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Sydney early childhood teacher Renee Connaghan says the role has changed.

Sydney's Renee Connaghan is at the forefront of modern early childhood teaching, and says the days of babysitting and nappy changing are long gone.

Andre Grimaux, 25 February 2023

EARLY childhood teaching has come a long way since Renee Connaghan started 18 years ago.

The centre director at Only About Children in Wahroonga was asked recently by a parent why his three-year-old child would be learning STEM at the preschool and childcare service in Sydney's north.

"I said to him; 'Why wouldn't they?' This is the time the children are so excited and it's the time you build on their curiosity and how we engage them in tactile, hands-on experiences," Mrs Connaghan recalls.

The centre she runs teaches literacy, numeracy, STEM, robotics, creative arts, Spanish and even cooking to preschoolers.

Gone are the days when all children have to sit in a group and learn at the same time

and pace. The notion that it's all babysitting and nappy changing has been thrown in the bin.

Mrs Connaghan says she aims to develop children who are resilient, self-knowledgeable and independent, with "a little suitcase of social and emotional strategies" they can use when they get to primary school.

"We have so many roles within (what we do). My philosophy has grown ... I'm at a point now that we look at a learning partnership with the children, rather than a controlling relationship," she said.

"We've moved away from traditional methods of childhood education in this campus, to much more supporting the role of children having a say. We see children as being capable and having ownership of their early childhood education.



**Only About
Children**
More Than Childcare



“I see what we do here as laying the foundation for lifelong learning, so what we do here is important. We sow seeds here in early childhood.”

Renee Connaghan, campus director at All About Children in Wahroonga in class with Abigail Sinclair, Aydin Nathwani and Indi Van Coller.

Picture: Sam Rutty

The lack of understanding and appreciation for the work of early childhood educators, and all teachers, is something Care for Kids CEO Ash Sachdev says needs to change.

“My wife is an ex-teacher and I use to poke fun at the fact that she got 10 weeks’ leave a year, but she put in numerous extra hours every week looking at lesson plans, assisting students who needed extra help and researching ideas to make learning fun,” he said.

“These days more than ever, teachers from our early learning centres through to high school are having to not only teach but also play the role of counsellor, helping children of all ages adjust back after two years of Covid interruptions. This is not ... balancing the socialisation requirements that society demand along with the rigours of ensuring children catch up on the last two years of ad hoc learning.”

Mrs Connaghan agrees that elevating early childhood education would help shift societal views.

“We deliver so much more than just childcare. It’s not just changing nappies,” Mrs Connaghan said.

“When you get quality services and quality organisations delivering a higher standard of care that sits outside of basic childcare, then people start to develop a new respect for it.

“Having engaged, passionate and well-educated educators who love what they do, that’s what’s necessary to continue to lift the profile.

“This is where and when children develop their love of learning.”