

## Chapter 8

# MY STORY OF BONGI'S STORY

*“A portfolio is a unique picture  
of my personal learning, reflection and activities”*

Bongi (pseudonym)

### Personal Data

<b>Participant:</b>	Bongi (pseudonym)
<b>Degree:</b>	Studying towards a BA degree
<b>Region:</b>	Western Cape
<b>Age:</b>	23
<b>Gender:</b>	Female
<b>Peer help experience:</b>	12 months
<b>Experience in portfolio development:</b>	12 months
<b>Marks obtained for the portfolio:</b>	Excellent standard achieved (80-100%)

Bongi confirmed that she was comfortable with the interview being recorded and completed the consent form to participate in the research. She also gave her permission for copies of some of her documents to be included in this study.

### INTRODUCTION

This story is based on the transcribed interview between the researcher and Bongi. This chapter will focus on the researcher's impressions of Bongi and will be followed by a discussion of emerging themes, highlighting Bongi's experiences with developing her portfolio. The relationship between the researcher and Bongi will also be described in terms of what was found to be helpful in respect of the interview with Bongi and what the researcher

found less helpful. Finally, an overall analysis of Bongi's portfolio will be provided in the conclusion.

### **MY IMPRESSIONS**

Bongi was waiting in the counselling office when I arrived. I had previously met Bongi when I participated in the panel that evaluated the peer helpers in that region. Bongi was neatly dressed in a caramel jersey and fawn slacks. I experienced her as open and friendly.

Bongi's portfolio consisted of a plain green file (provided by the Peer Help Programme) as her working portfolio, and a 20 page flip file which she used as her presentation portfolio during interviews. Her presentation portfolio created a professional image and consisted of carefully selected items which were filed in her flip file. She used photographs effectively to illustrate her involvement in certain peer help activities. Some photos were displayed on the cover of her presentation portfolio while others were linked with certain of her reflections. She also used brightly covered paper to print some of her reflections on and this provided a colourful backdrop for the photos.

### **EMERGING THEMES**

The interview commenced with the researcher asking Bongi to tell her about her (Bongi's) own experiences with portfolio development. Bongi started off nervously, speaking rapidly at times. The interview was transcribed and the following themes emerged:

#### **Theme of initial difficulties with portfolio development**

Bongi mentioned that when her project leader discussed portfolio development for the first time, she failed to understand the concept or even what the word meant. She said:

At the beginning I thought ... what is it that [she - referring to the project leader] is giving to me ... I did not even understand the name portfolio ... I mean, I know the name portfolio, but did not understand it correctly.

Bongi explained that she initially felt that portfolio development was time consuming and she doubted her ability to complete the task. This made her feel anxious. She said: "It was a lot of work to do and I was so nervous... that I don't think I am going to finish this...". This linked with the **theme of the portfolio development process evoking initial anxiety**.

### **Theme of taking charge of the portfolio development process**

Bongi took charge of the process by taking a number of steps to overcome her initial difficulties, namely, she:

- **read the brochure** to gain an understanding of what a portfolio should contain.
- took **definite action**. She started typing up the information that she had at her disposal. She emphasised the fact that she personally collated the information that she typed up - thus indicating her ownership of the process.
- **consulted with the project leader** to check whether she was on track. She said: "Now that she [the project leader] gave me the pamphlet, I told myself let me just follow the instructions that are in there and just went back to ... [the project leader] when I finished everything so that she can see if I did everything correctly".
- **meticulously followed the instructions** to compile her portfolio. She said: "No, no, no, no, as I said, I followed the instructions, everything, I mean everything I was doing was according to the instructions".
- **was willing to learn** how to compile the portfolio. She said: "But when ... [the project leader] gave me the pamphlet with all the instructions ... I said OK - let me go through it."
- **was self-reliant and strived to maintain a healthy balance between relying on**

**herself and depending on the project leader** for direction. She said: "I wondered if I was going to do this in a correct way. I didn't know that, and I was so independent because I did not just want to depend on [the project leader] all the time".

