

Dealing with the demands of the Deakin University-Teach For Australia program: Four perspectives

Angela Evangelinou-Yiannakis

The University of Western Australia

This paper sets out to explain the Deakin University-Teach For Australia (DU-TFA) program for preparing teachers Australia-wide, with a focus on Western Australia (WA), and to offer insight into how the DU-TFA beginning teachers, known as Associates, 'dealt with' the demands of the program. It is not an evaluation of the DU-TFA program; rather, through qualitative research methods, it offers the perspectives of four Associates on how they 'dealt with' the demands of the program, and the suggestions they make for modifications to the program to alleviate some of these demands. The suggestions may prove useful to TFA and its new partner university, as well as to other initial teacher education (ITE) programs. The paper provides the background to the TFA program, inclusive of its purpose, its operations, and the mentoring approach it employs with its partner university to support the Associates. The qualitative research methodology used to gather the data, and the limitations of the study, are also explained.

Background

Teach For Australia (TFA) has been operating in Australia since 2008 and in Western Australia since 2015 (Teach For Australia, 2019). A derivative of the original collaborative network called 'Teach for All', the longest running of which is *Teach For America*, founded in 1990, the 'Teach For...' concept has spread across the world to more than 40 countries.

O'Donoghue (2017, pp. 212-213) provided a brief outline of the humble beginnings of the movement; a movement which began in 1989 when an American student, Wendy Kopp, initiated the concept of 'Teach for America'. O'Donoghue (2017) explained its significant growth and expansion world-wide since that time, now spanning five continents. He also outlined key concerns held by education stakeholders regarding the 'Teach For' approach to teacher preparation, but balanced these with a number of declared benefits. Ledger and Vidovich (2018) highlighted concerns about the retention of TFA candidates and their outcomes, and the expense involved per Associate in comparison to other ITE programs on offer. Specifically, they focused on stakeholder influences on education policy and the commodification of education (p. 22).

In Australia, the program began in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory in 2008. With the support of Shell Australia, the program spread to include Western Australia in 2015 and Tasmania in 2017. Supported also by The Ian Potter Foundation, one of Australia's major philanthropic foundations, the program receives grants which help to sustain it in this way. In particular, the Foundation has helped to include the remote community of Kalgoorlie, WA, where a significant proportion of students fall in the bottom half of the *Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage* (ICSEA) (Teach For Australia, 2019).

According to the official TFA website (2019) the vision of TFA is of “an Australia where *all* children, regardless of background, attain an excellent education”. TFA seeks to confront educational disadvantage through two key levers that impact student outcomes, teacher quality and teacher leadership. The program aims to change the lives of children by selecting very high calibre candidates, and developing them to become outstandingly effective teachers and leaders within schools. In a draft paper, WA State Manager, John Inverarity (2017) further explained that the focus of TFA is to select very able and well qualified people who have a suitable skill set for teaching in demanding circumstances. The skill set must include emotional intelligence, communication skills and leadership capacity “with its imbedded necessity of superior judgement and decision-making ability” (p. 1).

The TFA website (Teach For Australia, 2018) has provided following statistics for 2018: 9 cohorts of Associates; 156 partner schools; 674 placements; 8,900 classrooms; 9,400 applications to join the program; and 175,000 students affected by the program (similar data is available for 2017 and 2016, see Teach For Australia, 2017). Inverarity (2017, p. 2) presented the following figures for WA, 2015-17: 13 Associates were placed in 5 schools in 2015; 32 Associates were placed in 14 schools in 2016, including 5 in Kalgoorlie; and 32 Associates were placed in 16 schools in 2017, including 2 in Kalgoorlie.

TFA first began its alliance with Melbourne University, from 2010 to 2014 inclusive, after which, Deakin University (DU) won the tender for the contract, commencing its journey with TFA from the start of 2015. The contract between DU and TFA ended in 2018 with Cohort 2017 Associates.

A new partner university, Australian Catholic University (ACU) provided the following statistics for Cohort 2018: 125 Associates enrolled in the Master of Teaching (Secondary) (Professional Practice) in 76 secondary schools across Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and Tasmania. The ACU-TFA target for 2019 was for 180 Associates (*The Faculty of Education and Arts Newsletter*, Issue 3, 2018, p. 7); there are 153 currently in the program. In WA, Cohort 2018 involved 42 Associates in 24 secondary schools, and Cohort 2019 involved 48 Associates in 24 schools.

