Before diving into anything: game, project, production, world domination plot, etc, it is imperative to define your outcomes and your outputs.

**Finite & Infinite Games**

With today’s game, we’re exploring one core outcome: games are prototypes for real life. In today’s test game, Chocolate River, players need to be successful at communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. When we get on the other side of the game, we are definitely going to debrief those four things, but the real goal is to see if the “game as life” prototype theory holds up. Today, you’re not necessarily playing the game to win, or even to communicate, collaborate, be creative, or think critically. You are investigating the merit of “playing to play.”

**Finite and Infinite Games** is a book by James Carse. It is more philosophy than theatre, but all theatre has philosophical bones inside of it and it is a highly recommended read. Carse lays out what he sees as two main approaches to life. 1.) Finite play, which is playing to win. Finite players seek to gain power, titles, property, or other measurements of status or victory. 2.) Infinite players want to continue playing and make space so everyone who wants to play can play.

From my experiences in the Land of Community Development, infinite play is often overlooked, and we forget that any healthy ecosystem needs to be sustained and cannot be won. If it is finished, that usually means everything is no longer thriving (maybe no longer even living).

**About Me**

Andy grew up in Boone, Iowa, and earned his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from Central College in Pella, Iowa. After teaching in St. Paul and Chicago, Andy moved to Oska-loosa, Iowa in 2013 to be the first full-time Education Director at the George Daily Auditorium. In 2022, he was named Executive Director. Andy regularly works with students at the George Daily Youth Theatre, Central College, and William Penn University. After 15 years, Andy’s work has grown to encompass many sorts of finite and infinite games, with an ongoing mission to inspire curiosity, communication, and community engagement.
**CHOCOLATE RIVER**

Chocolate River

Generic Brand Name: That lava game you played growing up in your house that ended with "Andrew! Get off the furniture and play outside!"

Goals:
- Build collaboration skills
- Build problem solving skills

Base Explanation: A group of players must use their squares to cross the dreaded Chocomire! If a player touches the river, that player is lost at sea. They will need to be rescued to finish the game. Watch out for Chocodiles! If you aren't touching your squares, they’ll gobble them up!

Playing Space: To play the base game, you need a space with defined beginning and end points. Extra Graham cracker squares are good way to organize players lost at sea.

**DEBRIEF**

All games can be elevated with a solid debrief, but let’s remember the core outcome we’re trying to achieve: Can we see how this game is a prototype for life?

Why did this work or not work?
If you were to play again, what would work better?
How would we want to grow this game for continuing play?
Are there any other questions we should be asking?

The merits of growing a healthy ecosystem

When I started teaching, I often worked with a new group of students on every project. When I started my job in Oskaloosa, it was my first time working with the same students for multiple projects. If you were to see happens in our Youth Theatre's Chocolate River it would look different than what we played today. We played the base game best for getting a group to move and start talking with eachother. When you play at theatre camp, the game has grown to include more complex scenarios. There are time dumpsters, countdown timers, dodgeballs, and student experiments. We’ve worked hard to incorporate scale into what we do and address other needs. If we have students getting in the rhythm of a less than helpful habit, we try to mold a game to practice the more helpful habits. Sometimes, games just need to be harder because they’ve played the same one a lot.