Infectious Enthusiasm: A CookShop Teacher

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Although this is only Daisy Carusillo's second year implementing the Food Bank's CookShop Classroom curriculum at PS 24 in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, she handles the job like an old pro.

I recently had the pleasure of seeing Daisy in action as she instructed a roomful of new CookShop teachers at a training session one evening this fall. After a full day in their own classrooms, the teachers had arrived looking a little weary. But as Daisy led a mock Chef Lesson (a cooking activity in which students help prepare nutritious, kid-friendly recipes) it was clear that these lessons are her favorite part of the CookShop Classroom curriculum – and it was impossible for the tired teachers to resist Daisy's infectious energy and humorous anecdotes. Plus, it didn't hurt that the tangy batch of Peachy Orange Salsa they were preparing smelled so great.

"This is where nutrition education takes on a whole new life," Daisy said. "The actual handling of the produce, the chopping, the dicing, mixing, the smells…does so much for the building of community."

CookShop Chef Lessons give elementary-school children an opportunity to try healthy fruits and vegetables in a learning environment, Daisy said, while the Explorer and Discovery Lessons reinforce other academic areas such as reading, math and science skills.

"One of my favorite [Chef Lesson] memories is when a student was so proud of her dish – it looked so colorful, and it was so flavorful – she wanted to take some to the principal so she could taste it," Daisy said.

But like all learning experiences, some can be a little jarring at first. When Daisy's students were told carrots comprised the root of a plant, "they were so shocked, they weren't sure if they wanted to continue eating [the Carrot Raisin Salad]."

Daisy said the students were more willing to taste the Three-Bean Salad and Apple Dipper recipes, but, she said, all CookShop lessons help serve a child's personal development.

"Children who develop adequate cooking skills and nutritional knowledge are more likely to make healthier food choices later in life," Daisy said.

And it's that kind of insight – rather than the number of years' experience -- that makes Daisy Carusillo an expert CookShop teacher.