

# The Shape Activity

## Experiencing (and Learning about) Social Constructivism in the Classroom

Nancy Flanagan Knapp  
University of Georgia  
Nfknapp@uga.edu

# The Shape Activity

Please take the next 15-20 minutes to work with your small group, following the directions on your envelope (other groups have different directions).

# When you are through, discuss & be prepared to share...

1. Explain how your group decided to organize/use the pieces you were given.
2. What characteristics were most salient or important in your decisions on how to place/use each piece? Why were these characteristics most important?
3. Did everyone agree right away about how to organize/use the pieces?
  - a) If not, what alternatives were suggested? How did you come to agree on your final plan? Did different group members take different roles in this process?
  - b) If so, can you think of any other reasonable way(s) to organize/use these pieces?

# Some SC ideas . . .

1. People's purposes influence constructions.
2. People will interpret identical instructions differently, due to prior experiences and background knowledge.
3. The characteristics of the materials given/available influence possible constructions.
4. The understood purpose of construction determines what characteristics “matter.”
5. There are often numerous “right” constructions; the same materials can be used in a variety of ways to achieve the same purpose. BUT there can also be “wrong” (ineffective, harmful) constructions.
6. Through conversation, a group can construct what that no single member had previously thought of; the knowledge of the whole group becomes more than the sum of its parts.
7. Power relationships (based on gender, culture, knowledge, temperament...) influence final group constructions.

(In response to the question "How well did this activity help you understand each of the following social constructivist ideas?")

| IDEA          | Author-taught<br>classes (N=4)<br>$\mu$ (SD) | TA-taught classes<br>(N=18)<br>$\mu$ (SD) | All classes (N=18)<br>$\mu$ (SD) |
|---------------|--|---|----------------------------------|
| <i>Idea 1</i> | 2.19 (.17)                                   | 2.25 (.31)                                | 2.23 (.28)                       |
| <i>Idea 2</i> | 1.60 (.24)                                   | 1.90 (.26)                                | 1.84 (.28)                       |
| <i>Idea 3</i> | 1.76 (.36)                                   | 1.96 (.25)                                | 1.91 (.28)                       |
| <i>Idea 4</i> | 2.24 (.16)                                   | 2.14 (.28)                                | 2.16 (.26)                       |
| <i>Idea 5</i> | 1.59 (.26)                                   | 1.81 (.23)                                | 1.76 (.25)                       |
| <i>Idea 6</i> | 1.78 (.09)                                   | 1.87 (.28)                                | 1.78 (.25)                       |
| <i>Idea 7</i> | 2.55 (.13)                                   | 2.49 (.32)                                | 2.51 (.29)                       |

NOTE: Ratings were on a 1-5 Likert scale, with 1 = very helpful, 2 = quite helpful, 3 = somewhat helpful, 4 = neutral, 5 = confusing.