These actions linked with a number of themes namely the **theme of self-efficacy**; the **theme of taking ownership of the process**; the **theme of consulting with others** and the **theme of following instructions**.

Through consultation with the project leader, Bonggi also received positive feedback on her progress, as well as information such as that she needed to obtain an A4 flip file to use as a presentation portfolio and to use the Lever Arch File as a working portfolio to collate her experiences. It therefore appeared as if the process of consulting with the project leader facilitated the feedback process and helped to boost Bonggi's confidence - thus linking with the **theme of portfolio development facilitating feedback**. After receiving feedback, Bonggi continued to develop and maintain both a working and a presentation portfolio. This linked with the **theme of following instructions**.

### **Theme of having a positive attitude towards portfolio development**

Throughout the interview it became clear that Bonggi viewed portfolio development in a positive light, despite her initial difficulties. Her statement in the covering letter of her presentation portfolio clearly indicated her positive attitude toward this career tool and linked with the **theme of goal-directedness**. She wrote:

A portfolio is a unique picture of my personal learning, reflection and activities. I am writing this portfolio because everything that I am doing in my life such as the skills and experiences that I am getting, I want to put them in my file chronologically. I want my interviewers to see what I have and what I want to achieve in future.

Bongi, therefore, viewed portfolio development as a worthwhile process and the portfolio itself, as an important career tool with a specific career focus. The **theme of portfolio development being a worthwhile process** was confirmed in a number of Bongi's statements during the interview, namely, she believed that:

- the portfolio was **a tool to help her reach her career goals**. She said: "In order to get to the Masters [referring to the degree] I will work very hard ... do a lot of volunteer jobs and have experience in counselling and I think that my portfolio is a good start for me".
- **the portfolio contained the story of her life at Unisa**. She said: "I've got it, I've got it. I have got all [emphasised] my life here. Everything that was happening to me by that time".
- portfolio development was a **worthwhile process and felt that she had gained confidence from compiling it**. She said: "...now I think it was a wonderful [emphasised] idea. Because with my career as well, my career being a psychologist in future, I think this is very, very, very, very [emphasised] good for me because now I am so confident, I feel so confident".

As Bongi viewed the process as worthwhile, she committed herself with enthusiasm and creativity to the portfolio development process. A number of aspects in her portfolio pointed to this creative involvement namely: (1) the creative front cover of her portfolio and the clever use of photos; (2) the development of a time line to depict her development from June 1998 when she wrote Matric, through to her appointment as an Assistant Student Counsellor; (3) the drafting of a comparative reflection between the peer help and the Nicro training. This allowed Bongi to compare the two types of training that she was involved in and helped her to identify

similarities and differences of approach.

The theme of having a positive attitude towards portfolio development was however not limited to the portfolio development process only. Throughout the interview Bongi referred to a number of incidents that she reflected on where her positive attitude enabled her to overcome difficulties namely: (1) her sensitivity of being a second language user of English; (2) her initial hesitation about speaking in public and in front of groups; and (3) her initial doubt about her chances of being successful in studying at Unisa. It therefore seemed as if Bongi had an innately positive attitude which helped her, not only to overcome numerous hurdles, but also in developing her portfolio. Through reflection Bongi became aware of this characteristic - thus linking with the **theme of developing self-knowledge**.

The theme of having a positive attitude towards portfolio development also linked closely with the **theme of a belief in her ability to succeed**. Despite Bongi's anxiousness and her concern about the volume of work she had to complete to compile a portfolio, she displayed a firm belief in her ability to complete the task successfully. This was also highlighted in her narrative essay where she reflected on her growth over time. She wrote:

This is where I am today, doing part-time counselling. I believed that here in this world, you do not need to be scared of anything and believe in yourself, everything will work out and you will be successful...

This linked with the **theme of self-efficacy**.

