CHAPTER 6

HIGH REGARD AND PARTICIPANT CONTRIBUTIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapters 6 to Chapter 8 shift the description and interpretation of the CDEP away from the instructional system to implementation and the learning milieu.

The aim of Chapter 6 is to address the next two questions of this study, namely: Question 2, “What contributions are CDEP participants making in their institutions and which of these contributions are as a result of participating in the CDEP?, and Question 3, “In what way/s are these contributions informed by learner-centred notions of ODL?”

The chapter begins by providing information on the CDEP participants and the enrolment figures over the period 1997 – 2000 in order to introduce the context within which the feedback about the programme and the contributions of learners in their organisations are discussed. Both the feedback on how participants regard the CDEP and the nature of contributions made by these participants in the different DEASA member organisations demonstrate the programme’s performance which, on the whole, suggests, strongly, that the CDEP is a successful programme whose delivery matches its instructional system in terms of content, participants’ reasons for enrolling in the programme and the knowledge and skills imparted. The evidence of this success is presented in verbatim respondents’ comments or viewpoints covering the reasons for joining
the programme, how these reasons have been met, the nature, form and content of the learning materials and the delivery methods used.

This evidence came from all three categories of CDEP participants and the sources are questionnaires, interviews, field notes and tutor-marked assignments. The term participants is used in this study in its broadest sense to include all stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the programme, namely learners, tutors and organisations. The CDEP learners are staff members employed in the organisations that are members of DEASA and are enrolled in the CDEP for staff development and training purposes. CDEP tutors are also staff members employed in organisations participating in the CDEP and are contracted by UNISA to provide part-time tutorial support to CDEP learners in the five DEASA member countries. COL provides sponsorship for learners’ enrolment in the CDEP through collaboration arrangements with DEASA. These arrangements were originally, that is from 1997 to 998, that COL paid 50% of the CDEP enrolment fees and participating organisations paid the remaining 50%. In 1999, this arrangement was changed to COL paying 75% and DEASA organisations 25%.

The chapter then moves on to provide further corroboration of this sense of the CDEP’s success by presenting evidence on the kinds of contributions that participants are making in their organisations and showing that these contributions are informed by notions of learner-centred ODL and that they are as a result of participation in the CDEP. Evidence on the contributions comes from all categories of CDEP participants in all five DEASA member countries.
To protect respondents’ confidentiality, fictitious names have been used in all direct quotations throughout this report. For the same reason, the names of organisations have been excluded in direct quotations. The names of the countries have, however, been included and not changed.

6.2 HIGH REGARD FOR THE CDEP

The identification of the CDEP participants and an indication of enrolment numbers over the period 1997 – 2000 provide an understanding of the profile of CDEP participants and also the size and spread of the programme in DEASA member organisations and countries. This also highlights the comprehensiveness of the high esteem of the programme and the reasons for interpreting this as indicating the seeds for its success.

Between 1997 and 2000 DEASA was the main user of the CDEP. Enrolments on the programme came from 17 (81%) of the then 21 DEASA member organisations. A comparison of the DEASA registrations with the total CDEP registrations shows that in 1997 when the collaboration began, the DEASA enrolments represented 37% (23) of the total CDEP enrolment number of 62 learners (UNISA-ICE 1998: 3). The situation changed thereafter to a more dominant enrolment position for DEASA. During the next three years the DEASA enrolment represented 100% of the 1998 total enrolment of 74 learners; 62% (45) of the 73 learners enrolled in 1999 and 71% (35) of the 2000 total of 49 learners. Because the focus of the study is on the DEASA-UNISA/SACHED-DETU collaboration, the private/individual enrolments were used here merely to demonstrate that DEASA was the largest user of the CDEP during the period.
under study. Feedback on the CDEP from DEASA, the dominant user, is, therefore, crucial for the providers.

Among the 17 organisations, the four main users are the two higher education institutions, UNISA and CES, and two secondary education organisations NAMCOL and LDTC. Viewed from a country perspective, Namibia and South Africa are the largest users with Namibia (CES, NAMCOL and NP/COLL) combined enrolments amounting to 63 and South Africa (ABEP, OLSET, SACTE, TSA and UNISA) amounting to 61 of the enrolments during this period. With a total of 124 enrolments, these countries represented 70% of the CDEP enrolments.

The number of tutors supporting learners during the four year period was ten (10). South Africa had, during the first year, 6 tutors and other countries had one each. During the last three years the number ranged between 5 and 6 per year which ensured at least one tutor per country. The sixth tutor supported learners from the South African remote areas.

Figure 6.1 lists the DEASA member organisations participating in the CDEP and the annual enrolments per organisation over the four year period 1997-2000. The number is higher than that in the survey sample in Chapter 3 because it includes all the 2000 learners, while the last survey questionnaires were sent out before some of these learners had enrolled. Four of the organisations listed in Figure 6.1, are either no longer members of DEASA (that is, ABEP, SACTE and MOH) or have merged with another organisation (that is, TSA and UNISA).
Figure 6.1: DEASA Organisations Participation Figures 1997 - 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANISATIONS</th>
<th>LEARNERS</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ABEP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BOCODOL/DNFE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CCE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. CES</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. DEMS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. EDC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. IDE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. IEMS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. ILS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. LDTC</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. MOH</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. NAMCOL</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. NP/COLL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. OLSET</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. SACTE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. TSA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. UNISA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>177</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback on the CDEP was received from completed questionnaires of at least one of the three categories of participants in each of the 17 member organisations as indicated in Chapter 3, Figure 3.3. In addition observation, interviews and perusal of documents including tutor-marked assignments ensured that most of these 17 organisations were covered. This means that the
views of the majority of the CDEP stakeholders’ were represented, thus, enhancing confidence in the findings of the study (Cohen & Manion 1984: 255).

Perusal of various CDEP documents and informal discussions during the familiarisation stage indicated that the CDEP participants found the programme very useful and relevant to the needs of their jobs. These views were corroborated in the questionnaire responses and interviews. The sections that follow provide evidence from these two sources of data.

6.2.1 Questionnaires

The reasons for participation in the CDEP given by each of the three groups are presented in Figure 6.2 below in the verbatim language of the respondents.

The first two reasons cited in Figure 6.2, for all three groups are a sound orientation to distance education or gaining/improving understanding of distance education and improving skills/capacity/performance in distance education. These main reasons listed as the first two groups in Figure 6.2 had combined percentages of 80%, 77%, and 86% respectively for organisations, learners and tutors. In the case of organisations and tutors, evaluation of the programme for later wider use was another reason mentioned. Some of the learners, on the other hand, enrolled through recommendation from their organisation and also because the course curriculum was closely related to their work or the course was the only one in this field.

