

# 7

## Of Large-Mouth Milk Jugs, Cosmic Trash Compactors, and Renewal Machines

### *Reflections on a Multi-task Portfolio Assessment*

Charlotte W. O'Brien

THE EMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT HAS ENCOURAGED EDUCATORS to seek ways to actively involve students in authentic activities which are challenging and interesting. As an English language arts consultant working to help classroom teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice, I know that performance assessment should also model and support good instruction. Without a doubt, writing portfolios in the classroom have this potential. Is it also possible for such potential to be supported through large-scale portfolio assessment? I believe that it is.

Portfolios provide a forum of understanding for both learners and teachers. This occurs for the learner, when, as Yancey observes, "The writer's pieces are not seen so much in isolation or relative to others' pieces, but rather relative to the writer's own development as represented in the portfolio" (Yancey 1992b, 106). It occurs for teachers when they no longer find themselves asking the question, "Now that I've got all these portfolios, what do I do with them?" In *A Fresh Look at Writing*, Graves explains, "The portfolio can serve as a medium for teaching and learning as well as for evaluation . . . External evaluations can be satisfied if the main emphasis is on the student as the improving/learning writer" (Graves 1994, 174). Murphy and Smith concur, "Portfolios can integrate

assessment and good practice. When the two complement each other—good practice and assessment both requiring purposeful, contextualized tasks performed in authentic situations—they can serve the learner and the learning” (Murphy and Smith 1992, 59). I know that this can happen with writing portfolios in the classroom. I also believe that it can occur in a *multi-task portfolio* assessment such as the one I developed and piloted for possible use as part of a communication arts statewide assessment. This type of *event*, to use an assessment term, incorporates reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing ideas and information. Students complete a series of tasks which lead them to compose a culminating piece of writing and to reflect about these tasks and about themselves as readers, writers and thinkers.

The use of portfolios in large-scale assessments, however, is a hotly debated issue. In fact, Lucas, in her powerful indictment of large-scale portfolio assessment, identifies the “co-option [of portfolios] by large-scale external testing programs” as one of the three major pitfalls that must be contended with if the portfolio movement is going to realize its potential. Certainly this danger must be considered. Yet I believe a carefully crafted large-scale portfolio assessment may be used hand-in-hand with portfolios in the classroom to support what Lucas describes as “evaluation in the service of learning” (Lucas 1992, 11).

### The Multi-task Portfolio

Writing portfolios most often contain a variety of pieces composed and selected over a period of time. I view this as a *horizontal* approach. In contrast, the portfolios discussed in this chapter provide a window into each student’s thinking and writing at a certain point in time. I see this as a *vertical* approach. According to Yancey, the defining features of the *horizontal* portfolio include collection, selection, reflection, diversity, evaluation, and communication. *Vertical* portfolios are much the same although they are more akin to “slice of life” vignettes. They, too, contain diverse collections of written responses. The choices, however, are made by students in how they respond to the tasks. They communicate their thoughts through writing and reflecting. Finally, readers evaluate the portfolios holistically using a rubric. (See the Appendix for the multi-task portfolio rubric.)

For five class periods, seventh and eighth graders performed seven tasks in response to a student-produced video and a collection of written materials. The resource booklet contained letters, short articles, an editorial, charts

and graphs, a cartoon, a poem, and fun facts all reflecting some aspect of the theme, “Renewable Resources and Energy Efficiency.” Students worked cooperatively in small groups, as well as individually, discussing the resources and sharing ideas with each other. As they processed information presented in a variety of formats, they were required to: 1) demonstrate understanding and processing of the content—“I understand”; 2) produce evidence which enabled the reader to understand the content—“I can help you understand”; and 3) write reflectively about the thinking and writing which occurred as they responded to the tasks and developed their written responses—“I can show you how I understand.” Teachers served as facilitators, free to ask and answer appropriate questions but not to make suggestions or corrections concerning students’ responses to the tasks.