From the aforementioned, it is therefore apparent that once Bongi understood the concept of portfolio development and started taking charge of the process, her attitude towards this tool changed. She started viewing it as an important tool with a specific career focus. She described it as a worthwhile process as the product contained the story of her life. Her positive

attitude also linked closely with her belief in her ability to succeed. The theme of having a positive attitude towards portfolio development therefore linked with a number of themes namely: the **theme of goal-directedness**; the **theme of portfolio development being a worthwhile process**; the **theme of developing self-knowledge**; the **theme of a belief in her ability to succeed** and the **theme of self-efficacy**.

### **Theme of reflection on goals and goal directed behaviour**

Throughout the interview with Bongi it was clear that she used the portfolio to reflect on her goals and her goal directed behaviour. Bongi had a clear focus of what she wanted to achieve and that influenced the decisions that she made.

Bongi used her portfolio to **reflect on past goal directed behaviour** to analyse the rationale for the decisions that she made, namely, she:

- decided to become a peer helper as she wanted to join a student structure on campus and help her fellow students. She said: “In 2001 I thought that what if [I] ... join peer helper ... it is a passion of mine to help other people and I wanted to join a group”.
- decided to apply for a contract position at the Bureau for Student Counselling and Career Development because she viewed this as an opportunity to develop her skills, which she wanted to use to help others. She said: “I told myself that I will go to the Bureau and do a lot of volunteer work so that I can gain communication skills, for helping people from different walks of life”.
- enrolled for additional training to improve her skills and knowledge. She enrolled for a computer literacy course and Nicro training for abused women. She said: “ ... I joined Nicro’s ... Women Support Centre for training dealing with battered woman ... I went there because I wanted to gain more experience in counselling and [to understand] why women are abused by their husbands”.

Bongi also reflected on activities to **determine her future goals**. The following are examples

of how she involved herself in specific projects to gain skills and experience which she planned to use in future:

- She attended workshops to gain skills which she planned to use in future to train others in her community. She said: “ ... maybe if I could have my own workshops one day specifically like in the townships, just to train people in the community as well.
- She participated in additional training workshops to develop skills related to her future career. She said: “I did the course [referring to Nicro training] because I was very interested in counselling and I believe it will assist me in my career as an Industrial Psychologist”.

Bongi also reflected on her portfolio development process, clearly indicating what her goals with her presentation portfolio were and how these linked with her career goals. She reflected:

According to the documents and the handouts that I have in my file, I want those ... documents to indicate that I really want to be an Industrial Psychologist. The aim of my portfolio is to prepare myself when I am going to the interview. I want to show my interviewers this is what I did, and this is what I achieved. I do not want to struggle answering questions during the interview and also not to forget the skills and experiences that I had. I also want to display all the skills that I learnt from the Bureau especially listening and counselling. Those referring me to be a good Industrial Psychologist.

In summary, it is evident that Bongi used the portfolio to reflect on her goals. Through reflection Bongi understood the rationale for her participation in specific activities; helped her to identify what she would gain from her involvement and assisted her to determine her future goals. The reflection on goals also helped her to determine why she was developing her portfolio, what she stood to gain from it and how she could use it. This linked with the **theme of using the**

**portfolio as a career tool** and the **theme of on-going reflection on experiences.**

### **Theme of on-going reflection on experiences**

A recurrent theme during the interview with Bongi was that she used the portfolio for on-going reflection on experiences. From these reflections it seemed as if Bongi benefited in a number of ways:

- **She increased her self-knowledge and became aware of her skills.** She also learnt that she has the ability to motivate others. She said: “What I learnt from this course is more effective counselling. I believe I have the skills for that and for me it is easy to encourage and motivate a person, rather than to destroy him/her...”.
- She **became aware of her goal directedness, dedication and perseverance** by reflecting on an incident where she was involved in an accident while travelling from home in a taxi to Unisa to write an exam. As she was not injured she insisted on being taken to Unisa to allow her to write the exam. She reflected:

I was in the taxi travelling ... where I am staying and I was writing my last paper at 09:00. Where we had an accident. After I woke up, I called my mom because I was not injured. She came to pick me up and I refused to get into the ambulance. It was after 08:00. I told my mom that I wanted to go to Unisa to write the exams and she said no, she did not think I could remember everything, but I said no I can. I went to the exam room in time and I wrote my last paper. I passed the paper with 57%. I always tell myself that in my life I don't want to give up at all.