95.5% (that is all except one) of the 184 respondents to the questionnaires said that the programme had met their reasons for participation. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 below show that there
was a match between participants’ reasons for joining the programme and the ways in which the programme was seen to have met these reasons.

**Figure 6.2: Reasons for participation in the CDEP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANISATIONS</th>
<th>LEARNERS</th>
<th>TUTORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide staff with new skill and refine existing skills, or provide staff development to improve performance of institutions and learners, or provide training and certification (50%).</td>
<td>To gain/improve my knowledge and understanding of distance education, or to acquire systematic and/or solid theoretical grounding in distance education (44%).</td>
<td>To help learners gain understanding and appreciation of distance and adult education, or share my distance education experience with others, or I realised enrolled staff needed support in order to succeed (57%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide a basic but sound orientation/theoretical background for staff involved in distance education, or coming into distance education which they can apply in their work situation (30%).</td>
<td>To improve my capacity and/or skill or performance as a distance education practitioner or I need to know how to deal with adult learners, or to improve my performance in supporting learners (33%).</td>
<td>Improve my own understanding of distance education, or I enjoy tutoring (29%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a way of evaluating the course in preparation for wider use (20%).</td>
<td>It was my institutions decision/recommendation or decided upon by my institution in line with change management (15%).</td>
<td>Wished to use the course more heavily in future for staff training or wanted to see how it worked (14%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course curriculum closely related to my current work or it is not often to find a course in this field (8%).</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In describing how their reasons for joining the programme were met, the majority of respondents mentioned that it was in terms of broadening their understanding of the principles of and good practice in distance education and that this improved their motivation and competence. For those organisations and tutor respondents who were participating as a form of evaluating the
programme, this reason had either been fully met or as some respondents have stated “I am now familiar with the course and I believe it can be used for further training” or “the course has covered almost every area of my institution’s activity”.

Figure 6.3: How reasons for participating in the CDEP have been met

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANISATIONS</th>
<th>LEARNERS</th>
<th>TUTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadened or deepened staff’s understanding of:</td>
<td>Improved my understanding/ knowledge of distance education theory and practice or it covered all the necessary aspects like how to deal with adults and/or distance education learners (62%).</td>
<td>Reasons were fully served or they were greatly rewarded and all three of my students passed and I hope I have been of help to my students, some I had limited contact with (60%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The principles and good practice of distance and open learning</td>
<td>Improved my competence/capacity/skills or I am in a position to serve my clientele better/know what is expected of me (25%).</td>
<td>Preparing to help others forced me to read critically (20%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Their target audience</td>
<td>It has good quality content/ curriculum or excellent example of interactive, student friendly study materials or exactly what I have been looking for (5%).</td>
<td>I am now familiar with the course and I believe it can be used for further training (20%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specific duties,</td>
<td>It was relatively affordable (4%).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or established a knowledge base for the needs of the jobs staff are doing (45%).</td>
<td>Did not meet any of the reasons for enrolling (2%).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has led to highly motivated staff or improved their performance tremendously or made them go the extra mile to offer good service or are now eager to further their studies (44%).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course has covered almost every area of my institution’s activity (11%).</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one respondent who said all her/his reasons for participating had not been met came from the learners group. This, as s/he said, was because the programme was not relevant to her/his
job as s/he was not involved in distance education but was a designer and producer of audio materials for a basic adult education programme. The respondent’s expectations were that the programme would provide practical tuition on how to produce audio materials. It sounded like s/he did not bother even to listen to the CDEP’s audio cassettes which contained different audio production styles ranging from talks, interviews, discussion groups to drama.

The overall positive appreciation of the programme resulted in 59% of the learners group responding to the question on how the programme has not met their reasons for participating by saying that, on the whole, the programme has “met my reasons” or by saying the question was “not applicable” or having “no comment”. For the rest, the programme had not met their reasons because it was “not detailed enough” or “not enough depth” or “regarding administration” or “no promotion/salary upgrade since completing the course”.

The three broad categories of strengths mentioned about the CDEP by all three groups were that:

- It is a good distance teaching package with “high quality” or “learner friendly” or “well designed/structured materials” which provided a “good coverage in breath of good practice in ODL” or “was relevant to participants jobs” or “was empowering” or “valuable for concurrent experience”
- Support for “learners and tutors was reasonably good” and some organisations “received no complaints from enrolled staff”.
- The mode of delivery, that is “print modules and audio programmes supported by face-to-face sessions was good/excellent”.
As indicated in Chapter 5 on the instructional system of the programme, the CDEP learning materials consist of five print modules and supporting audio-cassettes. ODL by nature involves the use of self-instruction materials and limited face-to-face contact. The learning materials are the main source of knowledge and learning for learners or as Rowntree aptly puts it:

> Whether “on-site” or “at-a-distance”, learners working with self-instruction materials have one important thing in common. Because they have much less contact with a teacher than “normal” learners do, they rely very very heavily on specially prepared teaching materials. That is, the teaching will have been largely pre-planned, pre-recorded, and pre-packaged (Rowntree 1990: 11).

ODL materials are, therefore, crucial for effective learning. Participants’ views on the nature and form of the CDEP materials, show that the pre-planned CDEP materials were well prepared and of good quality and matched the originators’ aim of producing a programme that will introduce learners to good practice in ODL. Response of between 63% and 67% on the quality of CDEP materials from the three participants groups are summarised below in Figure 6.4.

**Figure 6.4 Participants’ views on CDEP materials**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANISATIONS</th>
<th>LEARNERS</th>
<th>TUTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content well structured, learner friendly, relevant and application is immediate or support for learners and tutors, or delivery is good/excellent (65%).</td>
<td>High quality course materials or course really follows what it preaches in Module 2 (Distance Education), or content is very relevant or related to one’s job or very accommodative of the expectations of both practitioners and novices (63%).</td>
<td>This is a good distance education package or the learning materials are learner friendly, or well designed, or content is relevant, or general good coverage in breadth of good practice (67%).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The verbatim comments about the CDEP learning materials can be grouped into the following three categories:

- nature and form of materials: “high quality”, “well designed” ‘learner friendly”, “empowering’ clear, well written and published in a very interactive manner, multi-media style of presentation etc.
- content: has a good general coverage in breadth of good practice in ODL, “detailed tutorial letters and clear and broad well marked assignments”; “covers a large area of what DE is”.
- methodology: “open access to any person; “very little prior knowledge is needed”.

