

Should three year-olds learn to cook?

The Redcliffe Children's Centre in Bristol has introduced regular cookery sessions for its three and four year-old pupils at a time when many schools are closing kitchens down.

Allegra McEvedy: So, Jo, this looks like a ton of fun. Is there any kind of structure, or are they just doing what they want to do?

Jo Ingleby: It's very much led by the children, what they want to do and what they're interested in. We try to have a whole assortment of ingredients that are interesting to all of your senses, not just to eat, but also to smell and to crunch.

We find the children like raw food much more than you'd think – things like kale, they'll eat raw, broccoli... We've got a variety that changes all the time.

Allegra: Is there any kind of an endgame to this?

Jo: Well, usually something will come out of it which is edible. But we don't come in with an idea, that you must do it in this way, and it must be perfect, and we will do it in this order, which is the normal model.

Allegra: They all do what they want, and at some point it gets cooked into a "something".

Jo: Yes, exactly.

Allegra: So why do you think it's important to get the children cooking at two and three rather than five?

Jo: By five, they've decided what they like. At two and three their minds are open to tasting all these different things, and having an appetite for vegetables and fruit.

And learning skills... you're learning most of your skills at two, three, four. By five, you're quite good at everything. So it's great to learn all the chopping skills and cooking and seeing an end result that gets turned into dinner.