This linked with the **theme of developing self-knowledge.**

- She **used the portfolio to process personal trauma**. She reflected on a highjacking incident that her family survived. She said: "... I can see now with the portfolio it is not ... only the work related stuff, also your personal life. It can also include that". It appeared as if this written reflection allowed Bongi to process her feelings around this specific incident. She said: "... immediately when you put all those things down you can see ... there is something that happened to you. It is not in there anymore (pointing at her head) it is here... (pointing at her portfolio)".
- She **reflected on negative experiences in order to learn from these**. Bongi reflected in her portfolio on a negative experience that she had when she assisted a student with a concentration problem. She reflected as follows:

One experience that I had at Unisa that taught me a lot was this student who told me that it is difficult for her to focus on her studies. She asked me if there is a minimum time for students who are working and I said she can spend four hours per module per week and I gave her the study skills pamphlets and told her about the study skills workshops. She asked me whether I am also a student at Unisa and I said yes. She asked me how many modules I am doing, and I said six ... I answered because I always take six and as soon as I register at Unisa I always start studying in order for me not to work under pressure when it comes to the exams. Her husband came to see ... [the project leader] and said that, I said to the student that she is so stressed and that she has a low intelligence. I was so surprised and shocked when ... [the project leader] told me that. What I learnt from that situation was not to take it personally because everything that I said was not bad or wrong.

During the conversation between me and the student, I did not pick up anything wrong [negative] from her, so she must have misunderstood me. So now I know what is my responsibility at the Bureau and how to deal with difficult students and problems like that. The risk that I am taking also as a student makes me know how it is to deal with other students. Maybe my explanation or my answers made the student think that, for me to do six modules and for her to do two modules, I am more intelligent than her, which is not true.

This reflection helped Bongi **to learn from this negative experience**, encouraged introspection, and helped her to **take ownership for her part** in this unfortunate situation that occurred. Through collaboration with the project leader Bongi managed to understand how the student's own perceptions influenced her understanding of the situation. This linked with the **theme of portfolios facilitating debriefing**.

- She used the portfolio to **learn from her own behaviour** and identify areas for improvement. She shared the following in one of her reflections on her behaviour during the selection for Assistant Student Counsellors: “Sometimes I respond too quickly and after that I keep quiet. It is one of my weaknesses but I ... will work on it” - thus linking with the **theme of developing self-knowledge**.
- She used the portfolio **to identify her weaknesses which allowed her to identify areas for future growth**. She reflected on her counselling skills and identified aspects of her skills and knowledge that needed to be improved. She said: “The aspects that I have not explored in-depth is, the BPrimEd [referring to the compilation of the degree] and I would like to explore that further and also questioning skills”. This enabled Bongi to set future goals to pursue. This linked with the **theme of identifying future goals**.

From the interview it was evident that Bongi was **comfortable with the process of reflection**. She also confirmed that she found the process beneficial as she felt a relief after reflecting on paper. She said:

So immediately when you reflect, something just comes up, even personally, not about Unisa stuff only. Your personal things, you can also write about them. Immediately you write something that is in your mind [on] a paper, it just goes out [meaning that you feel a relief].

Bongi admitted that she, at times, forgot to reflect on some experiences. She omitted to reflect on incidents such as: (1) the testimonial received from the project leader that she was particularly proud of; (2) the exceptionally high number of volunteer hours that she worked; (3) being the top student in terms of volunteer hours rendered; and (4) her contribution towards the peer help office administration. This linked with the **theme of lack of reflection on significant experiences**.

Bongi also confirmed that although the portfolio process enabled her, initially, to reflect on experiences, the newly developed Critical Reflection Sheet (see Appendix D) had improved her reflexive abilities. She felt that the Critical Reflection Sheet allowed her to reflect experientially in detail. She said:

Because you know, with the experiential learning cycle, you experience first

... then you feel ... from the feelings you analyse and compare, and then from comparison what it is that you can do differently from what you have experienced.