At the conclusion of TFA’s selection process, the candidates selected become ‘Associates’ who are then required to commit to teaching in a disadvantaged school for a period of at least two years. During this time, the Associates complete their Master of Teaching (Secondary) degree with DU. The journey begins with a six-week in-residence program taught at the University’s Warrnambool Campus. This is the Associates’ first experience of the theory and practical basis of what is required for teaching in a low socio-economic community. It includes lectures, workshops, group and individual assessments, and a two-week teaching practicum at one of the local primary or secondary schools in Warrnambool. At the end of the six weeks, the Associates will have completed one quarter (4 of 16 units) of their Master of Teaching degree (Deakin University, 2016).

Associates are then offered a two-year placement in hard-to-staff, low socio-economic schools where they are employed under the ‘Limited Registration’ category. Their teaching

load is 80% of a full-time load, with the remaining 20% being dedicated to their Master of Teaching degree. Together with intensive study blocks and online distance learning, as well as TFA training sessions throughout the two-year period, the Associates complete their DU-TFA requirements for full teacher registration in their respective jurisdictions. However, in order to meet the registration requirements, Associates need to have met the 'Proficient stage' of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Standards (AITSL, 2017). Their progress along the Graduate to Proficient continuum is mapped and assessed during the two-year period with interim reports, starting with their first report being completed after the initial two-week practicum in Warrnambool and ending with their final portfolio assessment around the end of Term Three of their second year in their respective schools. The evidence sets produced by the Associates for this assessment, along with the completion of the Master of Teaching degree from DU, as well as their enhanced teaching and leadership skills after their two-year placement in schools make them eligible for full registration.

The Master of Teaching degree at DU is a rigorous course that is spread over three trimesters. Associates undertake four units in Trimester 3, two units in Trimester 1, and two units in Trimester 2. They then take four units again in Trimester 3 of their first school placement year, leading them thus into the final year of their studies. It is in the second year that Associates can choose from a selection of pathways for their final units of work, helping them to specialise in a particular field. The Deakin Master of Teaching (Secondary) is accredited by the Victorian Institute of Teaching and is recognised Australia-wide and also internationally. Graduates of the degree can then teach in secondary schools from junior to senior levels, both in Australia and overseas (Deakin University-Teach For Australia Mentor Workshop, 2017).

In order for Associates to succeed in their two-year journey, a support system has been set up between Teach For Australia and Deakin University. The 'nested support' structure includes, in ascending order, the Associate, the School Learning Mentor (in-school mentor teacher/leader, SLM), the school wherein the Associate is placed, the TFA Teaching and Leadership Advisor (TLA), the Deakin University School Academic Mentor (SAM), the TFA/DU Support Services, including free counselling/psychology services, and the Teach For All Network. Specifically, however, the key personnel to be involved regularly in the two-year journey undertaken by the Associates are the SLM, the TLA and the SAM. These three roles form a pyramidal base that supports the Associate on his/her daily journey through the teaching and academic aspects of their two-year experience.

Each of these roles has a specific focus although some overlap does exist. For example, the SLM is the daily mentor available to the Associate whilst the TLA is a fortnightly visitor to the school, coaching the Associate in the practical aspects of being a teacher. Both the SLM and TLA observe lessons and provide constructive feedback, following a specific guide for such observations, as provided by TFA. Meanwhile, the SAM visits the schools wherein the Associates are placed twice a year, or more times if necessary, and provides guidance and advice specifically with regard to the Master of Teaching degree and the Associate's progression from the Graduate to Proficient stages of the AITSL Standards. However, upon invitation from the Associate, the SAM can also observe

lessons and provide feedback. Hence, whilst there are specific tasks assigned to each of these three key roles, there is also some overlap, all of which helps to form a rich basis of support for the Associate.

The personnel involved in each of these roles receive specific training before and during the course of their two-year journey with their Associates. The training is provided by DU and TFA. The SLMs, for example, participate in workshops at the start and during the year. They also undertake intensive online training modules on mentoring through DU. This assists with their forward planning in terms of how they will mentor their Associate to negotiate his/her everyday experiences in the classroom, and help their Associate progress along the AITSL Standards.