But between 33% and 37% of the respondents did not mention learning materials as some of the strengths of the CDEP. Instead in answer to the question “what are its (CDEP) major weaknesses”, they mentioned learning materials and indicated some of the problems that need addressing in the CDEP despite the overall positive response. These problems were corroborated in the interviews and will be discussed in the next Chapter.

**6.2.2 Interviews**

Interviews with different members from the three groups of participants also corroborated the above positive responses. Evidence from an interview with Angeline, a senior staff member of one of the largest users of the CDEP from Namibia, confirmed the reasons for enrolling staff on the CDEP and extended them to include the fact that the CDEP was the only available course in the DEASA member countries and that her earlier positive experience of studying with UNISA was also a contributory factor for enrolling her organisation’s staff on the programme.
Interviewer: Why do you register your staff on the CDEP?

Angeline: All my organisation’s staff had no professional qualification in ODL. The opportunity to register staff on the CDEP was very appealing. In fact at that time the CDEP was the only course available at that level. The decision to register staff was also part of the organisation’s staff development strategy. A UNISA course was an obvious choice for me since my experience of studying with UNISA made me confident that it was a good course. I did not know that a similar course was offered by the Open University of Tanzania, but I am not sure I would have allowed people to enrol on a course and institution that I had no adequate knowledge of.

Other evidence of the positive response to the CDEP are contained in the interviews cited in the next section, which, though, used to demonstrate learners’ contributions to their organisations’ operations also cover aspects of their views on CDEP materials, content/curriculum and mode of delivery. Pitso’s interview in Figure 6.10, in particular, notes the supportive role of tutor-markers like Mosadi whose comments on assignments were challenging, encouraging and allowed him to work through the materials at a level that suited his needs. The strengths of the CDEP will be discussed fully after Pitso’s full interview.

Despite the positive feedback suggesting the CDEP’s success, contradictions, problems and issues emerged from the CDEP delivery as the next chapter will demonstrate. These contradictions, problems and issues centre around why a highly regarded programme of this nature was neither extensively used as evidenced by low enrolments nor accordingly recognised and rewarded by organisations that employed the CDEP learners.
The contributions that the CDEP learners make in their organisations which are discussed below provide another view of the CDEP’s success. Similar to the high regard, the learners’ positive contributions in their organisations illuminate further the subsequent discussion of contradictions, problems and issues emerging from the CDEP delivery.

6.3 WHAT ARE CDEP LEARNERS’ CONTRIBUTIONS IN ORGANISATIONS?

After charting the positive feedback and high regard for the CDEP, this section of the study concentrates on the contributions of CDEP learners. It addresses Question 2, that is, “what contributions are CDEP participants making in their institutions and which of these are as a result of participation of the CDEP?” and Question 3, “in what way/s are these contributions informed by learner-centred notions of ODL?” Data from observations, questionnaires, interviews and tutor-marked portfolio assignments provided the information required to address these questions. The need to link tutor-marked portfolio assignments with application of CDEP ideas and approaches in organisations emerged during interviews with learners when this researcher was informed that concrete evidence on application of CDEP knowledge, skills and attitudes could be found in these documents. Learners felt that while observation of people doing their work was a useful method, the timing of the observation might not always coincide with fruitful application of ideas or skills. For example, an observation taking place during weekdays with a learning centre administration officer might not capture the essential nature and elements of a learning centre whose busiest time of interaction with learners and tutors is on Saturdays.
To demonstrate a variety of levels and ways in which the CDEP learners are contributing to ODL provision in their organisations, the learner-centred nature of these contributions and the influence of the CDEP in these contributions, five different situations are presented and discussed below. These situations are:

- A group interview held on 20 September 2004 with some of the CDEP 1997-2000 learners from Lesotho. The Lesotho interviewees preferred a group interview because they said they knew one another well, worked closely together and were not shy to speak in a group situation.
- Evidence from tutor-marked assignments of two learners from Swaziland and South Africa.
- Extracts from interviews with directors of two organisations from Lesotho and Namibia. These interviews were conducted on 20 September 2004 and 14 June 2005.
- An extract from a 2002 interview with a South African tutor.
- An interview with a 1999 South African learner who had changed his job after completing the CDEP.

6.3.1 Lesotho learners group interview, 20 September 2004.

The respondents in the interview below are all staff members of one organisation in Lesotho. Their job responsibilities fall within a range of ODL sub-sectors: learning materials developers; administration/typing/storeroom and printing officers; counselling/learner support officers and
operational level management staff and/or supervisors. The job categories of these learners match the CDEP’s stated target audience as described in the instructional system.

Figure 6.6 Group interview with CDEP Lesotho learners

Interviewer: The majority of the 1997 – 2000 CDEP learners who completed the evaluation questionnaire said that the CDEP was very useful in introducing them to ODL theory, practices and approaches. This raises for me the question of if, indeed, the CDEP is so useful to its users, how are they using it in their job situations. Could you please indicate to me how you are using the CDEP in your jobs as course writers, typists and other officers working in an open and distance learning organisation.

Lerato: CDEP e mpuletse monyetla. I am now doing an Adult Education Degree with the University of Lesotho. Our learners have problems. We have after our studies with the CDEP realised that our support services are not adequate and are now in a position to recommend the introduction of other kinds of support services like audio tapes and we know how these can be used by learners.

Bontle: We are also working with many people who have many and varied needs as far as resources are concerned. We are now in a position to advise how the scarce resources that we have can be divided among our centres. This is because we know the different sub-sections of distance education and what the needs of each sub-section are.

Kebohile: I have learned a lot about materials development. I know the different types of layout strategies that can assist learners to learn better when studying our materials. Even when we produce booklets, I am able to ensure that these are well developed.

Mary: When I started I was not aware of the people I was going to deal with. The course was an eye-opener. Now I know what to do in tutorials in the different courses that I am responsible for. I am able to speak the same language with the learners and to assist them as much as I can.

Bontle: Maybe what we now need is to find ourselves at the same level as our sister organisations in the development of materials. It will also be useful to meet with other course writers. We will be able to develop materials together and also learn from one another.

Interviewer: Who are you referring to exactly?

Bontle: I mean colleagues in other countries who are working at the same level as our organisation.

Modise: Materials from other institutions are good. If possible we should work with institutions like UNISA and even get our students to progress to other levels of study through
We can also collaborate in other ways with UNISA in getting the CDEP used in different ways within our organisation, for example, use it “go bula mamati” (open doors).

