

Doing Serendipity

Use this tool to strengthen children's ability to seek and make connections.

Step 1: Set goals

When you are ready to begin a new unit or project, share your learning goals with children. What questions are you hoping to explore with them?

Step 2: Document the learning process

As an adult, you have the ability to make connections between how children experience and interpret the world, and all the things children don't know yet. Listen for connections between what children say and what you know about the big questions you are exploring as a class. Children may use metaphor, they may reveal new questions (that don't always sound like questions), or they may offer connections between their ideas and the ideas of a peer that surprise you and open up new possibilities. Listen for poetic language and things children say that can be returned to over and over again in light of new experiences. Keep notes in a journal or notes app. What may seem unimportant in the moment can develop into an important pattern — which can only be revealed in hindsight!

Step 3: Make new connections visible in the classroom

When either you or the children make new, surprising, or unexpected connections within a course of study, post these ideas in the classroom so the group can revisit them.

Step 4: Reflect

Return to the artifacts you have made visible. Ask the group to forge new connections between the new experiences they are having and the words and ideas you have made visible.

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Children need ample practice seeking, sharing, and making sense of their own connections.

Doing Serendipity entails making an effort to find what we are not directly seeking and to experience the thrill of discovering useful or interesting things in unexpected places. Doing Serendipity can keep us curious and engaged; it encourages children to anticipate the possibility of surprise and delight in moments of uncertainty (if they know where to look!). Viewing mistakes as opportunities to find something unexpected and to see new patterns, rather than as failures, supports the development of inventive mindsets.



Suggested Time Frame

This process can be used throughout projects. Do not be surprised when children find serendipitous connections between current studies and ideas expressed years earlier!

When and How

Use this tool when you are facilitating a project with children, in order to make visible the strategies researchers, inventors, and artists use to create new ideas and sustain curiosity.

Tips and Variations

- Read the op-ed piece by Pagan Kennedy: [How to Cultivate the Art of Serendipity](#). Share parts of the article with older students.
- Introduce the word “serendipity” to children and invite them to look for it.
- The value of “doing serendipity” can be cultivated in small moments, particularly when a mistake is made or an effort fails. Use mistakes or unexpected outcomes as opportunities for something new to be learned.
- Pay attention to connections among topics and projects. If you have extended relationships with groups of children, seek connections across the years.
- Consider the relationship between doing serendipity and making meaning. Write up your reflections and share with colleagues. It can be especially helpful to get into the habit of regularly photographing children’s learning processes. These photographs, looked at collectively over time, may reveal surprising patterns and connections that can help children advance their ideas.
- Reflect on the value of moments of “wondrous happenstance” for the classroom learning group — perhaps for the school, families, and staff, as well.

For video examples and reflections on practices that inspire inventiveness, become an Opal School Online Sustaining Member at learning.opalschool.org.