The online modules from the Mentor Professional Learning Program (MPLP) provide a full and rounded education on best practices in mentoring. The MPLP is supported by expected readings in the field of mentoring. These include Ferrier-Kerr's 2009 article on the establishment of professional relationships between the beginning teacher and the in-school mentor, advocating that, for such a relationship to be successful, both parties must be active in it. Another mandatory reading is that of Graham (2013), *Enhancing professional learning conversations*, wherein a 'how to' guide is provided on how to successfully achieve such conversations between the beginning teacher and the in-school mentor. The 'Discover-Deepen-Do' (The 3D Approach), is offered as a sound approach to mentoring; one that draws the solution to problems from the beginning teacher rather than the experienced in-school mentor making suggestions on how to resolve the issue at hand (pp. 35-40). Similarly, Ambrosetti's 2014 article, *Are you ready to be a mentor? Preparing teachers for mentoring pre-service teachers*, is a staple in the MPLP as it offers the groundwork to good mentoring approaches for the beginning mentor and beginning teacher. Mentoring, Ambrosetti explained, "...concerns the development of the relationship between the mentor and mentee which, in turn, provides the underpinning for the growth of the mentee's skills... the relationship becomes central to the interactions that occur" (p. 31). In particular, the findings of Ambrosetti's study conclude that "mentoring skills can be learnt and developed over time" (p. 37). The reciprocal nature of the mentoring relationship and the shared journey are stressed, along with the positive aspects of preparing for mentoring rather than it being an ad-hoc approach. Izadinia (2017) argued that negative mentoring experiences can change pre-service teachers' perceptions of the sort of teacher they are and can be, and that mentoring directly affects the emotions and professional development of the participants from their own perspective (p.67).

With specific reference to WA, in 2017 the DU-TFA Team consisted of a State Manager, a Manager/TLA Leader, three TLAs, and two DU SAMs. As such, the combined forces of this personnel helped to ensure that the Associates had a strong support system beneath them. From the humble beginnings of only 5 schools being involved in 2015, accommodating 13 Associates, the program grew to include a total of 22 schools and 62 Associates in 2017. For the purpose of this paper, the sample of Associates who were interviewed was obtained from Cohorts 2015 and 2016, representing two of the three cohorts over the four years of the DU-TFA Program in WA.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was used for this study. Located within the interpretivist paradigm, the theoretical position of the study was that of symbolic interactionism. A brief explanation of interpretivism, symbolic interactionism, and data-gathering methods follows.

Interpretivists set out to examine the meanings that phenomena have for people in their everyday settings (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 17). In an interpretivist study like the one reported here, the individual and society are viewed as being inseparable units. Accompanying this is the view that a complete understanding of one is not possible without a complete understanding of the other. A second, and related, basic premise that exists in the interpretivist paradigm is that because all interaction between human beings is meaningful, an understanding of the meanings that create and are created by interaction between human beings is essential to an understanding of the social world (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 16). Blackledge and Hunt (1985, p. 234) outlined the foundation pillars of this premise as follows:

1. Everyday activity is the building block of society and that society can be traced back to the way that people act in everyday life. Therefore, if we want to know about education and what changes may need to take place, we need to look at everyday activity within the field.
2. Everyday activity includes some freedom and autonomy influencing the way that people act on a day to day basis, including the roles that people assume and the day to day patterns of action.
3. Everyday activity nearly always involves a person interacting with other people so that people not only give meaning to their own actions but to the actions of others.
4. Everyday activity involves a process of negotiation of meaning and, through this we come to modify our understandings and views.

Each of these four 'foundation pillars' relate directly to symbolic interactionism which is a major theoretical position within the interpretivist paradigm.

The data-gathering methods used were document study, semi-structured interviews, and participant and non-participant observation through formal and informal meetings with the Associates, email correspondence, and phone conversations. The participants involved in the study included a sampling of Associates from the Western Australian Cohorts of 2015 and 2016. The central guiding question was, "How did the Associates of Cohorts 2015 and 2016 'deal with' the demands of the DU-TFA teacher preparation program in WA?" The sub-guiding questions that were used were in keeping with the interpretivist paradigm and were as follows:

1. Would you say that the DU-TFA program was demanding and what reasons do you give for your answer?
2. How did you 'deal with' the demands of the program during the two-year period of your enrolment and what reasons do you give for your answer?

3. Did the three-way mentoring approach used in the program; that is, School Learning Mentor (SLM), Teaching and Leadership Advisor (TLA) and School Academic Mentor (SAM), assist you and what reasons do you give for your answer?
4. What suggestions do you have with regard to any modifications of the program based on your experiences?