Mogotsi: As student counsellor, I obtained skills for counselling especially on the role of the tutor and how to handle tutorials. I am now doing a much better job than I did before this course. The one problem we are facing in our organisation is lack of resources which has resulted in understaffing. This has made it difficult to institute face-to-face counselling sessions. So though we have the skills for face-to-face counselling and know what to do, we are unable to implement these skills to serve most of our learners.

Karabo: As a writer and materials development officer, I am happy for the knowledge I have gained from the CDEP since it has taught me the distance education production line as a whole, not just course writing. The Management and Administration Module, in particular was very excellent because that made me see what needs to be done for distance education to be effective and what we, as supervisors, need to do to facilitate efficiency in the organisation.

Also as supervisor, I know what some of my colleagues have said about the value of the CDEP and also know how it has concretely improved their work. Some of these colleagues have said that the CDEP “e ba file lesedi” (light) of knowing what is involved in distance education as a total education system, not just what their printing department is about. They know who their learners are and how they can improve the products of their printing department to serve the learners better. One person who works in the storeroom has said knowing the distance education system and its learners has enabled him to arrange to do his specific job in a way that facilitate a better service for the learners. Even in the case of one of my colleagues who is a typist, the course has made her understand why the course writers want the typing to be done in a particular way and she is now in a position to even suggest how typing could be improved to serve the needs of the learner better. Even our director has noticed the difference in our operations after doing the CDEP.

The overriding contributions made by learners in their organisations can be deduced from the above interview as being the cascading of the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained from the CDEP into various aspects of the learners’ jobs. The nature of the knowledge, skills and attitudes is described as having “opened doors” by providing access for further studies or in other respondents’ language “e mpuletse monyetla” or enlightening “e ba file lesedi”. This knowledge has enabled learners to identify institutional weaknesses and recommend suitable changes. The recommendations they have made have contributed to the introduction of new support strategies.
like audio cassettes, or advice on how scarce resources can be shared among centres, or how to improve the products of their printing department to serve the needs of the learners.

The knowledge gained has also helped to identify forms of collaboration in other areas like materials development and learner progression to higher levels of education:

> Materials from other institutions are good. If possible we should work with institutions like UNISA and even get our learners to progress to other levels of study through collaboration (Modise in Figure 6.6).

The respondents in the above interview attest that the contributions they are making are as a result of participation in the CDEP. This confirmation comes from individual interviewees and from a supervisor who reports on her experience, the comments from her colleagues and her knowledge of the improvement in her colleagues’ performance:

> Also as supervisor, I know what some of my colleagues have said about the value of the CDEP and also know how it has concretely improved their work (Karabo in Figure 6.6).

This provides a balanced view of the nature and quality of CDEP’s role in the contributions learners are making in their organisations by showing that the supervisors and higher level managers (“Even our director has noticed the difference in our operations after doing the CDEP”) recognise the contribution of the CDEP to improved organisational performance.
That the contributions made are informed by learner-centred notions of ODL is confirmed by statements like: “I know the different types of lay-out strategies that can assist learners to learn better when studying our materials”. “Now I know what to do in tutorials in the different courses that I am responsible for. I am able to speak the same language with the learners and to assist them as much as I can.” “As student counsellor, … I am now doing a much better job than I did before this course”.

The problem about lack of resources which is mentioned in the above interview will be discussed in Chapter 6 which focuses on problems experienced by learners in their application of the CDEP knowledge and approaches.

6.3.2 Evidence from tutor-marked assignments

Evidence from tutor-marked assignment provides another dimension of the contributions CDEP learners are making in their organisations. The three extracts presented in Figure 6.7 represent three different kinds of application of knowledge in the contributions made by learners, namely: theoretical knowledge of ODL and practical application of skills in an administrative context and in learner support and tutorial services respectively. These applications match the requirements of the jobs of the three categories of CDEP learners, that is, Mzwakhe, a senior academic staff member with a doctorate degree teaching at a university in Swaziland, Ntombizodwa, an administrative staff member with a secondary education level qualification working in a learning centre in a rural town in South Africa and Mubu, Lecturer responsible for student support and tutorial services.
Figure 6.7: Evidence from tutor-marked assignments

i) Mzwakhe, a senior academic staff member from a Swaziland organisation.

I had a problem defining distance education because of the size of my country. My country is small, just slightly over 17,000 square kilometres. One can travel from North to South and East to West within one and half hours. The public transport system is good. Distance is not a constraint to distance learners. In fact some distance learners who are not employed spend five days, eight to nine hours a week in the library of the main campus reading and/or consulting course lecturers. At times, they “gate-crash” face-to-face classes of the full-time students. Because of this gate-crashing, one professor remarked to me that in Country B distance education was but in name.

But after doing this activity, I had a clearer understanding that “distance” was not the only factor defining distance education, although it was one of the major ones. I now know that in distance education the learner is at a distance from the teacher/educator; she/he studies at times that suit him or her; she/he can learn anywhere, pace himself/herself; she/he is separated from the teacher/educator and sometimes from others; and she/he uses specially prepared self-instructional materials and other learner support media and systems (modules, study guided, audio and video cassettes, radio, face-to-face tutorials, study groups, counselling and well marked assignments.

Later, I used the knowledge I had gained after doing this activity to explain to my dear professor that “distance” was not after all the only differentiating factor. There were other factors. I told him that in classroom education classes were scheduled to begin and end at certain times, were held regularly in school buildings, everyone learned in the same place, learner missed out on what was learned if they were absent from classes, they learned at the same time, same pace, used textbooks, and teachers dictated the learning pace. In distance education (I explained to my dear professor) learners selected where, when, what, and how they study, did not miss work covered because they had self-instructional materials and other support media, set up their own study time-tables, studied on their own or in groups, dictated their own study pace and set their own tasks. In short, distance education is more learner-centred, while classroom education is more teacher/educator centred.

ii) Ntombizodwa, a learning centre administrator from a South African organisation

I gained a lot of from this particular piece of work that is work based on Module 5. In my learning centre, that is where I work in this town, we have records of tutors’ personal information, students’ personal information, attendance registers, correspondence and receipts.

I did not know how to go about keeping these records. One day my Coordinator asked me about a correspondence letter which we received from UNISA. This particular letter explained about the conditions under which students are to deregister. I did not know where the letter was because all the materials we were using were in a box. We threw everything
into that box. This was the way the office operated when I started working here and was never informed to change it.