Bongi confirmed that she was excited about this new way of reflecting and thought that she would be able to reflect more effectively by using this structured method. It therefore seemed as if Bongi's reflections, initially, lacked structure. The Critical Reflection Sheet has, however, assisted her to reflect in a more structured manner. What is important is that Bongi had a number of examples of earlier reflection exercises in her portfolio. She continued to reflect despite the uncertainty and difficulty that she experienced. This linked with the **theme of following instructions** and the **theme of taking ownership for her own learning**.

From the examples received from Bongi it is also apparent how the structured way of reflection had helped her. Initially (see Example 1 on p. 180) she merely described the context and what she had learnt. The Critical Reflection Sheet (see Example 2 on p. 181) allowed her to describe the context of what happened, guided her to reflect on her feelings, required from her to analyse what she had learnt, and allowed her to note what course of action she would take in similar situations in future:

**Example 1: An example of Bongi's earlier reflections**

I heard at Student Counselling there is the peer help volunteer jobs for those who want to join. I went there because I wanted to be involved as well. I went to an interview for peer helping and also attended 3 day training. To me to be a peer helper it means a lot because in future I want to be an Industrial Psychologist. Then for me it is a good start because it is a passion of mine to help other people. ... from the peer help I learnt a lot because before I became a peer helper it was difficult for me to speak in front of other people as I said earlier on.

I learnt different skills like decision-making, whereby you don't have to decide for a student or a client, listening or empathic listening skills is the ability to listen to someone's ideas or feelings, the purpose is to gain knowledge, experience and skills that I can apply one day to the job that I want to do. The other thing that I want to know is how to identify the problem and related it to what has happened. I want to apply what I know and what I am good at in terms of the abilities, the things that I have done and looking into the future. The aspects that I have not explored in-depth is, is the BPrimEd and I would like to explore that further and also questioning skills.

I can do things differently because I have goals in my mind and the other thing that I can do differently is to work hard in order to be successful in future. How? Because I don't give up so easily in life until I find what I want or be what I want to be. The problem that are preventing me from achieving my objectives are languages. Because I am willing to be fluent to other languages as well, but that does not mean that I won't fight those problems. I can work on my weak point all the time. To deal

**Example 2: Bonggi's reflection on her involvement in a community outreach project according to the Experiential Learning Cycle**

It was my first time to participate in a community outreach project. It was also a very good experience to see that you can actually be out there and provide something such as career guidance that I did not get when I was in high school.

**Feeling:**

I was a bit afraid of speaking in front of a group of students. Because of, the part of me that wanted to be there, I had to take that feeling away and do what is necessary for me and other students. We divided the class into small groups, and what I observed is that my students were very interested in what I was telling them about Unisa.

**Analysis:**

I learnt how to deliver the information that I have got and also how to handle myself in a situation like that. I also learnt how to deal with new faces and also to deal with the group of young teenagers who were asking a lot of questions.

**Action:**

The changes that I need to make is to practice the presentation skills because one day I also want to see myself doing presentation in front of groups.

From the examples that Bonggi shared during the interview it is clear that her reflections were data rich in terms of both the depth of the reflections and the breath of the experiences that

she reflected on. The reflection exercises and the benefits that Bongi gained from regular reflection linked with the **theme of developing self-knowledge**; the **theme of portfolios facilitating debriefing**; the **theme of identifying future goals**; the **theme of lack of reflection on significant experiences**; the **theme of following instructions** and the **theme of taking ownership for her own learning**.

### **Theme of monitoring of growth and skills development**

Bongi confirmed that there had been growth and development in a number of aspects in her life. Many of the issues that she highlighted were as a result of her reflection on experiences - thus allowing her to provide the context in which the growth took place or the skills were developed.

