CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

7.1 SUMMARY

The researcher undertook to design a process-oriented writing course and try it on a group of twenty-four students, consisting of both boys and girls, admitted to the First Year of B.Sc. (Agriculture) at the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru College of Agriculture, Karaikal. They were from urban and rural areas, and had been taught through either English or the vernacular medium at the school level. The course comprised 10 sessions spanning a period of four months from November 1990 to February 1991.

Materials were selected from various sources like newspapers and magazines besides a few traditionally prescribed text-books. They were suitably adapted to the various writing tasks of the proposed course - report-writing, note-making, summarising, letter-writing, essay-writing, etc. They were carefully chosen to have a bearing on agriculture and agriculture-related subjects, focussing mainly on the content rather than the register.

Emphasis was placed on the methodology of teaching writing, guiding the students through the various stages in
the process of writing. During the pre-writing stage, the topic was discussed from various angles either by the class as a whole or in groups, or by adopting both the strategies. Students were instructed to concentrate on the organisation of content in the initial draft and on grammar, spelling, and punctuation in the subsequent ones. They were also asked to exchange the drafts among themselves for comments and suggestions for improvement.

It was decided to study the impact of the writing course on the writing abilities of the students through pre- and post-tests administered at the beginning and at the end of the course respectively, and the students' performance was evaluated on the basis of certain criteria, like a sense of purpose, awareness of audience, organization, range of vocabulary and language use, and mechanics of writing. The evaluation was done as per the guidelines given by Hedge and the scheme produced by the Royal Society of Arts (Hedge 1988:146).

7.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

A detailed study was also made of the various tasks that the students had attempted in the class on the units prepared. The unit on note-making had its impact on the other kinds of writing attempted in the programme. In the case of those who first took down the main points, the redrafts showed a better organization of ideas. Out of 16
students who fared well scoring above 40% marks, 11 students made notes first before going on to attempt the first draft. Hence note-taking can be considered to be an important skill to be developed by the students in improving their writing skills.

The students' attempts at writing essays showed that they found great scope for manipulating data and felt the need for some changes in the subsequent drafts, whereas with report-writing, once they had fitted the necessary information into the format, they did not make many changes in the subsequent revisions. Writing a report on the given material gave the students, therefore, a sense of completion and fulfilment, whereas essay-writing gave them a better scope for attempting improved versions or revisions of the earlier drafts.

From the analysis of the pre- and post-test data, the following facts emerged:

a) There was a marked improvement in the students' understanding of the imperatives/passes.

b) There was some improvement in the writing of reports but not much in the writing of abstracts. The former was taught during the course while the latter was
not. It proved that the students had to be trained in writing such special strategies during the course.

c) There was not much improvement in the performance of vocational stream students compared to those from the non-vocational stream.

Besides a general analysis of the pre-and post-tests, a case study of two students whose range of difference in scores in the two tests was the highest was made.

The first student showed an improvement in his ability to frame sentences and arrange the ideas. When his language was poor, he exhibited at least an understanding of the text and thus provided unity of thought to it. He showed a complete understanding of the grammatical forms of imperatives/passives but there was no general improvement in his own use of the language. For instance, he showed little improvement in his knowledge of verb-patterns and some grammatical structures in both the tests. But in the writing of the home assignment, even when he had bodily lifted sentences from the various materials supplied, he could at least group them properly.

The other student was able to use the given data more effectively and in her subsequent drafts she effected some changes. In writing the abstract too, she showed some understanding of the arrangement of ideas.
The impact of the process approach on the writing abilities of the students was further studied by means of statistical tools like measures of central tendencies and dispersion. The higher value of arithmetic mean, median and mode of the post-test scores clearly indicated the improved performance of the class in general. Similarly, lower values of quartile deviation and the co-efficient of variation of post-test scores affirmed a more consistent and stable performance of the students. The values of skewness also supported this conclusion as pre-test scores were more skewed than those of the post-test. A descriptive statistical tool, the graph, was used to locate these values by means of 'more than' and 'less than' Ogive curves.