Limitations of the study

It was originally intended that a series of focus group interviews would be held over the space of a few months in mid-2017. However, as the researcher was mindful of the time that the Associates needed to invest in the interviews and of their significantly heavy workload, the interviews were held at the end of 2017 and before the start of the school year of 2018. Furthermore, whilst most of the Associates of Cohorts 2015 and 2016 had indicated verbally that they would be more than happy to participate in the study, it proved to be far more challenging than expected for the Associates to agree collectively on a given day and time during the holiday period. Hence, the interviews that were held were not in focus groups; rather, they were one-on-one, and there were only four participants in total (two from Cohort 2015 and two from Cohort 2016). Two of the four participants gave full face to face interviews whilst the other two responded by phone and by email. All four participants were comfortable and happy to participate in the study and did so, providing open and candid responses. As such, and despite the low number of participants, the responses provided by the four Associates gave valuable insight to the researcher on how they 'dealt with' the demands of the DU-TFA program. It must also be stated that the low number of participants means that the views presented in this paper are not necessarily representative of the respective cohorts; rather, they are the perspectives of four Associates involved in the program.

Ethical considerations

The researcher was granted Human Research Ethics approval by The University of Western Australia in September 2017. Participants were thereby provided with a Participant Information Form and a Consent Form. The potential benefits of the study, specifically for the TFA program and, more generally, for initial teacher education courses were also outlined.

Findings

It will be recalled that the central guiding question was "How did the Associates of Cohorts 2015 and 2016 'deal with' the demands of the DU-TFA teacher preparation program in WA?" The sub-guiding questions that were used to guide the interviews were as follows:

1. Would you say that the DU-TFA program was demanding and what reasons do you give for your answer?
2. How did you 'deal with' the demands of the program during the two-year period of your enrolment and what reasons do you give for your answer?

3. Did the three-way mentoring approach used in the program; that is, School Learning Mentor (SLM), Teaching and Leadership Advisor (TLA) and School Academic Mentor (SAM), assist you and what reasons do you give for your answer?
4. What suggestions do you have with regard to any modifications of the program based on your experiences?

The semi-structured interviews held allowed for other open-ended questions to be asked, shedding further light on the responses given by the participants. Each of the above sub-guiding questions will now be dealt with in turn. The responses provided by the Associates will be coded as such: A1, 2015; A2, 2015; A3, 2016; and A4, 2016, denoting in this way the chronological order in which the Associates were interviewed in their respective cohort.

The following responses were provided for the question “Would you say that the DU-TFA program was demanding and what reasons do you give for your answer?”

A1, 2015 Before starting the program I had heard from others about how demanding it could be (particularly at the start), so I anticipated it would dominate my life completely for all of Term One and much of Term Two.

A2, 2015 ...it was very demanding, especially at the start, and I think a lot of that was compounded by Deakin University coming on with TFA at the beginning, and also leading into Western Australia for the first time. The demands were the course itself; so the actual university part of it was only demanding because we didn't have the Western Australian Curriculum. To start with we were told to just do the Victorian stuff and it doesn't matter and those of us who had moved interstate; we needed to be able to absorb all the local knowledge. That did add a lot of pressure to begin with...

The classroom side of it... it's going to be demanding but I don't think it's any more demanding than any other career change but... there's a big personal sacrifice that you're making... because we were coming into school and didn't understand the time demands, the study demands and... we were doing a Master's so there was this increasing demand for our time, rigour, the amount of work we were expected to do while trying to fit that in around our school, and we weren't necessarily easily being given that 0.4 to study.

...and there were lecturers who refused, initially, to cater for Western Australia. There were also some staff at Deakin who were very positive and understood our concerns... when we're expected to prepare for a course for the following year, or an outline for it, and we were expected to use Victorian resources which we actually didn't/couldn't access because we weren't teaching in Victoria, that was extremely frustrating... the demands on us were huge...

A4, 2016 Yes, indeed; it was a highly demanding program due to very high expectations of the study load and also the fulltime teaching load of not 0.8 FTE. In addition to that, there were expectations of completion of the leadership modules by TFA and, particularly, the attendance at the interstate Intensives. I did find it quite challenging at times.

All three respondents agreed that the DU-TFA program was a demanding one, with two of the three making reference to both the study load and teaching load as being key reasons for the demanding aspect of the program. Associate A2, 2015 was critical of the perceived hurried introduction of the program to WA and laid blame with both DU and TFA for this phenomenon. The Associate was particularly critical of the Victoria-centric approach used in the initial stages of the program which, in his mind, added stress to the Associates' already stressful experience of being new to teaching and having to complete a Master of Teaching degree at the same time. Associate A4, 2016 reiterated that the combination of study and work load made for a demanding program and also made reference to further expectations that were held of the Associates.