### Tasks and Responses

Tasks one to three actively involved students and stimulated their thinking about the many different problems and solutions associated with the topic under consideration. Students were free to discuss their ideas related to the theme, tasks, and resources, but they wrote individual responses. Tasks four to six encouraged students to use process-writing strategies as they developed a thoughtful response to the theme. Task seven gave them the opportunity to reflect about their work and about themselves as thinkers, readers and writers.

#### Task One: Writing A Summary

After discussing with several classmates the twelve-minute video which offered tips to save energy around the house, each student wrote a letter to a friend responding to the information presented in the video. Students liked the informality of the letter format, and their voices came through clearly. Even though they were critical of the video, its offbeat humor got them thinking about the topic in an enjoyable way.

#### *Colleen’s response:*

Maggie—

We just watched a video in English. It was about saving energy. I guess it was OK but it wasn’t my favorite. It was good, though, considering kids wrote it. Anyway, it showed how you can save energy in each room—the kitchen, living room, bathroom, bedroom, and basement. It told us to do things such as take shorter showers, fill the freezer with gallons of water, and get more energy

saving light bulbs. If I could change anything about it, I'd probably give it some better jokes and the actors be a tad less enthusiastic. Overall, it was educational and got the point across.

See you!  
Colleen

*Brad's Response:*

Dan,

My group did not like the video much at all. We thought that it was weird and sort of for kids maybe under our age group such as 3rd or 4th graders. Even though I did not like the movie it kind of got a good point across about how and where to save energy in the home. The video didn't really teach me anything that I didn't know already. I guess that is why I didn't care for it too much. Well, how did you and the group you're in like it? That's all I've got to say, bye.

Your Friend,  
Brad

### Task Two: Identifying Important Ideas/Themes

In groups of four or five, students read and discussed assigned pages from the resource booklet which included information presented in a variety of formats (e.g., letter, editorial, chart, cartoon, etc.) to understand how these related to the theme of renewable resources and energy efficiency. Each student was responsible for reporting to a second group about the main ideas or themes in the resources her or his group reviewed; however, all students had the complete resource booklet to which they might refer at any time during the assessment.

### Task Three: Drawing Conclusions

After forming new groups which included at least one representative from each of the groups in Task Two, students briefly summarized the gist of the resources reviewed in their previous groups and listened as others did the same. Then, noting that people draw many different conclusions when they gather information from various sources, students individually wrote down several conclusions concerning the resource material which made the most sense to them. Examples of seventh grade responses included the following:

- We have improved in reusing and recycling but we definitely need to do even better. We need to better use our renewable energy and improve our water quality. We need to recycle all recyclable things

and get kids to become environmentally involved because the future is in their hands. If we don't, we will end mankind.

- I think that we waste too much trash. We don't recycle and reuse things enough. People are always writing articles, and drawing charts, graphs, and cartoons like the ones we've read. But a lot of people still don't reuse and recycle, and we need to think of another way to get people to reuse and recycle.
- We need to be concerned for the future, which means [*sic*] reusing, conserving, and not pretending like "we" own the earth, for we "are nothing but a strand in the web of life."

(In the last example, the student is referring to a poem attributed to Chief Seattle which was included in the resource booklet. When she composed her piece for the culminating task, she chose to write a poem.)

#### Tasks Four to Seven: Generating Ideas, Organizing Ideas,

#### Writing About a Problem or Issue, Reflecting About Your Thinking

These tasks replicate those usually included in process writing assessments—with the addition of the reflective section. Students talked with each other about ideas they might develop and about how they might plan their written responses to the theme presented in the resource booklet. In addition, they also looked back at any of the resources and previous tasks they thought might help. Marsha Sisson, who piloted the assessment, observed, "These [performance] assessments on the whole tend to be somewhat linear in nature. This multi-task activity isn't at all. Thanks. Students are going to their earlier tasks to find information. They are also rereading the resources."