After I went through this course I know exactly what to do. This means I have learned something of value. Now I have the following records filed neatly:

- Tutors personal information
- Students personal information
- Registers
- Correspondence
- Fax records
- Photocopy records
- Expenditure.

It is through all the above documents that I got raw data or information to break down into smaller pieces and analysed into valuable information for future use and reference.

iii) Mubu, Lecturer: student Support and Tutorial services at a Namibian organisation

I am a distance education practitioner employed by my organisation with the specific job title of Lecturer: Student Support and Tutorial Services. I have been involved in distance education for about three years and have benefited from several short courses, workshops and seminars, and have thus gained some experience and practice of distance education. But none of those courses helped me like this one. This course has, in my estimate, significantly improved my understanding of distance education. I cannot say what fraction of my knowledge in distance education it has contributed, but wish to confirm that it has, so far been very useful eye opener.

On the one hand I wonder how I could practice distance education for about three years without the crucial benefit of this kind of course. I am not sure if I could, on the other hand, have adequately appreciated the course first, before getting involved in distance education for sometime without the enlightenment it provides. In this regard one would say the course is well designed for people like me who are already involved in distance education….

Module 4 is special to me because it improved my understanding of the necessary broad responsiveness of student support and tutorial services. I would, for example, still consider the course worthwhile if this was the only module available. Nevertheless, the equal importance of the other modules reflects on the overall usefulness of the whole course. Several reasons make the 4th module useful to me:

- It clearly explains what is involved in my kind of job. I had before often sounded vague when trying to explain what distance education is and how I am a lecturer who does not really lecture, in the typical sense of the word, but rather serves as a member of a team which provides a variety of support and tutorial services to distance students.
- It increased my ability to train newly recruited part-time distance education tutors. This was through increasing my knowledge about student support and tutorial services. For example it supplied me with helpful discussion material for tutor training, like the analysis of tutorial speech at the Open University as reported by Steve Murgatroyd. This is helpful because newly recruited residential tutors overconfidently tend to be sceptical about what distance education educators can teach them about tutorials.
Recruiting and training of marker-tutors form part of my duties of employment.

- It elaborated on the student support role of outreach centres. The module informed me that an established system of community learning centres comprise a student support system. It gave examples of what centres can do. …

With respect to me the course has, by example, substantially succeeded. I feel that by working through all the study materials I have become a better distance education practitioner, more interested in further improving my knowledge, skills and attitudes. The resources placed into developing it were, in my view, well invested. I feel proud to be involved in this beneficial course which several other distance educators in Southern Africa are working through.

I think, finally that this course is a powerful multiplier of human development. I am pleased to have worked though it, and will treasure the set of five printed modules and accompanying seven audio cassettes. Through this study material I have interacted actively with, and learnt from many people…. To them, and all others involved I say many thanks.

In a dual mode institution like the one where Mzwakhe works, the ODL section of the institution is generally regarded as a step-sister or second best. Mubu also alludes to this when he notes the scepticism from newly recruited tutors from contact institutions on what he, as a distance educator, can teach them about tutorials. ODL practitioners in such a context find themselves having to justify the existence and quality of their programmes at most times. It is, thus, not surprising that for Mzwakhe, a senior academic staff member in such an institution, understanding of concepts and the ability to substantiate arguments with concrete facts and to engage in meaningful theoretical discourse on ODL with colleagues, are seen as crucial contributions in a higher education institution. The knowledge gained from and the actual experience of learning as a distance education learner through the CDEP, have enabled him to argue his point of view with confidence and supported with concrete facts: “Later, I used the knowledge I had gained after doing this activity to explain to my dear professor that “distance” was not, after all, the only differentiating factor”. Note the confident tone and self-assurance that suggests that though the addressee is a “professor” and in status higher than this learner, the
latter was now more knowledgeable about this particular subject, distance education and could stand his ground against a professor. Mzwakhe’s contribution to his institution is in educating colleagues involved in the contact section of his institution to the nature of ODL and the advantages of this mode of education.

In the case of the learning centre administrative officer, finding and/or retrieving important documents when required is crucial. Throwing everything into a box does not make life easy, neither is it efficient. So, though the learner was “never informed to change” the filing system of throwing everything into a box she was, after gaining valuable knowledge and skills from the CDEP, able to not only introduce a records filing system but also analyse the information contained in these records for use according to future demands. Her contribution to her organisation centre around changing the haphazard box filling system she found in her learning centre to an efficient and systematically differentiated system for storing and retrieving information and records.

As a student support and tutorial services lecturer, Mubu requires a thorough understanding of the theory and practice of distance education in order to support learners effectively and also train tutors who provide tutorial services in “outreach centres”. According to Mubu, the CDEP has provided him with a sound knowledge required to carry out these tasks effectively: “This course has, in my estimate, significantly improved my understanding of distance education”. From the knowledge gained he has provided a better service to both students and tutors in his organisation and also provided the learning and teaching resources that he used in his tutor training sessions:
For example it supplied me with helpful discussion material for tutor training, like the analysis of tutorial speech as reported by Steve Murgatroyd.

It is also clear that the contributions he is making in improving provision in his organisation are learner-centred and also tutor-centred as his work entails tutor training. All this, according to him demonstrates the CDEP is a “powerful multiplier of human development” in that its benefits and cascades from the immediate CDEP learner to others in a training of trainers fashion and also that the team approach of its learning and teaching resources exposes learners to ideas from a variety of expertise and results in learning and interacting actively with many people.

All three CDEP learners confirm that the contributions they were making were informed by the knowledge and skills they gained from the CDEP and that the contributions were learner-centred because they addressed the needs of the learners in accordance with the requirements of each of the three jobs. For the administrative learning centre staff member knowing learners profiles, keeping records are essential for communication with learners and knowing their needs from both an administrative and academic point of view. In a similar manner theoretical knowledge of ODL is also crucial for making informed decisions on different aspects of provision and in training tutors. In dual mode institutions this knowledge is important for convincing colleagues from the other section of the university on ODL as an essential and quality educational provision that has an important role to play in providing access to education and, therefore, the need for mutual co-existence and sharing of knowledge and skills in the different areas and modes of provision. Figures 6.6 and 6.7 have presented evidence from CDEP learners. In the next section, Figure 6.8 presents the views of two senior managers, Angeline and Moiloa.
6.3.3 Corroboration of learners views by Angeline and Moiloa, directors from Namibia and Lesotho.