She mentioned that her growth in confidence was related to the fact that she had compiled a portfolio and that she could, through the items in her portfolio, provide evidence of her development should she be required to do so. She said (speaking softly while weighing up her words):

There has been growth and development ... because I know, for example, if I'm going to an interview now, ... if they are asking for documents ... or the evidence ... then I'll just show them, in confidence, because I know that I collected all the information .... I will be able to give it to them because I know that they are here and that I have checked them ... and I have reflected on them as well.

This linked with the **theme of growth in confidence** and the **theme of using the portfolio as a resource file**.

Bongi, furthermore, confirmed that by writing her narrative essay and by reflecting on what has

happened during her period of study at Unisa, she had been able to monitor her growth over time. She also confirmed that the portfolio allowed her to express herself in a confident manner. She said: “[a]nd with the portfolio as well. If I can go back to 1999 and come back again to the portfolio that I did, both portfolios that I did, ... I did develop”.

Bongi continued to share that she also developed a number of skills through participation in the peer help programme. She used the portfolio to reflect on these developments:

- **communication skills.** She said: “I learnt how to communicate with students... and how to communicate with them in the working environment [as an Assistant Student Counsellor] ... and I learnt ... how to communicate with people from different walks of life”.
- **teamwork.** Bongi shared that she had developed skills in teamwork, as she formed part of both the peer helper group as well as the Assistant Student Counsellor group which required from her to work closely with her colleagues.
- **facilitation of a decision making process.** Bongi felt that she had developed this skill through training and assisting students in the peer help office. She said: “... [the] skills are the decision making process whereby you do not need to decide for a student, you can only give the student options and guidance”.
- **empathic listening skills.** As a result of the training, Bongi shared that she had developed “... listening, empathy, questioning skills, attending, values and ethics”.
- **portfolio development skills.** She said: “I even learnt how to make and create a portfolio of skills and experiences”.
- **presentation skills.** Bongi shared that she had developed this through her involvement in career guidance outreach activities and Unisa Open Days where she presented information to groups of students.
- **dealing with emotional issues.** She explained: “[t]he skills I learnt in this course included, counselling skills, when you are counselling a student at Unisa it is not the same as when you are counselling an abused women. Because most of the Nicro

clients are very emotional. It did help me to deal with more emotional ... students at Unisa”.

- **academic skills.** She said: “... I learnt ... [s]tudy [s]kills, mind maps, time management ... [t]hese skills enabled me to help students who does not know what to do [referring to managing their studies] at Unisa”.
- **career development skills.** Bongi also reflected on her involvement in an outreach programme and shared that she perceived this as developing some of her future career skills. She said: “I felt so happy on that day and I knew that my life was beginning to grow - and my career as well”.
- **interpersonal skills.** She said: “I developed abilities in interpersonal and communication skills”.

Bongi therefore used her portfolio to collate her reflections on her activities, which in turn, helped her to identify the skills that she had developed. She was therefore able to provide verifiable proof of the claims that she made in terms of her skills development. Bongi also confirmed that she used the skills that she had identified and had reflected on in her portfolio, to compile the section on her developed abilities in her CV. The following is an extract of Bongi’s CV which focussed on her skills development:

**Extract from Bongi's CV**

**DEVELOPED ABILITIES****Interpersonal and Communication Skills**

I obtained these through my work at Unisa Student Counselling and my volunteer work at the Nicro Centre for Abused Women. These abilities were further developed through the Unisa Student Counselling training which I completed in March 2001 and from, voluntary Counselling of abused women and peer helping. This taught me to be understanding and empathetic to people's problems.

**Organisation and Planning Skills**

I always plan what needs to be done in the office and I always check what we do not have in our office. I like to reorganize the office and organize studies and time effectively.

**Information Management Skills**

I learnt to manage different types of information firstly through assisting in outreach projects, handling the sorting of information, secondly giving both prospective and registered students the information as part of my duties at Unisa.