The freedom to clarify and solidify thinking on a topic through interaction with others and with resources did not, as one might suppose, lead to copying ideas but to creativity. The following directions prompted students to write about a problem or issue in Task Six: "You have viewed, read and discussed a variety of materials which touched on the theme—renewable resources and energy efficiency. In the twenty-first century, we will have to make many important decisions related to this subject. In many cases, there are no easy answers. There is usually more than one side to the story. Now it is time for you to give your opinion about a problem, issue, solution, plan, or invention concerning renewable resources and energy efficiency." Students seemed more confident in their ability to complete the longer written piece; they knew they had something to say about the topic. Finally, they were able to share important insights about their thinking and writing processes.

## Portfolio Examples

Six portfolios containing Tasks Four to Seven demonstrate more completely the progression of students' ideas and insights. After generating ideas through brainstorming and prewriting for Task Four, students wrote a focus statement at the top of the page. For Task Five they wrote down the main idea before making note of details or possibilities they might include.

### Brenda's Portfolio

#### Task Four: Generating Ideas Figure 1

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I WILL WRITE MY PAPER ABOUT Solar Power as an Alternative to electricity.  
water pollution  
wasting electricity  
recycling  
{ solar power  
over use of electricity (skylights)

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## Task Five: Organizing Ideas

### Figure 2

MAIN IDEA: We need to conserve electricity

| QUESTIONS TO DECIDE                | DETAILS OR POSSIBILITIES  |
|------------------------------------|---|
| AUDIENCE?<br>FORMAT?<br>BEGINNING? | It will be a letter to my best friend, Alison Wals, so she will be my audience. The beginning will be an example of how my family has started conserving electricity by keeping lights off or low.                                |
| ISSUE/PROBLEM?<br>MAIN POINTS?     | The issue or problem is that too many Americans waste a lot of electricity. Some of the main points are that we need to conserve our electricity and a lot of people would save on their electricity bill if we all did the same. |
| DETAILS/EXAMPLES?                  | My parents started punishing us if we don't turn off lights when we're not around, and bought a dinner switch to put on our dining room light. They skylights and windows let in a lot of light and are cheaper too.              |
| CONCLUSION?                        | The conclusion will be that I will ask her to please conserve electricity the way that my family does. It will work if we do it just a little, it will still help our planet.   |

For Task Six, Writing about a Problem or Issue, Brenda wrote a personal letter.

Dear Alice,

What's up? My parents have become total energy efficiency freaks. At first, I thought they were just being mean, because they'd punish me for leaving the light in my bedroom on when I was some place else. Then I decided they were just being weird, because I'd walk into the kitchen and find my mom cooking with the only light coming from an open window. I just didn't understand—I've always been a person who hated dim rooms. When I brought these points up to my mom, she sat me down on the couch and gave me a little talk. Actually, it was a long talk. But what she basically said was that she and my dad both agreed that too many Americans waste a lot of electricity, and that they decided that doing even just their share would benefit the environment. And keeping the lights off would lower the electricity bill, anyway. They're even thinking of putting in a skylight in our living room. I hope they do. Skylights are neat.

I wrote this letter because now I want to conserve electricity, too. I'm never in trouble for leaving lights on anymore. And I want you to get your family to become as energy efficient as mine. Just tell your parents that we should all do our part. And if that doesn't work, point out that they'll save money. It'll work. And maybe, if you

*write a letter like this to someone else, it'll be even one more thing that'll help the earth.*

—♡ ya,

*Brenda*

After drafting and revising their papers in Task Six, students answered the following questions about their thinking and writing for Task Seven:

1. What task did you like best and why?
2. What task was the most difficult and why?
3. How do you get ideas for writing about a topic?
4. What connections did you make between Task Six and the tasks that preceded it?
5. What do you think is important for your reader to know about you as a writer and thinker?