The following responses were provided to the question "How did you 'deal with' the demands of the program during the two-year period of your enrolment and what reasons do you give for your answer?"

A1, 2015 My initial strategies were about time management. Before starting, I had hoped to settle into a routine by the end of the first semester of the first year that was along the lines of: complete all school related work during the week (with half a day on the weekend if needed) and allow a whole day on the weekend for DU. I wanted to manage my time in a way that prioritised my goal of maximising my effectiveness in the classroom rather than focusing on DU assignments that at times were more related to educational theory/ethics/ etc. I knew that the learning curve was steepest at the start, so I was prepared to sacrifice other areas of my life during the first two terms to focus on growing as a teacher.

I believed I'd be able to stick to my plan of having a healthy work life balance after the first semester or so, and pictured having time to be creative with my teaching. However, this was not the reality. I was a very slow planner, and it took me far longer than expected to prepare regular lessons. This ate into both DU and 'down' time. Essentially my initial plan fell apart, and I spent most of the two years working as hard as I could just to keep up with school demands and DU.

A2, 2015 I didn't deal with it very well. To start with, I don't feel that there was the support and because of those battles that we were having, I almost quit three times and it was really only the fact that we had a pretty close-knit wolf-pack here at (my school) that allowed me to lean on those guys cos they were experiencing the same thing. If I wasn't in a school with multiple Associates, I would have packed up and moved back to (my home state).

So, it did mean that the holidays were me trying to juggle study with trying to go back and see family, and I don't think I handled it very well but I also think there were other personal circumstances when I came into the program, which compounded that but we were all experiencing the same thing.

Oh, we were leaning on each other, and it wasn't just us. We were also trying to help the other Associates in the other schools because in Western Australia it was new. We were experiencing something different to everyone else in the country, and when our concerns were not being listened to and taken seriously then we could only rely on the local cohort, and we were definitely leaning a lot on (our TFA Manager and TLA). (She) was probably the reason why... we got through.

(The trips back home) helped. The rest of it was really just trying to survive day to day. I guess, the problem I had was the Intensives... going to Victoria actually compounded it and made it even harder for me to be able to focus on what my primary reason for doing the program was because we were expected to participate and we would have loved to have spent that time with family or people we were away from while persons in Victoria were not held to the same account and they would come and go, do whatever they wanted, and that actually almost derailed... the Western Australian experience for most Associates. ... there needs to be greater accountability for Associates. They have a job to do; they should be doing it properly and it's not holiday time at their entitlement; they are still learning; they are still getting their degree.

A3, 2016 *Associate A3, 2016 gave a dot point summary of the way in which he dealt with the demands of the Program:*

Daily:

- Walking the dog after school, taking in some exercise and fresh air;
- Down time/TV time;
- Girlfriend - "Something to look forward to!"; and
- Stressed but OK.

Weekly:

- Going out at weekends; and
- Chipping away at all assignments and school work during the year so as to remain 'on top of things'.

As needed:

- Relying on SAM for assistance with academic/MTeach matters, such as extensions, advice, guidance, etc.;
- Relying on TLA for advice and guidance on teaching practice;
- Relying on SLM for advice and guidance on teaching practice;

- Changing SLM for 2017 as SLM hasn't given the necessary amount of time needed by me, hasn't observed my lessons, hasn't been supportive enough, etc.; and
- Changing Pathway for 2017 from Research to Internationalisation so as to have more defined deadlines than the Research Pathway can offer (I need deadlines to cope).

A4, 2016 I did struggle, particularly the first year, like many of my peers as well, just trying to adjust to the workload and the expectations. The reasons why I did overcome those obstacles were basically a really strong relationship with my Mentor, which helped me to navigate the first year. And also it did help me to negotiate a reduction of my teaching load to 0.6. My contract was 0.8 but I managed to negotiate it with the school directly to 0.6, which obviously alleviated my working and studying load.

Additionally, being a Mum, it did help me to actually be around my kids and it obviously did have an impact on my mental health, my overall well-being, feeling a little more grounded and more in control, shall we say. And also, it did help me to improve and reflect on my teaching practice because I actually did have time to sit down and think about what I was doing, while the first year - it was basically just doing, doing, doing; no thinking; I can't even recall what happened the first year so... If you can't reflect, there is no point, right? You have to have time and also you have to be, emotionally, in the right place ...if you as a teacher are not in the right place, you cannot give to your students your full self...

