Dan aims to make a difference

Almost a decade since he graduated from a degree in environmental policy, Dan Brooks has gone back to school — in more ways than one.

The 32-year-old from Newtown is one of many career changers switching into teaching.

In his Masters of Teaching course at Sydney University, there are senior IT professionals, an ex-chef, burnt-out corporate types and HR officers.

For Mr Brooks, who is majoring in secondary economics and geography, teaching is a way to share his passion for the environment with future generations.

"I like the different ways that teenagers see things," he says. "From the sustainability aspect, we all need to start looking at things differently and find out what it means to be sustainable.

"For teenagers, it's about their future. The state of the planet is an important issue for them to be engaged and interested in."

With experience in a range of environmental fields, from living on a permaculture farm in northern NSW where he studied a permaculture diploma, to working on policy for Sydney Olympic parklands, Mr Brooks believes he’ll be able to add greater depth to his classroom lessons.

"If I’d gone straight from school to uni and back into a classroom setting, I’d almost feel I was missing out," he says. "I feel I’ve got a lot more to bring to this profession, having worked in private and government fields."

Sydney University’s professor of teacher education and the arts, Robyn Ewing, says teaching has always been a popular career-change option. "There are different pathways into teaching — those who come straight from school, those who decide to go into teaching after their degree or after another professional career."

Professor Ewing adds that having children is another factor which may lead people into teaching.

"People’s reasons might be that they want to make a difference, they have a passion for a particular subject area they want to share, or have developed an understanding of, and fascination around how children or young people learn and want to contribute to that field," she says.

"Others may have always wanted to teach, but didn’t feel they were experienced or mature enough straight out of school and wanted some time. There are people from all professions — doctors, lawyers, social workers, people who work in policy, accountants — you can bring a whole range of different things, whatever point in life you choose to teach."

Dan Brooks: Life experience will add greater depth to his classroom lessons.