Angeline, a director at one of the Namibian organisations and Moiloa, a director from the Lesotho organisation where the interviewees in Figure 6.6 work, corroborate the learners’ views on the value of the CDEP with regard to contributing to the improvement of learners’ knowledge of ODL, application of this knowledge and skills in the organisations where they are employed and in this way contributing to the quality of organisations’ provision. These directors also confirm that the CDEP has opened access to further studies, improved learners’ confidence, encouraged them to adopt more learner-centred approaches and contributed to the development of strategies for improving the products and services provided in their organisations. It is also worth noting that Moiloa’s comments match what the learners’ from his organisation had said in Figure 6.6 with regard to their contributions being learner centred in nature and introducing strategies for addressing institutional shortcoming.

Figure 6.8: Views from two senior managers: Angeline and Moiloa

a) Angeline, a Director from Namibia

All those who were enrolled in this course were so inspired that the majority are studying for higher diplomas and other courses. That experience has motivated them to continue studying now that they have improved their knowledge and thus do not want to miss out on new developments. For one staff member with whom I work closely the CDEP has made a big difference in interpretation of ODL. He came from a conventional education system and is now more considerate of the needs of ODL learners. Other staff members are also more conscious of the needs of the customers especially in the regional centres and in areas like student support. They realise that monitoring and evaluation is a good strategy for improving services and they ascribe this interest to what they have learned in the course. So they apply the knowledge and there is a change in their practices and approach.

One student from one of our remote learning centres got a distinction in the course but there was no change in performance. We have to be aware that change depends on the kinds of
people concerned. Some are prepared to learn through trial and error while for some life can pass them by. So, in this guy’s case, no significant change could be seen. But, I must say that in a recent interview for another job in the organisation, he presented himself with great confidence and actually referred to the CDEP as having given him a reference framework for his job.

b) Moiloa, a Director from Lesotho

From an institutional point of view, these CDEP participants have improved greatly in terms of their general attitude to distance education and its learners and also their ignorance of distance education has been addressed. They now know that distance education learners who study most of the time independently with no contact with other learners need support and ways have to be found to address their needs. Recently, for example, they requested a retreat to discuss how to address the late arrival to learners of courses. During this retreat a major contribution of the CDEP that I noticed, was a greater understanding that we need to serve our people well and that where there are shortcomings what strategies can be introduced. For me it is pleasing to work with enlightened people who know what they are doing and how to improve what they are doing.

The caution from Angeline about differential application of knowledge and skills among learners is, however, important. It affirms that change or performance and/or application of knowledge and skills is never uniform. People are different and have different interests and abilities. The learner mentioned by Angeline is an example of some of the learners who, even with very high pass grades, often demonstrate little or no influence from the studies they have successfully completed, or in the words of this director, “life can pass them by”. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of programmes and of learner performance after completion of training programmes is, therefore, important to identify such shortcoming and implement strategies for addressing them.

Tutors play a central role in CDEP delivery. Their views on the contributions of the CDEP learners to organisations also need to be taken into consideration as Figure 6.9 will demonstrate.
6.3.4 The views of Raoleka, a South African CDEP tutor and ex-CDEP learner

Raoleka, works full-time as a Coordinator of one of the South African learning centres situated in one of the poorer provinces of South Africa. He has postgraduate qualifications and is one of the learners that have successfully completed the CDEP. As Coordinator of a learning centre, he is also responsible for tutor training like Mubu from Namibia and for the management of the centre. His views on the CDEP presented in Figure 6.9 show how knowledge gained from the CDEP and resources like the learning materials have contributed to the quality of his work and also that he continues to practically implement the knowledge gained from the CDEP in the two sectors of his operational responsibilities, management of a learning centre and tutor training.

Raoleka:

The Certificate for Distance Education Practitioners was very benefiting and the knowledge is immediately implementable. I have used Modules 4 to train newly appointed tutors (combining it with the SACHED 'bad and good tutorial video material) - to assist them develop a broader understanding of the profile of a distance education learner and the skills, knowledge and attitudes expected from distance education facilitators/tutors. With the module on the management of distance education programmes at a local level, one gets his management approach sharpened and focussed on key issues around the planning and managing of DE programmes. This info is also very useful in the training of satellite administrators.

The other module on the development of DE materials, I have shared with some of the tutors interested in DE beyond just interpreting the material for the students. One (Pitso, see interview below) was so critical of what he was teaching that he ended up joining Prof Knowledge’s outfit and also helping academic departments consent to review their course materials.

Raoleka is not merely using the knowledge gained from the CDEP to improve the quality of his job, but he is sharing this knowledge with other colleagues in his learning centre and for training
other tutors working in his organisation. He mentions three specific CDEP Modules that have been useful for his tutor training programme and centre management and administration duties, namely the Materials Development Module (Module 3), Learner Support (Module 4) and Management and Administration (Module 5). The benefits of these Modules have also been commented on by other learners in the earlier interviews to show how their contributions in organisations have been informed by what they learned from the CDEP and the learner-centred nature of these contributions.

Pitso, the colleague mentioned by Raoleka, was interviewed because he was reported to have changed his job after the CDEP experience. His interview is quoted in full because it captures not just a new dimension to the contributions made by learners in their organisations but also because it provides insights into some of the issues surrounding the CDEP delivery. Though these issues will be discussed in the next chapter, cutting them off from the interview would have disturbed its flow. Instead as it stands the whole interview foreshadows the next chapter and provides a rounded view of the CDEP within a chapter dominated by participants’ high regard of the programme. It also introduces the contradictions resonating within the programme’s delivery and learning milieu.

6.3.5 Interview with Pitso, a South African learner

Pitso’s views were important for this researcher to corroborate what Raoleka had said about the role of the CDEP in making learners critical of their organisations’ practices and eventually resulting in a desire to change jobs in order to better address identified organisational
weaknesses. For the reasons mentioned in the last paragraph of Section 6.3.4 above, the full interview is presented in Figure 6.10.

Figure 6.10: Interview with Pitso, a South African learner

Interviewer: Why did you enrol for the CDEP?

Pitso: I think, I must just get my facts right, I think, Merriam used me as a critical reader for two courses, Administrative Law 1 and then one in Biblical Studies. I think Merriam suggested that I do the course. Yes, I think it was Merriam. I will go back in my memory, but I think it was because she read my report and then said it could be beneficial and blah, blah, blah.

Int: So you were a critical reader while in the north?

Pitso: Yes and I was doing administrative functions and was a tutor as well in Raoleka’s learning centre.

Int: Do you think that after being asked by Merriam to enrol that the CDEP met your needs and reasons for enrolling?