All four Associates struggled with the demands of the program and all four sought out similar and/or different ways of 'dealing with' these demands. Some of the strategies employed by them included time management, leaning on their peers, seeking out family and friends for support, having some 'down time', keeping a consistent routine with assignment work so as not to lose momentum, seeking the assistance of the support structure provided by DU and TFA, changing course pathways, dropping from 0.8 FTE teaching load to 0.6 FTE, and taking time to reflect on the process of teaching and studying.

The following responses were provided to the question "Did the three-way mentoring approach used in the program; that is, School Learning Mentor (SLM), Teaching and Leadership Advisor (TLA) and School Academic Mentor (SAM), assist you and what reasons do you give for your answer?"

A2, 2015 So, the support structures did help... the TLA was the reason we got through that first year and we managed to fight all these battles together. Without that person coming into my classroom and being available to encourage you to just take another week; don't quit, keep going; that helped me. The in-school mentor... Being able to have that person who I

could go to straight away was invaluable. I didn't have much to do with my SAM in that first year. That probably made life a little bit harder because I felt like the battles that I had to fight for/we had to fight... we needed to... have someone fighting for us, wasn't in place. It probably improved after that first year but, to start with, I think, no one really understood the roles and they didn't understand the impact it would have on Associates.

The TFA-Deakin partnership came along too quickly, and I don't believe they should have branched out into Western Australia. They bit off too much to start with without any supports in place and then they also grew the size of the cohort significantly. There were too many changes.

I think people should have listened to us and they should have planned this properly; and even right down to placements, we were not given information about that – before Intensive, so the communication was poor. And, looking back, if I had have realised the support structures that weren't in place and the lack of organisation, then I would have not done that; I would not have entered the teaching profession that way. We shouldn't have been fighting with Registration; we shouldn't have had to think about that. It should have already been sorted. So, they came in too quick.

A3, 2016 Relying on SAM for assistance with academic/MTeach matters, such as extensions, advice, guidance, etc.; relying on TLA for advice and guidance on teaching practice; relying on SLM for advice and guidance on teaching practice; changing SLM for 2017 as SLM hasn't given the necessary amount of time needed by me/hasn't observed my lessons/hasn't been supportive enough.

A4, 2016 Yes; I have to say that, definitely, it did help me... but I think it was just more by chance... and that will be one of my critical points about the whole program. It just happened that I was just lucky to have a good School Mentor; it just happened that I did have an excellent Academic Mentor; it just happened that I did have two very competent TFA/TLA's... but, when it came to actually seeking the support from TFA headquarters when I was mentally not well, when I was struggling to keep up with the Program, when I was just struggling in general, I felt very isolated, and I felt really lonely, and I felt, actually, what was the point! I didn't feel that I was valued. But, having those good people around me made a huge difference, and some of those people are the reason why I'm here this morning, talking to you... but, as I said, it was just pure chance... rather than actually a well-designed and implemented plan, which it should be.

...one of the difficult things of being an online student, and I think that's something that needs to be somehow addressed because you just don't feel

really part of anything. You are in your little bubble and it's the same with the TFA... there were expectations that we should meet up, you should be talking to your peers, but then what happened... the reality is you have that immense workload, that immense study load; it's just impossible, particularly where it was like me where I was the only (Associate in my school). It is just an extra thing on top of everything else. It's just too much.

...I did have full support from my team but not from the Head of Department but that's another story... I went to ask for a reduction (to) my workload, they very promptly said "Yes, that's fine." So I think that shows that, actually, I did have a good relationship with my colleagues and my peers at the school.

There were mixed responses to this question, depending on the school situation and the personnel involved. For example, A2, 2015 attributed his survival in the program to his TLA and also to the support he received from his SLM, while he did not have much to do with his SAM in the first year. He blames the perceived rushed approach to starting the program in WA for the "lack of organisation", in his view, and the problems that eventuated because of the rushed approach.

A3, 2016 and A4, 2016, on the other hand, made good and regular use of the support structure offered by DU and TFA, assigning a large part of their success in the program to the three-way mentoring support structure that was put in place. A3, 2016 did seek a change of SLM for his second year in the program, whilst A4, 2016 felt that it was pure luck that she had an excellent support team around her, helping her to survive the program and to succeed at the end of it. With regard to using Deakin's free online counselling services, A4, 2016 explained the difficulty of doing so because of the isolation she felt as an online student.

