

## ThinkFun Games What Do They Stand For?

There are many types of games in the world; games of chance, skill games, ball games and card games, the list is far reaching. Common to all games is that they are fun and joyful. Games are a form of play.

ThinkFun games fall within a narrow niche in the commercial games market; logic puzzles, spatial puzzles and strategy games. The category is commercially so small that it didn't exist in an organized way before ThinkFun began its work 25 years ago.

This game category does have strong and enduring roots, however, in the field of recreational mathematics. Great thinkers like Richard Feynman, John Conway and Martin Gardner attest that they were profoundly influenced by puzzles and logic games in their youth. The category is all about the demonstration of higher order thinking skills.

Most ThinkFun games have in common that they require focus and concentration for the player to be successful. Each game is designed to have a single objective, the play comes by solving a series of challenges all involving the same objective. Each challenge is incrementally different and more difficult than the previous one. Players progress through the game, improving their skills and pitting themselves against increasingly difficult challenges that improves their skills further.

The skills necessary to be successful are common among all the games... a focused sense of purpose and objective. Note: It is important to understand that the games themselves do not teach this skill... rather, players naturally find this skill within themselves and bring it to bear so that they can be successful with the puzzles. The games bring players to a specific "problem solving state of mind" where they are focused and attentive, particularly ready to be reflective and prepared to accept new ideas.

Several of the ThinkFun games can be tied directly to Content Learning standards, as well as Process Learning goals. MathDice does a fantastic job for practicing times tables and teaching exponents. Chocolate Fix can be used to teach Reasoning and Proof.

It would be a mistake, however, to perceive that to be worthy, a logic game must map to a specific content standard or teach something "curricular". The main purpose of this program – its central rationale – is to teach Process Thinking. The games chosen for the MBA program must be included for how

they promote central Process goals, not because they can stretch to be associated with a particular Content standard.

To draw a comparison, let us consider the subject of Reading. There are many forms of reading that a school should not encourage... Gossip Magazines come to mind as one example. But from within the boundaries of approved, well respected, age appropriate literature, rarely do teachers push forward one title over another because of its ties to a particular grammatical construction or linguistic standard.

So it should be with logic games. From within the complete field of games, there are many segments not appropriate for a school setting. But from within the boundaries of approved, well respected age appropriate logic puzzles and thinking games, it should be understood that each of the games starts out worthy, and its utility should be measured by how it supports and amplifies our stated Process goals.

The measure of each game should be: Does it engage the student, and is it fun? Does it stretch thinking skills in expected ways? Does it fit into our larger program goals, and help to propel these goals forward?