

## **Building Bridges: Collaboration for Student Success**

Dr Vanessa Reher<sup>1</sup>, Dr Vanessa Schneider<sup>2</sup>, Dr Cristiane Albuquerque<sup>3</sup>, **Kim Cartwright**<sup>4</sup>, **Ryan Keen**<sup>5</sup>, Shona Burton<sup>6</sup>

1 Griffith University, School of Dentistry and Oral Health, Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222

2 Griffith University, School of Dentistry and Oral Health, Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222

3 Griffith University, School of Dentistry and Oral Health, Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222

4 Griffith University, Library and Learning Services, Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222

5 Griffith University, International Office, Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222

6 Griffith University, Griffith Health, Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222

The Building Bridges Pilot Project, 2014, was initially created due to an identified need in the First Year cohort of the School of Dentistry and Oral health (DOH), following a communications course in Semester 1. Some students in that course were identified as not achieving the communication expectations and, concurrently, some students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year courses were being identified as having poor communication skills when placed in real clinical situations on placement. It was decided that a further targeted programme was needed to help address these particular first year students, so that when they reached real life clinical practice they had the necessary communication and cultural skills to function professionally.

**Participants:** 14 'at risk' students were identified and invited to participate in the pilot programme and from these 11 students in total agreed to be involved. Students were predominantly from Asian cultural backgrounds including Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese, with many having English as an additional language. All students had good academic scores and a minimum of 7.0 IELTS English rating, thus the communication issues they faced appeared not to be simply a lack of English or academic ability but rather to be a mixture of cultural and sociolinguistic issues, combined with a lack of confidence. It was hoped that by creating a positive and encouraging learning environment, which specifically focussed on giving the students opportunities to practice their communication skills, their confidence and ability would both improve. Additionally, in helping the students to perceive themselves as 'soon-to-be professionals' by providing realistic clinical experiences, it was hoped that their positive attitudes and self-efficacy would also increase.

**Teaching team and Programme:** In order to provide these students with a well-resourced learning environment, and to share the workload of the project, a group of professionals was involved in the planning, implementing and evaluating of the pilot project. This group included 2 dentistry academics and 3 student advisers (1 International Student Adviser, 1 Academic Skills Adviser and 1 Student Success Adviser). The project also had support of the executive level of the DOH school. A 13 week programme was implemented and evaluated with pre and post surveys of the participants. Reflective journals and discussions with students also informed the teaching team of the direction for the course and reflection of the course progress.

**Result:** From the evaluations analysed after the completion of the pilot project there was a definite improvement in both skill and confidence in 9 out of the 11 participants. The teaching team felt that for most of the participants the intervention had been very successful, if not a significant contributor to their ongoing success and self-identity. This increase in confidence also led some of the participants to volunteer themselves to become student mentors in 2015.