**Leadership Skills**

I was the organizer of Comsa (Communication Students Association). The aim of the project is to bridge theory into practice since I was doing communication as a subject. I invited some of the schools from the Western Cape to come and see what Unisa offers. I also helped my colleagues to teach the high school students computer literacy skills such as word processing and working with spread sheets.

**General**

I am an active peer helper and active Assistant Student Counsellor. I am a very hard working person, I always try to find solutions to problems and I solve them with empathy

It is therefore clear that Bongi used her portfolio to reflect on her involvement in activities with the specific aim of identifying the skills that she had developed. She, not only used her portfolio to collate her reflections and the evidence of her skills, but she also used this information to compile her CV. This linked with a number of skills namely the **theme of growth in confidence**; the **theme of using the portfolio as a resource file**; and the **theme of portfolio development facilitating CV writing**.

### **Theme of using the portfolio as a document centre**

During the interview it became clear that Bongi used her **working portfolio** exclusively as a document centre. She said: "This one ... [referring to the working portfolio] was just the collection of everything". The working portfolio contained information about the number of hours of volunteer service rendered; the list of projects she was involved in; the leaflets on academic skills such as time management and planning and exam preparation; examples of interest questionnaires; notes on the academic offerings and study possibilities at Unisa; newspaper articles of interest; letters from Unisa Management thanking her for her participation in the Unisa Open Day; and workshop handouts.

The **working portfolio or collection file** as Bongi called it, allowed her to collate the information on all her activities and achievements. She then summarised the information to be included in her **presentation portfolio**. These summaries often contained photos depicting her involvement in peer help activities.

### **MY RELATIONSHIP WITH BONGI**

I had met Bongi on a previous occasion when I was part of the panel conducting the peer helper evaluations in her region. During the evaluation it was clear that Bongi had developed

an excellent standard portfolio. I was therefore fortunate to have the opportunity to listen to what has happened to Bongi since the evaluation and to view the consistent growth that had taken place in her life and how she had reflected that in her portfolio. I have, on both occasions, experienced Bongi as a goal directed person who is hard working and who is achieving her set goals despite a number of challenges that she has to face.

Bongi is a second language user of English who is working hard on improving her ability to communicate in this language. Her sentence construction demanded active listening and concentration from the researcher to fully understand what she was saying. Bongi was clearly nervous at the start of the interview, and she continued to speak rapidly during our discussion. She did, however, speak freely about her experiences with portfolio development.

### **My perspective of what was helpful**

A number of aspects were found to be helpful in the interview. These related to the interview with Bongi on the one hand, and on the other hand, what was helpful in gaining an overview of Bongi's portfolios.

The social part of the interview commenced with a discussion about her baby and how she coped with balancing motherhood with her studies. This eased the start of the interview. I found it particularly helpful that Bongi was open and readily shared her experiences in using her portfolio as a tool to monitor her development. This helped me to gain an understanding of how Bongi managed the process and what benefit she gained from her portfolio.

Bongi was clearly enthusiastic about portfolio development and she shared that she thought the process was a great idea. It was therefore helpful to listen to her account of what the process meant to her, how it impacted on her development, as well as how she used it to monitor her progress.

During the interview I asked Bongi to talk me through both her portfolios and I asked her to explain documents and evidence as we went along. This allowed her to set the pace at which we were working and allowed her to place the emphasis on those items in the portfolio that she was particularly proud of.

Bongi compiled both a working and a presentation portfolio and it was very enlightening to see the meticulous manner in which she managed these two documents. Considerable time and effort went into the development of her presentation portfolio. She used photographs and coloured paper effectively to highlight her reflections and to illustrate her involvement in activities. Her creative involvement was also evident in the clever manner in which she drafted a time line of critical experiences since she left school. This clearly indicated that the portfolio had become a part of her life and not just a collection of documents to satisfy the requirements of her project leader.

Bongi's portfolio contained her most recent narrative essay which provided an extensive overview of her experiences as a peer helper. Bongi also used critical information in her portfolio, which she summarised in her CV. Her portfolio therefore contained the most recent copies of her narrative essay and her CV, which she updated regularly, without keeping copies of the previous documents. Valuable information that could provide an overview of her incremental growth over time was therefore lost. This is critical for the monitoring of growth and development over time and pointed to an important aspect that needed to be adapted in the Unisa portfolio training programme.