Pitso: I am just going to mention positives and negatives combined. When I received the study package, I was, what’s a good word?

Int: Put it bluntly.

Pitso: Oh! those covers, really! Those covers made my toe nails to come off. (Laughter by both). I could not believe the icons. Second impressions were the use of tapes. I am not a good listener, I am hyper active. So luckily I could do the assignments without listening to the tapes. I think my lasting impressions of the CDEP were not necessarily the course materials. I had been a tutor for four years at that stage. I had been involved with Raoleka and I had been at the administrative side of ODL. So I had a good overview. What really made an impression was the tutor remarks on the assignments by Mosadi. It really was something. I still have them. It made such an impression on me.

Int: In what way?

Pitso: The extensiveness to which she read the assignments and reacted. I mean she filled in her comments in pencil but it was interactive comments and also stimulating me more. And that really, I did not know who she was. I thought she was from UNISA/ICE and then I tried to make contact and at that stage Mponeng was on and off. The contact with Mponeng was not good. The admin side of the CDEP was not good. Merriam gave me her personal telephone number and I could speak to her. That made a huge impression. It was the first time I saw how comments on
assignments can look and the role they can fulfil.

The level was also difficult for me. I had just finished at that stage my Honours degree. I was enrolled for the Management Development Programme at UNISA that was a postgraduate course. I was not sure where to pitch the CDEP. How deep should I go, how critical?

Int: And do you think the comments from Mosadi helped with pitching the level

Pitso: Yes, she stimulated me, she actually pitched me and said I want to engage with you on this level and she took me further. She did not say no you are going too deep, she provoked me into thinking more. That was really one of my most profound memories of the CDEP.

Int: And from the admin side what kinds of difficulties did you experience? I am asking this because you were remote from UNISA Pretoria and therefore similar to other remote learners including those in other countries.

Pitso: I have already mentioned something about Mponeng. I did not ask for an extension for an assignment. I had a specific need. I cannot remember what it was. She was the only contact person and I sent her an e-mail and no response, not even I am out of office, nothing. At that stage I did not have a response for about three weeks. I then spoke to Merriam and she gave me Mosadi’s number. That solved the problem.

Int: And did Mponeng ever respond?

Pitso: She never responded. That was a weak point and that was before I knew ICE and the set up. If I was a normal student and not one involved with Raoleka and blah, blah, I think I would have dropped out. I could phone Merriam. I could phone Mosadi. But the international students, they do not know what else to do. I think, that was the kind of problem that I encountered on the administrative side.

Int: So at your centre you were occupying an administrative position?

Pitso: Yes and as tutor too.

Int: Which subjects were you tutoring?


Int: So what made you change jobs?

Pitso: At that stage a number of things. I was at the top of my rank. I was the only White male in the Regional office. There were two other White females and the rest of the staff Black. So I was professionally at the top of where I could go in my career. Secondly, that was just before the merger and I knew TSA had a number of Whites and there would be only so many positions. That was the one thing. The other thing was, I was feeling frustrated in that centre. I worked very hard, but the politics of running a regional office was really influencing me very negatively. At one stage I was a NEHAWU shop steward, but I remained a Whitey. Thirdly, academically, I
wanted to do an MBA at UNISA, but then I realised that there was no political role left for me at UNISA as a White Afrikaner male. So then I enrolled for Law to be able to go outside UNISA if things turned bad. Then I made contact with Merriam at that time as critical reader of two of her courses and then when they advertised I was on leave. She phoned me and said won’t you apply and I knew they could only appoint so many White males and luckily I was one of them. I was extremely happy in the north, don’t get me wrong. I had a very good relationship with Chris, my head, and Raoleka. I enjoyed the students. I enjoyed the town. When the White lecturers would come from Pretoria, they would say, hey it’s so Black. But this is what I like, I would say. So I did not change because I was very unhappy, this was just an opportunity and the position was two levels above me at that stage. So it was a choice I could not refuse.

Int: So the CDEP experience, was it useful in your new role?

Pitso: The CDEP gave me a qualification in distance education which was not a requirement for the position but added to my CV. So it was a good paper to have. At this stage, there are very few qualifications in online, ODL or distance education. So it was good to have a paper. It was important for me to pass it cum laude to show that I really did my best. So concerning that it really meant a lot to me. Concerning the content because I had been seven years in a regional centre and I have been a tutor, I do not think I learnt anything wow new. It confirmed a lot of my beliefs. What it did. No I lie. What it did was, it introduced me to the theoretical framework of distance education. I am a theoriser, I love theories. So that gave me the interest to investigate further.

Int: When you came for the job interview, was your qualification recognised?

Pitso: No one asked questions about the qualification. What they did ask and what I mentioned was my research on Mmarobala which I did for the CDEP assignment. Ya now its coming back. I did the portfolio assignment on Mmarobala and I sent it to Merriam and she thought it was good and I think she sent it somewhere as well. So when I applied for the position she also said I should make the assignment a paper. And I arrived here in March and that June I presented that paper at the Commonwealth of Learning Conference in Durban. If it wasn’t for the CDEP I would not have done that research on Mmarobala. I would never have had the initiative.

Int: Have you published that paper?

Pitso: That was published in Progressio. And at that Commonwealth Conference you were chairing the session and Dr Rice thought it was good. We communicated for a while by e-mail but then it just died.

Int: So you have had some time after completing the CDEP and you are now also involved in the BA ODL, so how do you see the future of the CDEP?

Pitso: Change the cover. (Laughter). Seeing that I have a very strong admin background, I would love it to be compulsory in a renewed form or another form to teach at UNISA or to work at UNISA. It should be part of the staff development policy. Especially because admin guys have such a wealth of information and experience and they don’t think about what they are doing.
They are not required to do research so there are no initiatives for them. So that would be, if you could get some of the admin guys, it will really enrich their practice. And on the academic side, it will open their eyes.

Int: Any other comments

Pitso: No

Pitso sent me the following additional comments by e-mail twenty minutes after the interview.

Your interview caught me a bit off-guard and I am sometimes (...) a bit slow. Therefore please bear with me with the following remarks -

1. The CDEP allowed me to engage with DE and ODL as a discourse - I had no educational qualifications at that stage but I was (and hopefully still am) a passionate teacher at heart. The CDEP allowed me to engage with the theoretical discourse on education in general and ODL specifically. The fact that I could enrol and that my opinions were valued by the Tutor-Marker, Mosadi, and my colleagues (Raoleka and others) made a HUGE difference to the way I saw my own contributions and future contributions.

