alex: Something like mock conversations where students need to take up a position and argue against one another. I did that in German conversation classes as an undergraduate. And then give students a reason to care. You know that's, that's the big thing with games, why do I care. It's you can have autonomy but even if the motivation is purely intrinsic and not grade based students need a reason to enter into the fantasy world that you're building. Jean: I think for some students to it they have to know it's okay to get into that roleplay. Let me take on another character instead of just being who I am let me be somebody else which I think is a great opportunity for students. Alex: Which it can be a great opportunity and it can be a lot of fun it can also be really scary. Jean: Sure. Alex: For students who aren't comfortable speaking up so much at the same time it can also be an outlet for those students to take on another personality that is maybe more outgoing and enact that person in the classroom. Jean: That's cool. I like that because I can definitely see those students that might be the ones that sit in your class and are very quiet and don't want to participate and now all of a sudden, I don't have to be me I can be this other person and act like that other person. Alex: Certainly Jean: Yeah
Alex: It's not that they don't have anything to say it's that they're afraid of sounding dumb usually. Jean: Yeah I think so, I think so. Well, I have to say you did do a session for us in CeTEAL in the fall and it was awesome. I attended that session I got a lot out of it that's one of the reasons I asked you to come and do the podcast with me today. I know you're going to be offering another session for us sometime this spring. Alex: I am. Jean: So, I would encourage faculty to come out and to attend that session we haven't scheduled that yet but that will be up on our website soon. And is there any final words you want to give our faculty or whoever else will listen to our podcast? Alex: Well, yes, the seriousness of games lies itself within the play that is experienced. By allowing yourself to enter into a fantasy world whether it's in a match in Germany that is based on your life or if it's in a place with castles and dungeons and all sorts of horrible enemies it becomes either way a space in which to serve a laboratory of thought where you can act out things that you may or may not do in real life and see potential consequences. So it's as didactic as you would like it to be. Jean: That's awesome. I like that I like that safe space because I know when I taught younger grades k-12 we said students make your mistakes here before you go out into the world. It's a safe environment here so I think within the classroom that might be key to for some students to say this is safe and you can be whoever you want in this classroom and let's try these things out. Alex: I have on
my conversation class syllabus failure
is only failure if you stop trying to
succeed or if you've run out of time of
the semester. Jean: True for that too. I
like that. I thank you for being with us
today on this inaugural podcast I look
forward to your session coming up in the
spring. Thanks so much. Alex: Thank you very
much. Jean: You have been listening to the
Ceteal community podcast. Tune in again next
time we look forward to having you hear us. The
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