I have taken the liberty of consolidating Brenda's responses to these questions into a paragraph. Brenda explained:

I liked writing the best, because I like doing creative things like that instead of evaluating things and summarizing things. I think Task Three was the hardest, because I am bad at coming up with conclusions to things, and evaluating them on my own. To get ideas I think about other things I've read about that topic, and other things I've heard, seen, or done about that topic. The tasks that preceded Task Six got me ready for writing. They gave me information to work with, and ideas to use. As a writer, I like to write what I want, not have a defined topic, or way of writing. As a thinker, often it's hard for me to get ideas, but most of the time, once I get one, I can't stop!

Earlier in Task Three (drawing conclusions), Brenda wrote, "we need to think of another way to get people to reuse and recycle." When she generated ideas in Task Four, she thought she would write about solar power as an alternative to electricity. In Task Five she did a good job planning her paper. It's interesting that she decided to use the letter format. The response to Task One was a letter, and several of the selections in the resource booklet were letters to the editor. Notice she said she gets her ideas from reading and from what she has heard, seen, or done. She listed only a few in Task Four, and they were all very broad, with the exception of the word *skylights* which was an afterthought. In the letter to Alice, Brenda does not copy what she has written from the chart, but she does incorporate those ideas into the body of the letter. According to Brenda, the hard part was coming



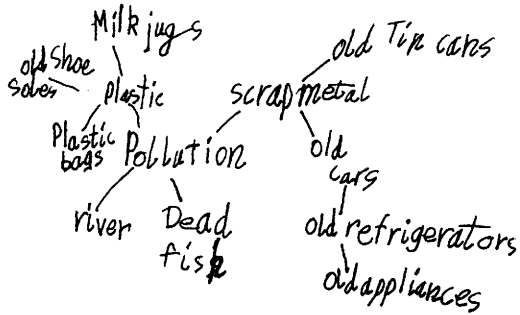
up with an idea, but we can agree with her that once she found one, she had no problem writing about it.

Joey's Portfolio

Task Four: Generating Ideas  
Figure 3

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I WILL WRITE MY PAPER ABOUT water Pollution



Task Five: Organizing Ideas  
Figure 4

MAIN IDEA: *We need to stop stream and lake pollution*

| QUESTIONS TO DECIDE                | DETAILS OR POSSIBILITIES                             |
|------------------------------------|--|
| AUDIENCE?<br>FORMAT?<br>BEGINNING? | <i>Teacher, Class mates<br/>poem</i>                 |
| ISSUE/PROBLEM?<br>MAIN POINTS?     | <i>Pollution<br/>fishing<br/>stream pollution</i>    |
| DETAILS/EXAMPLES?                  | <i>catching milk jugs instead of<br/>fish, tires</i> |
| CONCLUSION?                        | <i>no fish just trash.</i>                           |

Joey wrote a poem for Task Six:

Large Mouth Milk Jugs

|                                   |                                    |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Going fishing,                    | Polluting,                         |
| Going fishing,                    | Polluting,                         |
| Gonna have some fun,              | It was Incesticides,               |
| Burning in the sun.               | I wish we could change,            |
| Whearing my gas mask to breath    | Or ever rearrange.                 |
| Our fresh clean air,              | The pain is great,                 |
| When we get home we'll have to    | The stench is strong,              |
| get the tar out of are underwear. | If we only relized whats going on. |

Joey's case illustrates one of the problems encountered in performance assessments which are done over a period of days or weeks. Joey was absent for several days and did not have a chance to make revisions or complete the reflective task. We can tell from what he wrote that a lot of thinking was going on. Notice he does not mention large-mouth milk jugs in the body

of the poem, but the picture of a pond where large-mouth bass used to be easily caught comes to mind immediately—except now it is polluted, and the only things the fishermen catch are large-mouth milk jugs and other trash. I wish we had Joey’s reflective writing because now I see what an important piece that is in understanding his thinking processes.