2. The CDEP meant so much more to me taking into account my administrative background as well as tutor experience my Learning Centre. It must be much harder for students enrolling for the CDEP when they are not involved in ODL.

3. I was privileged to have role-models who were passionate about teaching and learner support. Merriam opened my eyes and still is a role-model. Raoleka at the Learning Centre was and is for me an excellent example of someone doing much with available resources. He is a true gentleman and lifelong learner. MoXhosa and yourself (in your centre visits) embodied for me as a younger white tutor amazing role models of passion for learner support. Chris (the then Regional Head), is a wonderful example of humility and passion for providing excellent service to students. All these persons above contributed immensely to preparing me for and making the CDEP an invaluable enrichment of my life.

4. The students of the Province and, more particularly, those students in Mmarobala. They trusted me with their (academic) lives. They invited me into their homes. Of the three learners - one has continued to do an Honours in Criminology and is employed in the Forensic Unit of the Police, the other is still a teacher and the other one has never completed his qualification after a spell of witchcraft. He is currently unemployed and destitute. These students and the others changed my life forever. Their humaneness as well as the dire circumstances in which many of them study - have humbled me and still humbles me. I cannot come to work one day without honouring them and their influence in my life. Thank you for asking.
In comparison with the other CDEP learners’ views mentioned in earlier parts of this chapter, Pitso is more critical and ambivalent about the contribution of the CDEP to his knowledge. At first, he says because of his experience in working at a learning centre and tutoring, he did not think that he “learnt anything wow new”, a view that contrast with Mubu’s in Figure 6.7:

I have been involved in distance education for about three years and have benefited from several short courses, workshops and seminars, and have thus gained some experience and practice of distance education. But none of those courses helped me like this one.

Pitso later says that his view that he did not “think I learnt anything wow new” was a lie and that in fact the CDEP gave him a theoretical framework of distance education. In his e-mail sent 20 minutes after the interview, he seems to have thought through his earlier responses and felt they were made “off-guard” and that his well thought through view was that the CDEP provided him with the ODL “theoretical discourse” which he used in the research that he conducted as part of his portfolio assignment. This contradiction demonstrates the paradoxical nature of the CDEP delivery as the later chapters of this report will show.

The importance of the contribution that Pitso’s research was making in ODL generally and to his organisation’s research output is demonstrated by the encouragement he got from his colleagues to present this research at an international conference and its subsequent publication in a local journal. And it is also with regard to this aspect of the CDEP’s contribution to his development, namely introduction to conducting research, that Pitso shows no ambivalence:
If it was not for the CDEP I would not have done that research on Mmarobala. I would never have had the initiative.

The certainty is informed by the nature of his previous experience as one of the administrative officers who had a “wealth of information and experience and they don’t think about what they are doing.”

The CDEP is intended to exposure learners to theory and best practices in ODL. In the above interview, Pitso, despite his four years’ experience of tutoring and non-specified but longer administration experience in a learning centre, had not been exposed to best practice in ODL assignment marking: “It was the first time I saw how comments on the assignments can look and the role they fulfil”. Mosadi, the tutor-marker that Pitso mentions, had in the comments and contact with Pitso at a distance through her tutor marking, in practice, demonstrated how the requirements of an effective correspondence tutor can be met:

To be effective, the correspondence tutor needs, first, to convey, through comments, advice for further study and, secondly, to perceive the student’s existing state of knowledge and conceptual framework. The manner in which this is done is extremely important: the approach needs to be constructive and supportive, and the words carefully chosen when the only contact is through correspondence, since there is no chance to temper criticism with a smile or elaborate a hasty comment as in a face-to-face meeting. (Robinson 1981: 272).
Mosadi’s constructive and supportive role in her tutor-marker comments and though she did not know her learners personally, was able to perceive their “existing state of knowledge and conceptual framework” and in the words of Pitso above “actually pitched me and said I want to engage with you on this level and she took me further” and for the learner the experience was “interactive and also stimulating more”. It is this exposure to good practice in tutor-marking that Pitso has said has indeed made a “HUGE difference to the way he saw his own contributions and future contributions” in his organisations. After such a “stimulating” experience, one can assume that Pitso’ contribution to his organisation’s tutoring will be improved. This suggest that were he to return to the Province where he was working before changing jobs, the students he talks so fondly about in the last paragraph of the interview and other new ones would, from his experience in the CDEP, benefit from improved tutoring services. It is a pity that in the above interview, this researcher did not probe Pitso’s contributions in his new job. The nature of his new job as a learning development facilitator assisting academic staff to produce good learning materials should provide opportunities for him to make the kind of contributions that he called “future contributions” and which would enable him to engage in both “theoretical discourse” and practical application of the CDEP “invaluable enrichment of my life”.

As indicated earlier the problems that Pitso mentioned in the interview in Figure 6.10 will be discussed in the next chapter. They will form part of all the problems that other learners have identified. In this final section of Chapter 5, they are generally serving as a presage of what will follow in the next chapter.
6.4 CONCLUSION

Focusing on Questions 2 and 3 of this study regarding contributions made by CDEP participants in their institutions and whether these contributions are informed by learner-centredness notions of ODL, this chapter began by demonstrating the favourable reception of the CDEP by all participants and thus, affirming that the programme’s intentions were met. It provided different forms of evidence from the three groups of participants: learners, tutors and organisations, on the high regard for the CDEP and the programme’s role in the learners’ contributions to learner-centred ODL provision. The high regard for the programme has been shown to have stemmed from, inter alia, participants’ acknowledgement that the programme matches their reasons for enrolment and needs; that it, generally, is a good quality product in terms of its learning and teaching resources and delivery and that it has provided a good introduction to ODL. As can be expected, the nature of contributions in organisation varied according to participants’ job requirements with academic staff member emphasising the application of ODL theoretical knowledge in their job contexts, research and learning and teaching resources while the administrative staff focussed on skills like filing, resource allocation and student counselling. Uppermost in most participants’ comments was that the knowledge gained was used to provide better services to their organisations’ learners and/or tutors and ensure learner-centred provision. The training aspect and its multiplier effect regarding CDEP and participants’ contributions in their organisations have also been noted.

The high regard for the CDEP and the contributions made by learners in their organisations suggest that the CDEP is a successful programme. But as some of the participants have
commented in this chapter, the CDEP delivery and application of CDEP ideas in organisations also had problems. The citing of these problems by different participants indicates that the views presented were balanced covering both the positive and negative aspects of the CDEP. These problems including other issues emerging from the CDEP delivery will be discussed in the next chapter.