The People Behind the Papers (PBP) project began life as a potential topic for my own Masters dissertation in 2010. I eventually discarded the idea in that context, but it did take root in the form of a project, incubated within the Department of Psychology of Unisa by a number of supportive and passionate people.

What is the PBP Project? Put most simply it is a range of interviews with prominent South African social scientists, predominantly in the field of psychology for the moment. The interviews are generally focused on who the people are rather than the work itself. We are interested in the relationship between the person and the work. How do subjects such as personal history, national history, ethnicity, culture and the like contribute to the career path of a social scientist?

In order for someone to be eligible for an interview that person must have published at least one article in an accredited journal, which is the simplest selection criterion that we could think of. As a rule we use students as interviewers, usually post-graduates. Not only does this allow a student to spend time with someone whom they may personally admire, it also allows them to hone their interviewing skills.

We have a few more goals with the project. We wish to complement undergraduate student methodology texts with accounts of what research in practice is like, beyond the theoretical confines of methodology textbooks. We want to help define, discover and represent uniquely South African and African traditions in social science research. We would especially like to present a product based on this work to the international community of psychologists at the 30th International Congress of Psychology (ICP) in Cape Town in July 2012. We also want to convey the human element of the field to outside audiences and to research neighbours.

What happens to the interviews once they have been completed? First, we publish the video of each interview online soon after it has been completed. You can view the
videos here: https://sites.google.com/a/unisa.ac.za/people/. We encourage everyone with an interest in what the project does to peruse the interviews that have already been completed. Second, we transcribe each interview with the aim of publishing edited versions of the interviews in book form, but rough drafts of many interviews are already available online.

People Behind the Papers Interviews

The project is open to participation by virtually anyone. To take part there are a number of steps you need to take. First you need to identify a South African social scientist who has at least one article published in an accredited journal. If the team decides that we are interested in your subject then we will contact the person under the auspices of the project and ask for their agreement to be interviewed.

We will also attempt to help with video equipment should you not have your own, but this can only be done on a case-by-case basis and there is no guarantee as yet of equipment availability. If you are not perfectly comfortable doing an interview or
feel you lack experience, the PBP team is on hand to give advice so that you can be better prepared. After you have recorded the interview we will upload a copy of it to the project website. You are then expected to create a transcription of the interview as well as a short reflection of your experience of the person, your expectations, motivations for the interview, etcetera.

In order to ensure that your subject is not misrepresented you are expected to provide them with a copy of both the transcript and your reflection. If they should choose to they can then write a final word to make any amendments, observations or corrections.

If you are on the other side of the fence and feel that you have an interesting story to tell as a researcher, to be shared with colleagues and students all over South Africa, then we invite you to contact us. If we agree with you then you will be interviewed sooner rather than later!

The project team members are Eduard Fourie, Martin Terre Blanche, Khonzi Mbatha and myself, Sydney Butler of Unisa and Desmond Painter of Stellenbosch University. For more information about the project contact me, Sydney, at butlesl@unisa.ac.za or Khonzi Mbatha at mbathk@unisa.ac.za.

The PBP Project is beginning to grow in some very exciting ways. The latest twist is that we have now started a sub-project, People behind the Dissertations, which involves interviewing students who have recently completed their Masters or Doctoral degrees. Who knows where we will go next? Wherever that may be, you’re invited along for the journey!

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Sydney Butler is a final year masters student and post-graduate assistant in the Department of Psychology at Unisa. He is interested primarily in the relationship between people and technology. He runs a small educational technology blog at bloggingedutech.blogspot.com