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Education a stepping stone to a better life

WHEN Marty Dures walked into his new school seven years ago, he had no idea the school's embedded maths program would eventually lead him to the trip of a lifetime to Kathmandu in Nepal.

At Heritage Christian School in Port Macquarie, students from K-6 study maths with the Origo Education Stepping Stones program.

"I just kind of liked it," Dures says.

"It seemed to go through all the maths strands sequentially. It made sense, it had a lot of practical stuff."

"They knew that being literate, being educated is a way for them to advance."

Last year Origo buddied up with not-for-profit, non-government organisation Teachers for Teachers to send one lucky teacher to Nepal – and having entered a five-minute video addressing set criteria, Dures was chosen to spend two weeks there observing, learning and helping out where he could.

"There was a nucleus of maybe 10 or so – so myself, one local teacher, two or three Origo people and seven or so Teachers to Teachers Global people," he says.

"Teachers to Teachers Global are amazing.

"They're basically a bunch of volunteers, essentially retired

mathematics lecturers, professors, who very much have a passion for maths into developing countries.

"So they just hone in on places, like Tanzania and Nepal, and other developing countries around the world."

Besides an eye-opening trip to some public schools in Bhaktapur, about 45 minutes east of Kathmandu, most of Dures's time was spent in two to three local schools.

The private schools are probably the most common in Kathmandu, he says, due in no small part to the fact that the country's government is struggling.

"As many of us remember, Nepal was hit with a massive earthquake in 2015, so private education is very much, I sense, the desired way to go in Nepal.

"While there's money being spent on other things, like hospitals, infrastructure, electricity, water – the Government doesn't have a lot of money to go around, and so with regards to private education people are willing to pay for that, and work their butts off to do so.

"[Parents want] to get their children into a private education where there's, from what I observed, certainly better resources, better teacher-to-student ratios, just the sorts of things that I took for granted in an Australian school. It seems to be more available."

Along with an underlying joy in the people he came across at school and in the community, and pride in their country, Dures says the kids' passion for education was one of his favourite memories from the trip.

"It was absolutely tangible, just



Marty Dures, far left, says the Nepalese kids' passion for education was one of his favourite memories from an eye-opening trip to Kathmandu.

the way they turned up to school, looking forward to learning.

"Looking forward to how the day would roll out, it was just amazing.

"I was in Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 classes in my time there and I felt that they knew that being literate, being educated, is a way for them just to advance in their own country and to open doors. And I think it was drilled from home as well."

Dures only started his teaching career as a 45-year-old, having previously spent 23 'very happy years' at Telstra.

In terms of learnings to take back to his K-12 school, Dures says one of the most impactful came from an Origo/Teachers for

Teachers presenter, at a conference as part of the trip.

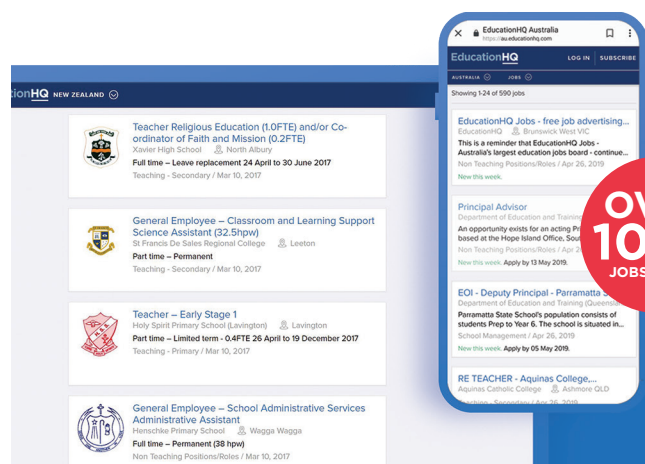
"It was what I've come to know as CPA [Concrete Pictorial Abstract]," the 53-year-old says.

"So it was just something concrete – give the students something concrete first when you're teaching them maths – so give them things like blocks, if you're teaching mathematics or take them outside and show them a brick wall.

"Sometimes I'm really prone to jump straight into the abstract side of it, just the writing down the numbers and putting the times there or the multiplication symbol and not actually giving them that concrete experience first.

"And then it was pictorials, so you then come back into the classroom and in small groups or whole class stuff, work with images of the same thing – practical pictures, photos, things like that, which demonstrate what you were teaching ... and – then finally jumping into, 'OK, well, how does this work with symbols? How does it work with paper and pen?"

"And I don't know whether that makes sense, but certainly for me I was convicted that 'I am very prone as a teacher just to jump straight into what the textbook might say, as opposed to giving the kids a real life, everyday context."



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