

CeTEAL Community Podcast

Role-Playing Games and Intrinsic Motivation in the Classroom

With your host Jean Bennett and guest, Alex Hogue.

(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

(0:01:20) I did read and really latched onto were
(0:01:22) choose your adventure gamebooks and from
(0:01:25) there it sort of morphed into game
(0:01:28) nights with family and then playing
(0:01:31) various board games role-playing games
(0:01:34) card games with my wife.
(0:01:38) Jean: Oh awesome. I remember those adventure books my
kids (0:01:40) had those and they would pick a path or
(0:01:42) choose a path. Was it something like that?
(0:01:44) Alex: Yeah, so you get to when you get to a
(0:01:46) point in the story where the protagonist
(0:01:48) has to make a choice, either do A or B
(0:01:50) you get the choice. You can choose to
(0:01:53) turn the page 82 to choose the option A
(0:01:55) or to choose option B turn to page 54
(0:01:58) or whatever. Jean: That's great what do you
(0:02:01) feel was your intrinsic motivation from
(0:02:04) this game and role playing? Alex: Autonomy and
(0:02:07) some influence over the story. You know
(0:02:09) games are they're sort of the medium of
(0:02:12) my generation. You know rather than
(0:02:13) having a story given to us we want to be
(0:02:17) part of the story and influence the
(0:02:19) story. Jean: And have you done any research in
(0:02:21) terms of gaming and how it works in
(0:02:24) learning. Alex: Yeah, so there were a series of
(0:02:27) articles that came out in around foreign
(0:02:29) language pedagogy around the late 80s to
(0:02:31) early 90s. These focused on either short
(0:02:35) role plays or they also made the
(0:02:37) distinction between role plays and
(0:02:39) simulations. Simulations were more larger
(0:02:44) basically they involved more choices to
(0:02:47) be made more autonomy on the part of the
(0:02:49) learner.
(0:02:49) Whereas straight role-playing activities
(0:02:52) would be more controlled and used a very
(0:02:54) targeted set of grammar points or
(0:02:57) vocabulary. After that things moved into
(0:03:00) the communicative method which held on

(0:03:03) for probably 10 or 15 years and now we
(0:03:07) are we find ourselves in an odd sort of
(0:03:10) post mythological era and I've seen the
(0:03:16) adaptation of role-playing games into
(0:03:18) the foreign language classroom as sort
(0:03:20) of a natural successor to the
(0:03:21) communicative method. So where the
(0:03:23) communicative method wants to teach
(0:03:26) language to authentic communication I
(0:03:28) want to take it a step further and have
(0:03:31) my students imagine they are actually in
(0:03:33) Germany communicating with Germans using
(0:03:37) what they've learned in the more
(0:03:39) controlled classroom to then sort of be
(0:03:43) thrown in the deep end but always with
(0:03:46) me there who and I can help guide them.
(0:03:50) Jean: Well it kind of sounds like it's almost
(0:03:52) like an immersion this game or
(0:03:53) role-playing immerses them into the
(0:03:55) language itself. Alex: For an hour and 40
(0:03:58) minutes on Mondays yes, my students are
(0:04:01) immersed in in the culture of Germany,
(0:04:05) where
(0:04:06) they need to do menial errands, everyday
(0:04:12) sort of tasks that require more language
(0:04:15) than they thought they would need,
(0:04:16) whether that is going to purchase a cell
(0:04:19) phone or register at a university or
(0:04:21) anything like that. It becomes more
(0:04:25) complex then then it seems right off the
(0:04:29) bat. Jean: Now I guess I'm thinking as you're
(0:04:32) talking and I would say for students
(0:04:36) then what sort of motivation or what
(0:04:38) sort of anecdotal stories might you have
(0:04:40) about how students take that intrinsic
(0:04:44) motivation or do you see that like
(0:04:46) bubbling up within them when they're
(0:04:48) when they're involved in this. Alex: Yeah that
(0:04:51) was one of the things I was worried
(0:04:53) about when I did my test run. I did a

