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**Colorado State University's  
Information Science and Technology Center (ISTeC)  
presents two lectures by**



**Dr. Sasha Barab**

Professor of Learning Sciences,  
Barbara Jacobs Chair of Technology  
Indiana University

## **ISTeC Distinguished Lecture**

in conjunction with the  
**Electrical and Computer Engineering Department and  
Computer Science Department Seminar Series**

# **“Videogames and Transformational Play: Learning in the 21st Century”**

**Monday, April 25, 2011**

Reception: 10:30 a.m.

Lecture: 11:00 – 12:00 noon

Location: Lory Student Center Room 205

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## **School of Education Special Seminar**

*sponsored by ISTeC*

# **“Dramatic Agency and Transformational Play: Why Should Educators Care About Videogames?”**

**Monday, April 25, 2011**

Lecture: 1:30 p.m.

Location: Lory Student Center Room 215

## **Abstracts**

### **“Videogames and Transformational Play: Learning in the 21st Century”**

Over the last decade, video games and other online media have become one of the most significant forums for the enculturation of youth. Though many academics have little first-hand experience with videogames, two generations of adults have grown up with videogames. In most contemporary videogames, learners do not mindlessly click on buttons, but instead engage rich narrative storylines and employ complex problem solving strategies as they come to master and appreciate the underlying game dynamics. In addition, videogames stimulate rich forms of participation that enlist membership and identity in ways that occur in only the most advanced curricular designs. In fact, scholars are increasingly documenting the discursive richness, depth of collaborative inquiry, complexity of game play, and multifaceted forms of learning and participation that videogames can support.

More than a theoretical discussion, I will ground these ideas in our work on the Quest Atlantis project where we have designed numerous curricular games to support transformational play in which players take on the role of scientists, reporters, accountants, etc. who use academic content to resolve problematic fictional storylines that unfold in virtual worlds. Specifically, I will discuss the Quest Atlantis (QA) project (<http://QuestAtlantis.Org>), an international learning and teaching project that uses a 3D multi-user environment to immerse over 50,000 children, ages 9-15, in educational tasks. As preparation for this talk, please feel free to explore our site and learn more about this exciting project.

### **“Dramatic Agency and Transformational Play: Why Should Educators Care About Videogames?”**

Games are popular in part because they are fun, but it is not simply their entertainment value that should grab educators' attention. Games are promising because they, unlike any other form of curriculum, can offer entire worlds in which learners are central, important participants; a place where the actions one takes have significant impact on the [virtual] world; and a place in which what you know is directly related to what you are able to do and, ultimately, who you become. In this way, games can become powerful learning tools that show children the value of subject-matter concepts, especially when the game is designed so that successful game play is dependent on developing increasingly sophisticated understandings. Positioning students in this way sparks their interest, but even more importantly, can lead to deeper engagement with content. In this talk, Dr. Barab will draw on his almost decade of experiences in designing games for learning to discuss the theory of transformational play. Students who play transformationally become game-world protagonists who use the knowledge, skills, and concepts of the educational content to first make sense of a situation and then make choices that actually transform the play space—they are able to see how that space changed because of their own efforts. I will discuss our use of games for critical design ethnography.

## **SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY**

Sasha Barab (<http://inkido.indiana.edu/barab/>) is a Professor in Learning Sciences, Instructional Systems Technology (IST), and Cognitive Science at Indiana University. He also holds the Barbara Jacobs Chair of Education and Technology, and is the Director of the Center for Research on Learning and Technology (CRLT). His research has resulted in numerous grants, dozens of academic articles, and multiple chapters in edited books, which investigate knowing and learning in its material, social, and cultural context.

**To arrange a meeting with the speaker**, please contact James Folkestad at (970) 491-7823 or [James.Folkestad@ColoState.EDU](mailto:James.Folkestad@ColoState.EDU).

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