It was also enlightening to see how effectively Bongi used her portfolio as a career tool. Bongi's focus with her portfolio was on providing evidence of her career related skills that she had developed. She therefore participated in activities and workshops with the specific aim of developing such career related skills.

The interview also highlighted significant incidents that Bongi omitted reflecting on. This

emphasised the importance of regular interviews with the project leader to generate feedback and identify gaps in the portfolio.

### **My perspective on what was less helpful**

During the interview Bongi spoke very fast at times. Although I did ask her to speak slower, I failed to explore the matter further to find out why she seemed nervous.

Bongi wrote a number of reflections which were supported by interesting photos. As I wanted to include some of these in my study, I asked Bongi whether she would give me the material, which she misinterpreted and thought I wanted to keep the material for myself. The use of the incorrect grammar led to confusion during this incident.

### **Bongi's perspective of what was helpful**

On asking Bongi whether she felt that the individual interview focussing on her portfolio was beneficial, she said: "It helps me a lot". Bongi mentioned that the interview enabled her to identify areas in her portfolio that she could improve on. She said:

I think it is also wonderful to me as well because ... as you [referring to the researcher] are explaining to me and asking me all this kind of questions ... I also see that ... [dropping tone of voice] this is not quite right, I need to go back [and reflect on these incidents].

Bongi confirmed that it would be beneficial for a project leader and a peer helper to work through his/her portfolio once a year. She added that such a meeting would help the peer helper identify gaps and omissions in the portfolio. She also mentioned that the interview had helped her to realise that she needed to reflect on some aspects that she omitted to do. She said:

I think now that I am going through this interview I am even realising the stuff that I think I still need to go back and work on a bit. I am thinking of doing that.

The interview has therefore added to the on-going growth and development of the Unisa Peer Help Volunteer Programme as well.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bongi clearly managed her portfolio development process with success. From the interview it became apparent that Bongi developed a comprehensive working portfolio from which an excellent standard presentation portfolio was compiled. Her presentation portfolio created a professional image and was also graded as excellent during the peer helper evaluations conducted in 2002.

Bongi referred to her working portfolio as her collection file which aptly described the contents of this file. She used the working portfolio to file documents, important information and first drafts of her reflections on significant experiences. She then collated and summarised the information, rewrote and edited it and carefully selected significant material to file in her presentation portfolio.

The general organisation of Bongi's portfolio was carefully planned in terms of the layout of the information and its structure. The central purpose of Bongi's presentation portfolio was to provide verifiable proof of her skills and experience during a job interview. She used the basic structure for a career portfolio as instructed by her project leader. She also creatively added other significant information such as a time line depicting major events in her life since 1998 when she wrote matric. It was clear from the meticulously compiled presentation portfolio that Bongi had given considerable thought to presenting it as creatively as possible. The material that she created was neatly typed out, often printed on brightly coloured paper and effectively illustrated by colourful photos to highlight her involvement in the peer helper activities. She also used two photos creatively on the cover of her presentation portfolio, which immediately

attracted one's attention. Each photo had a caption briefly describing her role in the activity displayed in the photo. Although Bongi stated during the interview that she has all her life documented in her portfolio, it was clear that she structured her presentation portfolio in such a manner to contain carefully selected information aimed at a specific target audience.

Bongi is clearly a dedicated and committed peer helper. She has rendered more than 9 000 hours of volunteer service since she started as a peer helper in 2001. This commitment and dedication has provided ample experiences to reflect on and Bongi made excellent use of these opportunities. Her portfolio contained data rich reflections both in terms of the depth of her reflections as well as the breadth of the experiences that she reflected on. Through reflection on her range of experiences Bongi was able to identify a number of skills that she had developed. Her reflections also allowed her to provide verifiable proof of where and how her skills were developed.