(0:04:55) test run of the role-playing game format
(0:04:59) in the German language, for students at
(0:05:01) German club last semester and sort of
(0:05:04) proof of concept for me but also see if
(0:05:07) they would actually respond to be
(0:05:09) interested. And it worked. I was
(0:05:12) pleasantly surprised that the students
(0:05:15) cared even though the effects were not
(0:05:17) real and there was no grade attached to it.
(0:05:19) Right they cared about their presence in
(0:05:21) the game, they cared about the autonomy
(0:05:24) they felt, and even though it was just a
(0:05:28) one-off session and we stopped mid-story
(0:05:31) they wanted to keep going. Jean: Don't stop
(0:05:33) the story keep moving forward. Yeah, I hate that
(0:05:36) about gaming, it's like when the game
(0:05:38) stops for some reason and then you hope
(0:05:41) to get back to that point. I guess you
(0:05:44) would see that a lot with with your
(0:05:45) students then. Alex: Yeah Jean: Can you
explain in the (0:05:48) classroom situation then what
would be a
(0:05:51) typical session in terms of this
(0:05:53) role-playing, how would you introduce it
(0:05:54) and then the role students would take on
(0:05:57) within the class.
(0:05:58) Alex: Well, I created short little character
(0:06:01) sheets to try and bring the whole
(0:06:04) Tabletop, pen and paper role-playing aspect
(0:06:07) into the classroom. So, students create
(0:06:09) character sheets for themselves, that
(0:06:11) list out their qualities the things
(0:06:13) they're interested in, what they have on
(0:06:15) them at the time, their running bank
(0:06:17) because they have to keep track of their
(0:06:18) own money also. And so at the beginning
(0:06:21) of each class I'll sit down and have my
(0:06:24) paper spread before me, and I have all of
(0:06:26) the authentic forms or green bank
(0:06:29) accounts, registering at universities
(0:06:30) things like that because experiencing

(0:06:35) the bureaucracy of Germany is
(0:06:36) experiencing a lot of the headaches of
(0:06:39) being an exchange student in the country.
(0:06:42) And there is value there so, Jean: It keeps
it

(0:06:47) real. Alex: Exactly yeah, the feeling slightly
(0:06:51) overwhelmed but then working through it
(0:06:53) is the very real aspect of, of the
(0:06:57) roleplay of being in the foreign
(0:06:59) language country. So, I will set out to
(0:07:03) tasks before the students say okay today
(0:07:05) you need to get a cell phone because not
(0:07:08) everybody has a functioning carrier in
(0:07:11) Germany. You need to meet your contact
at (0:07:15) the University and register for classes.
(0:07:17) You need to go to the grocery store get
(0:07:21) some food so you have something to eat
(0:07:22) and you need to go to the bank and set
(0:07:25) up a bank account so your stipend they
(0:07:27) will be receiving every game month will
(0:07:30) have somewhere to go. After that, it is up
(0:07:33) to them what how they want to order this,
(0:07:35) which they want to do first, and I just
(0:07:39) create the world that they, they say
(0:07:41) they want to exist in. Jean: So, then they
have (0:07:44) to partake in that world. I really like
that.

(0:07:45) I like that again that there is
(0:07:47) autonomy for them to make those choices.
(0:07:49) Alex: And there are consequences to
actions (0:07:51) you know. If they decide to go to
the

(0:07:53) supermarket first and get their food,
(0:07:54) they're carrying around bags of groceries
(0:07:57) to the bank and to the university and
(0:08:00) that's they will feel uncomfortable by
(0:08:03) doing that and I will make it take
(0:08:05) longer for them to get
(0:08:07) places. Jean: I really like that. I wish I had
(0:08:10) language class that did something like
(0:08:13) that. For me, there's that intrinsic
(0:08:16) motivation then for me to I really
(0:08:18) want to do well in this and I want to be

(0:08:20) successful and I want to be able to feel
(0:08:22) all of those daily life's and function
(0:08:26) within that so yeah thanks thanks for
(0:08:28) bringing that students. Alex: I'm glad that
(0:08:31) they're interested in in allowing me to
(0:08:35) try this potentially wacky idea of maybe
(0:08:40) we can use role-playing like it extended
(0:08:43) real pseudo-immersion roleplay as a
(0:08:47) conversation class. Jean: I would imagine a
(0:08:49) faculty member might think about, okay I
(0:08:51) see how that might work in your
(0:08:52) classroom. Could you give us an idea or
(0:08:55) just a generalization about how maybe
(0:08:57) other faculty might be able to use that
(0:08:59) in any type of curriculum. Alex: Off the top of
(0:09:03) my head, classes like philosophy or
(0:09:08) political science or communications
(0:09:11) these fall naturally into possibilities
(0:09:15) for adapting the roleplay format.
(0:09:18) I actually went to a panel at the Comics
(0:09:22) and Popular Arts Conference in Atlanta,
(0:09:24) that was called would, I think it was
(0:09:29) something to the effect of Would Kant
(0:09:31) kill the Goblin King Jean: Oh my Alex: And the
instructor (0:09:36) basically set up a traditional fantasy
(0:09:39) role-playing scenario but gave the
(0:09:43) participants options based on european
(0:09:47) philosophy. So, there was a character who
(0:09:50) was based on Kant's philosophy the moral
(0:09:53) deontologist, versus a character based on
(0:09:57) Hume's ethical philosophy, and you know
(0:10:00) where would they clash, how would they
(0:10:02) have arguments, and where would the
(0:10:05) outcome be after
(0:10:07) these things where you know a king has
(0:10:09) been kidnapped and by goblins and the
(0:10:12) town needs to rescue its monarch how do
(0:10:14) you do it where do ethics lie. Jean: Yeah, I
(0:10:17) could definitely see that working. I
(0:10:18) would like to be involved in something