The following responses were provided to the question "What suggestions do you have with regard to any modifications of the program based on your experiences?"

A2, 2015 So, the changes I would make is making sure that the university partner and Teach For Australia have very clear expectations and guidelines for the school, both for the support that they need to provide in the school (and) they also need to be fully aware of the stresses and the timing of assessments because if you take an Associate into a school without that support in place then I think they would really find that difficult.

Making sure the assessments and the assignments are relevant to what the Associate is actually teaching. I understand that sometimes they believe that this is what the Associate will be teaching but they're actually doing something separate. So, we just need to make sure that it is relevant, continues to be relevant...

...and actually getting the Associates together more... in Western Australia

I think we need to make sure that the Alum are involved but we also need to recognise that the first year out, they may have felt negative towards the program; they may have felt burnt out so maybe it would take time for them to want to re-engage with it, and everyone's got a different experience.

More face to face and realise that there is support around. ...make sure that there is an expectation of people to model – model behaviours, model the way you would structure a lesson. I think the university and TFA should do exactly the same thing. They should have an expectation of people to be there; they should model what they're saying, and the moment they go against what they're saying... the moment they stray, it also shows that they aren't practising what they preach... we need to rely on the people who are providing the program, and if we suddenly start seeing that they're not following what they're saying, then you suddenly lose respect for it.

... I think it was just tough coming into Western Australia; like, if I had gone into another jurisdiction, then I think it would have been easier. I think more the TFA personnel need to actually spend time in the schools and recognise that it is tough in there because if they're just sitting in an office, they don't actually understand what's going on. And I think the university partners/the university lecturers need to also see it because we are different. (Associates) are relying on the people organising it to have their back. If you grow too quick, there are going to be more problems. The moment you start changing... changing university partners I think is important; I think you need to learn from it, and I also think Deakin's done a great job; I think TFA has done a great job but I think there are still people who need to grow and they need to have a growth mindset rather than this fixed one.

A4, 2016 The first one is the Intensives. At the beginning... there was an Intensive prior to actually starting the year. ...travelling interstate, being a professional, being a mum; it's just too much. Unfortunately, I don't think the program really caters for all the people apart from brand new graduates...

And then there was also the expectation of another Intensive going back to Melbourne mid-year... and that's just too demanding so, actually, I'm glad to hear that now they've gone from that model to trying to do it more locally. That is the sensible thing to do... because, obviously, if you bring the training to the local level, what it means is that, hopefully, you will be able to cater for the local requirements. So, for instance, in my case, in the school where I was working, it is one of the schools that has the highest percentage of Aboriginal kids... those issues with Aboriginal kids should be quite prevalent in the training that is provided here... just to give me

the tools and just to give me some practical teaching practice or ideas about how to go about these things...

The only good thing about the whole Intensive back in Melbourne was those ten days of practical things. I will propose that, actually, you should do that in the school that you are going to be teaching in because that's the key. Because those ten days... will give you, really, a flavour of what you are going to go into; it will actually allow you to begin that crucial relationship with your mentor. ...it would have been very, very valuable to have had that experience, which is a shame because, working in the schools where we work you need that... So, instead of having everyone going to this same school somewhere where you are not going to be going there ever again, just do it for real in the place where you are going to be working... (Do it) at the end of the year just to give you a taste. And then... based on those ten days you can think about... the lesson plans that I'm going to be putting together; I know my students, these are the problems. It will prepare you much better to actually initiate your teaching for a year with a bit more 'meat' on the bone.

Definitely not to have just one Associate per school; that's a really bad idea! You need to have two/three Associates... for the purpose of support... talk to a buddy. ...life as a mature teacher, unfortunately, I felt that I didn't get the support that I needed. I mean; no disrespect whatsoever but the question is going back to TFA: What do you want? Do you want the same or do you want... people that actually bring something different. Well, if you want people that bring something different because, obviously, age is a good thing sometimes... then you have to provide for those people. So, that's where I felt that TFA didn't really provide for me, for my needs.

You have to take the whole person as a package because, definitely, I think, I was entitled to this opportunity and I have shown that I had what it takes to actually be able to be a great teacher but you need to give people opportunity.

It's very interesting because you are supposed to do this leadership model; you are supposed to do this... unconditional positivity, regard for your students and... that is beautiful but what about us? We are students at that point and that's the problem... Look, you just can't put everyone in the same box. Surely, you don't want to produce exactly the same teachers; it's just impossible because we are very independent. We are individuals, right? So you have to provide for people on an individual case.