The rank correlation and correlation co-efficient 't' test was applied on pre- and post-test scores after formulating the necessary hypotheses. Post-test scores yielded a higher value of correlation, proving the improved performance of the students. As the rank correlation co-efficient 't' value was higher than the tabular value, the null hypothesis was rejected at five per cent level of significance, affirming an improvement in the performance of the students after being exposed to the process approach.
Lastly, students' 'paired' 't' test was made use of to assess the impact of the process approach on them. The calculated value of 't' for 23 degrees of freedom at five per cent level of significance was much higher than the table value, and so the null hypothesis was rejected. The alternative hypothesis was accepted as the mean value increased, implying that there was a significant improvement in the performance of students as a result of the process approach.

Thus the measures of central tendencies, dispersion, rank correlation, and students' paired 't' test as well as the graphs have confirmed the effectiveness of the process approach in improving the students' writing ability. It may be pointed out in this context that in one study (Carroll 1984), students of teachers who had received an orientation to process-writing showed "statistically significant and educationally important increases in their writing performance" (p. 325) compared with the students of teachers who had not received such an orientation. The present experiment too has demonstrated that students benefit from this approach, though no comparative study like Carroll's has been attempted.

Towards the end of the trimester, the students' views on the writing course were sought through a questionnaire.
The following were among the views expressed by the students:

1) The topics chosen were considered to be the most important feature of the programme. Eleven students ranked as first the statement that topics relevant to them had been chosen throughout the course.

2) The next most valued aspect of the course being ranked as the first by eight students was that they were allowed to get suggestions and ideas in group discussions from their class-mates.

3) Journalistic materials and articles were ranked third by as many as nine students as important.

It was also found from their views expressed to the open-ended question that they were very much conscious of the need for English and expected the English teacher to play an effective role in the classroom.

From the results of the experiment, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1) The process approach to writing helps the teacher to understand the students' problems better since he becomes a guide and facilitator in the ongoing process of writing in the classroom. He can adapt and modify the techniques of teaching as warranted by the students' problems and by the occasion.
2) The arrangement of furniture in the classroom seems to be important for the approach to facilitate group discussion and interaction, to help the teacher move about, joining some group or helping some individuals, and finally, to create a relaxed and cordial atmosphere in the classroom.

3) The materials chosen should be dovetailed with the writing tasks and should be based on real-life situations, for materials play a vital role in the methodology of teaching. The teacher must have the expertise and the freedom to choose appropriate materials for the success of a writing programme.

7.3 SUGGESTIONS

In the light of the experiment conducted, a few suggestions are given for an improved performance of the students through the process approach.

In the experimental course, it took two or three sessions for the students to become familiar with the approach. It was also found from the students' responses to the questionnaire that they had been taught all along not through the process approach and group/peer interaction but through the product-oriented mode. Therefore, the students may first be oriented towards the process approach to
writing in a session of one hour or so. This preliminary session on the approach would prepare them for the methodology.

Secondly, one or two sessions could be used to analyse written texts from the point of view of various aspects of writing that the students are required to imbibe. For instance, models of effective and ineffective writing may be shown. To take an example, an essay on Eucalyptus with a definite focus and another without any focus may be given for contrast. These two texts may be studied and analysed by the students. They may also rewrite a text without a focus, giving it one.

Students can also be asked to read well-written texts and the patterns of organization underlying them may be analysed. Certain texts/passages without coherence and cohesion may be given to students to be rewritten with suitable modifications incorporated in them.

The models in both the instances are only used to make students understand the need to give coherence and cohesion, and to form an outline for an essay with a focus on a theme rather than for imitation. Further, an analytical reading of the texts from the point of view of writing would help them to understand the notions of audience awareness and purpose in a practical way.
Students may also be given unorganized paragraphs, which they may be asked to link, making suitable changes at the end of a paragraph or the beginning of the following one, or by writing a new one linking the two. They may also rearrange all the given paragraphs with suitable changes wherever such changes are felt to be necessary. Once the students write them, the drafts may be exchanged to study the effectiveness of various ways of linking the paragraphs. Generally, paragraphs with spelling and grammatical mistakes are given to students, whereas this kind of a task with the instruction to link grammatically well-written sentences but without being properly organized would teach them that the effect of a written text depends equally on cohesion and coherence. They would find ways of arranging ideas in paragraphs in various ways. This would also save a lot of time and explaining on the part of the teacher later during the writing course.

