Tool: Observing the Mental Challenge of Tasks in Action

Sometimes teachers include tasks in plans that they think are mentally challenging, but as the tasks are implemented, some changes may be required.

Use this tool to evaluate one or two tasks recently implemented in your classroom to think about what changes were made.

- In each column briefly summarize the major tasks of the lesson. For example: (“Students read chapter. 2. Students complete timeline of reconstruction.”)
- Then use the questions listed below to consider whether the changes increased or decreased the mental challenge of the task, and why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning goals for the activity</th>
<th>Activities as described by curriculum (if used in planning)</th>
<th>Activities as planned by the teacher in written plans</th>
<th>Activities taught in the lesson</th>
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Ideas for Conferencing about Intellectual Demand

- What changes were made between the curriculum, the teacher plans and the teaching?
- Why were these changes made?
- Which changes seemed to make the activities more challenging? Which changes seemed to make the activities less challenging? Was this the intent of the teacher?
- What changes were made on the fly during instruction? What led to these changes?
- How were decisions about what to change were made during planning?
- How might the lesson be taught differently a second time?
- Did the children seem to find the task as easy or as difficult as the teacher expected?
- What did they learn from the activity as it was set up in the classroom? What did they miss out on the opportunity to learn?