I did enjoy (the assignments) so I felt that I was actually gaining lots of information and things that I could actually put into practice. Probably, the second year more because I did have the time to actually study and... think

about things and actually get it... because the first year was like, one and then another, and then another, and that's not good. And also, in the second year, when I did have to choose the subjects... I felt those were quite relevant. ...the ATA; I felt so good because it says, yes, I've been able to do these things. I hadn't even thought about it until that point so that was a game changer for me.

...if they were to alleviate the workload for the Associates, I think the final product would be much, much better... the school workload.

Probably, my only point that I would like to include is just these two years I came out of the program as a teacher and I feel as a teacher, and I want to be a teacher.

The two Associates who responded at length to this question offered a number of suggestions for modifications to the program. Their responses were constructive, practical and relevant to their experiences. They also made some positive comments, such as stating that the ten-day practicum at the end of the Initial Intensive in Melbourne was an important first taste of the teaching profession; that the assignments were generally aligned well with their teaching experience, particularly in the second year where there was a choice in the academic pathway to be undertaken; and that the Authentic Teacher Assessment (ATA) was a very important assignment and one which really made them feel like they had achieved the status of a 'real' teacher. Both Associates applauded Deakin University and Teach For Australia for the important and very good job that they are doing in this program.

The following key themes and suggestions for improvement emerged from the findings:

- The partner university and TFA should provide clear expectations and guidelines to the schools that host the Associates.
- The schools need to be aware of the pressure that the Associates are under, particularly during the times when assessments are due, and they need to provide support during these times.
- The university needs to ensure that the assessments are relevant to the Associate's practical experience.
- The program needs to include more face to face time with other Associates, including TFA Alumni, especially for those who are the only Associate in a school.
- There should be more opportunity to observe experienced teachers in schools for the modelling of behaviour management and effective teaching strategies.
- TFA and university personnel should spend time in these types of schools to see what the Associates are really experiencing.
- The program should avoid growing too quickly in a new jurisdiction.
- Everyone involved should learn from the previous TFA partner university.
- Everyone involved needs a growth mindset in practice, not just in words.

- The Initial and Mid-Year Intensives should be held locally rather than expecting Associates to fly to Melbourne during their holiday time when they need to rest and/or be with family and friends.
- Training Associates at the local level ensures that local requirements are being catered for.
- Issues relating to Indigenous students should be prevalent in the training.
- The first ten-day practicum experience should be in the school to which the Associate is assigned to give the Associate a 'taste' of what their experience is going to be like, and to provide the Associate with the opportunity to commence developing relationships with the staff and students of the school, as well as to start real preparation for their classes for the following year.
- Ensure that there is more than one Associate in a given school for moral support.
- Cater to all types of Associates, including mature-age Associates with a family by being a little more flexible and understanding.
- Appreciate that Associates are also students during the two-year program and that the 'unconditional positivity' reserved for students in schools should also apply to them from TFA and the partner university.
- Keep the assignments relevant and allow for choice.
- Alleviate the school workload from 0.8 FTE to 0.6 FTE.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to explain the Deakin University-Teach For Australia (DU-TFA) program for preparing teachers Australia-wide, with a focus on WA, and with the specific aim of offering insight into how the Associates of Cohorts 2015 and 2016 'dealt with' the demands of the program. In doing so, it was deemed necessary to provide some background information on the Teach For Australia program. The qualitative research methodology for the collection of data was provided, along with the limitations of the study and the ethical considerations that were undertaken. The paper then presented the findings of the study.

In summary, all four Associates interviewed agreed that the DU-TFA program was demanding, each giving reasons for their responses. The Associates dealt with the demands in various ways in order to cope with the program. There were differing views on the three-way mentoring approach used in the program, with some criticism and some praise involved. The Associates then made a number of suggestions on how the program could be modified for improved outcomes. The suggestions could inform TFA and its new partner university and also other ITE programs.

Despite the demands of the DU-TFA program, and any of its shortcomings, the Associates were praiseworthy towards the two organisations for the work that they were doing to prepare teachers for the purpose of providing an excellent education to all students in Australia.

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Dr Angela Evangelinou-Yiannakis is an Honorary Research Fellow and Lecturer of the Graduate School of Education, The University of Western Australia, from where she received her doctorate in Education in September 2009. She has been a leader and principal in independent schools from 1994 to 2016, inclusive, and is currently involved in initial teacher education.

Email: angela.evangelinou-yiannakis@uwa.edu.au

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