Since homogeneity in language proficiency cannot be expected in the present Indian context and streaming the students into different groups may not be possible in all circumstances owing to several reasons in spite of the recommendations of the CDC Report, a short-term bridge course is suggested for students without a sufficient background in English to help them join the mainstream of study.
It is also suggested to organize training programmes exclusively focussed on the teaching of writing to orient the teachers of English towards the process approach. The teacher being the facilitator in the classroom, the success of any teaching programme depends on the resourcefulness and planning of the teacher. He has to search for new ideas to devise new strategies for working with students and for meeting the whole spectrum of students' needs.

In the present Indian context, the terminal examination is pre-eminently important with its built-in need for periodic tests and pass-fail categorisation. The syllabus and the examination pattern are predetermined and the teacher's aim is only to prepare his students for the examination. For this, no specific training is required for the English teacher and the traditional method of lecturing on the prescribed texts and the product-oriented written composition exercises will serve the purpose.

However, in the changing scenario of learner-oriented teaching and college autonomy, there is a need to review every learning situation as unique and hence it should be thoroughly studied as a pre-requisite for the design of language courses. In the absence of a rigid syllabus to be followed and the external examination to be replaced by internal/continuous assessment, the responsibilities of the course teacher have become greater.
The conduct of training programmes for college teachers in various disciplines has now been made possible by several schemes of the U.G.C. like the Refresher Courses conducted by the Academic Staff Colleges in Indian universities. The National Policy on Education of 1986 envisaged, through these training programmes, enhancing teacher motivation in specific subjects, techniques, and methodologies of teaching and thereby inculcating in the teachers the right kind of values. This would in turn encourage them to take the initiative for innovative research and improved methods of teaching.

It is suggested that a week's writing component may be included in the 3-4 week Refresher Courses in English. The objectives of this component would be (a) to enable the teachers to assess the language needs of their learners and devise need-based courses, (b) to acquaint them with theories on writing, (c) to make them aware of the latest research and innovations in the field of writing instruction, (d) to give them a practical orientation to organising writing classes, and (e) to evaluate and assess the materials and course books on writing.

7.4 SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

Given the language teaching situation in India and the dire need to improve it, there is much scope for further study
The following are a few of them.

Since the role of materials is very important, a study of suitable materials for various categories of students like students coming from the regional or English media, rural or urban areas, could be made and with more and more colleges being conferred the status of autonomy, the teacher has to be oriented towards preparing materials to suit his peculiar classroom situation.

In the present experiment, pre-writing activity was an important aspect of classroom work and there was initial hesitation and shyness on the part of the students to speak out. The role of speaking English or the ability to communicate in English and its impact on the writing process and ability could be analysed. It can be studied how far the speaking ability enhances the writing skill - whether there is a direct relationship between the ability to speak and the writing skill.

To attempt the writing tasks, the students were served with materials from various written sources. A study may be made on the impact of video programmes dealing with various topics on the writing skill. Students may collect their data by viewing the programme and it may be seen how they benefit by it in their writing process. It may also be a comparative study of the relative effectiveness of the
means of collecting data for a topic through video or written texts.

The researcher was able to conduct the study with a particular group of students during one semester only and there was no possibility of observing the long-term academic impact of the process approach on the writing skill of the students. A study may be conducted on the efficacy of the approach by offering a writing course on the same group of students after a period.

7.5 CONCLUSION

The objectives of the present study stated in Chapter V have thus been achieved. It was feasible to design a writing course with topics that were relevant to the students' academic and professional needs as it was evident from the students' responses to the questionnaire. The researcher could try out a process-oriented classroom approach to the teaching of writing. With enough time being given to pre-writing activities, group/peer interaction and evaluation, and rewriting, the students were guided through the successive stages of writing. The researcher was more a facilitator than a passive spectator and evaluator and with life-oriented, topical materials, he could make the programme of writing task-based so as to develop in the students the skills of writing.
This was a humble attempt to bring the researches and current theories on writing to bear on classroom practice by designing a writing course and administering it to a group of undergraduate learners. If the study evokes further interest in the teaching of writing in the practising English teachers in colleges and paves the way for further studies on various other aspects, the researcher would feel amply rewarded.