(0:10:20) like that too.
(0:10:21) Alex: The panel was so involved it was hard
(0:10:24) to, hard to get a word in actually. (laughter) Jean: Oh
Wow. (0:10:27) What would my first step be, if I wanted
(0:10:30) to now do this in my class? What would
(0:10:32) what would you recommend? Alex: Start small.
(0:10:35) J : Okay.
(0:10:36) Alex: Something like mock conversations where
(0:10:39) students need to take up a position and
(0:10:42) argue against one another. I did that in
(0:10:45) German conversation classes as an
(0:10:48) undergraduate. And then give students a
(0:10:52) reason to care. You know that's, that's
(0:10:54) the big thing with games, why do I care.
(0:10:56) It's you can have autonomy but even if
(0:11:00) the motivation is purely intrinsic and
(0:11:05) not grade based students need a reason
(0:11:08) to enter into the fantasy world that
(0:11:12) you're building. Jean: I think for some
(0:11:14) students to it they have to know it's
(0:11:17) okay to do that it's okay to get into
(0:11:19) that roleplay. Let me take on another
(0:11:21) character instead of just being who I am
(0:11:23) let me be somebody else which I think is a
(0:11:25) great opportunity for students. Alex: Which it
(0:11:28) can be a great opportunity and it can be
(0:11:30) a lot of fun it can also be really scary.
(0:11:33) Jean: Sure. Alex: For students who aren't comfortable
(0:11:35) speaking up so much at the same time it
(0:11:39) can also be an outlet for those students
(0:11:40) to take on another personality that is
(0:11:42) maybe more outgoing and enact that
(0:11:45) person in the classroom. Jean: That's cool. I
(0:11:48) like that because I can definitely see
(0:11:50) those students that might be the ones
(0:11:51) that sit in your class and are very
(0:11:52) quiet and don't want to participate and
(0:11:55) now all of a sudden, I don't have to be
(0:11:57) me I can be this other person and act
(0:12:00) like that other person. Alex: Certainly Jean: Yeah

(0:12:02) Alex: It's not that they don't have anything
(0:12:03) to say it's that they're afraid of
(0:12:05) sounding dumb
(0:12:06) usually. Jean: Yeah I think so, I think so. Well,
(0:12:09) I have to say you did do a session for
(0:12:11) us in CeTEAL in the fall and it was
(0:12:13) awesome. I attended that session I got a
(0:12:15) lot out of it that's one of the reasons
(0:12:17) I asked you to come and do the podcast
(0:12:18) with me today. I know you're going to be
(0:12:21) offering another session for us sometime
(0:12:22) this spring. Alex: I am. Jean: So, I would encourage
faculty (0:12:25) to come out and to attend that session
(0:12:27) we haven't scheduled that yet but that
(0:12:28) will be up on our website soon. And is
(0:12:31) there any final words you want to give
(0:12:33) our faculty or whoever else will listen
(0:12:34) to our podcast? Alex: Well, yes, the seriousness
(0:02:39) of games lies itself within the play
(0:12:44) that is experienced. By allowing yourself
(0:12:46) to enter into a fantasy world whether
(0:12:49) it's in a match in Germany that is based
(0:12:51) on your life or if it's in a place with
(0:12:54) castles and dungeons and all sorts of
(0:12:57) horrible enemies it becomes either way a
(0:13:01) space in which to serve a laboratory of
(0:13:05) thought where you can act out things
(0:13:09) that you may or may not do in real life
(0:13:14) and see potential consequences. So it's
(0:13:17) it is as didactic as you would like it
(0:13:19) to be. Jean: That's awesome. I like that I like
(0:13:21) that safe space because I know when I
(0:13:24) taught younger grades k-12 we said
(0:13:27) students make your mistakes here before
(0:13:29) you go out into the world. It's a safe
(0:13:31) environment here so I think within the
(0:13:32) classroom that might be key to for some
(0:13:35) students to say this is safe and you can
(0:13:37) be whoever you want in this classroom
(0:13:39) and let's try these things out. Alex: I have on

(0:13:41) my conversation class syllabus failure
(0:13:45) is only failure if you stop trying to
(0:13:47) succeed or if you've run out of time of
(0:13:49) the semester. Jean: True for that too. I
(0:13:52) like that. I thank you for being with us
(0:13:54) today on this inaugural podcast I look
(0:13:57) forward to your session coming up in the
(0:13:59) spring. Thanks so much. Alex: Thank you very
(0:14:00) much. Jean: You have been listening to the
Ceteal (0:14:03) community podcast. Tune in again next
time
(0:14:06) we look forward to having you hear us. The
(0:14:09) views expressed on this podcast do not
(0:14:12) represent the views or opinions of
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