Jake’s Portfolio

Task Four: Generating Ideas  
Figure 5



Task Five: Organizing Ideas  
Figure 6

MAIN IDEA: Water Supply

| QUESTIONS TO DECIDE                | DETAILS OR POSSIBILITIES  |
|------------------------------------|---|
| AUDIENCE?<br>FORMAT?<br>BEGINNING? | I Am writing to peoples house holds to wateh <sup>diffrent</sup> how much water they use A day. |
| ISSUE/PROBLEM?<br>MAIN POINTS?     | ① To much water is being wasted In missouri ② I'm tri to stop it ③ WATER.                       |
| DETAILS/EXAMPLES?                  | We Are losing millions Of gawens of water a year.   |
| CONCLUSION?                        | Put A stop to wasting water And calling pluse writing to people to stop.                        |

Jake wrote a letter to the editor for Task Six:

Figure 7

TITLE (Optional):

Dear ~~Missouri~~ Missouri citizens  
 Hundreds of gallons of water  
 is being use a day for no reason.  
 We have come up with a conclusion  
 that it is cause we leave our water  
 running while we are brushing  
 our teeth, and washing our dishes.  
 If the people would stop this are  
 water would be ~~so~~ much more  
 protective, ~~so~~ like it would not  
 be wasted as much and we could  
 use it for other things like lakes,  
 pools, ponds and stuff like water  
 rides. So think before you wast.  
 Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
 Jeffrey Collins

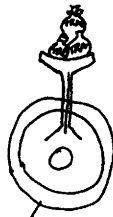
Jake picked up on the information contained in the video (which showed lots of ways to save water around the house). His letter is much more forceful than those contained in the resource booklet. He has given facts and examples, projected what might happen if people stopped wasting water, admonished Missouri citizens, and remembered to be polite. Jake explained about his thinking and writing: “The task I really liked was Task Two because I like reading educational stuff that I never knew before. Task Six was the hardest because I didn’t know how to put my words into writing. I get ideas for my topic by reading diffront things. I really just read. When I read I don’t only think I also study.”

Jake has a reading/viewing strategy that works and his interest in “educational stuff” provided some of the details for his letter.

Dillon's Portfolio

Task Four: Generating Ideas  
Figure 8

I WILL WRITE MY PAPER ABOUT how to get rid of all the garbage that is building up. You can send it to the ~~nearest~~ mantle in the earth where it will burn and no pollution will be given.



Earth Split Open

Task Five: Organizing Ideas  
Figure 9

MAIN IDEA: How to get rid of trash that is building

| QUESTIONS TO DECIDE                | DETAILS OR POSSIBILITIES   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| AUDIENCE?<br>FORMAT?<br>BEGINNING? | The President will listen. The format will be an editorial so I can get the point that I want to get across. The beginning will state the problem and what we should do about it.                                    |
| ISSUE/PROBLEM<br>MAIN POINTS?      | The trash is building up every fast and we're running out of places to put it and scientists aren't getting many ideas except to put it in space. People need to start worrying about it because soon it's going to. |
| DETAILS/EXAMPLES?                  | Every year 50 million tons of trash in the United States alone. Millions of countries are cleaning except us.  |
| CONCLUSION?                        | We need to start though about our world and where to put the trash.  |

For Task Six, Dillon wrote an expository paragraph:

#### What to Do About Trash

The United States is one of the most wasteful contries [*sic*] in the world. Trash builds up constantly and landfills are filling up just as fast as we throw it out in the ocean where we think it will sink to the bottom and it won't effect anyone. But really it does. The chemicals leak and pollute the oceans, trash starts to float to the shores where people swim. Our country really needs to start thinking about how we are going to deal with trash. My best idea was that we could build a channel through the Earth's crust and into the mantle. We could have all major trash fills be loaded up and dumped where they would be burned instantly. It is so hot at the mantle that if the trash let off pollution, the pollution would be burned also. So you see we really do need to start thinking about our world.

Dillon reflected:

[On the task he liked best] Drawing because it is fun to think of really neat ways trash can be desposed [*sic*] of. [On the task he found most difficult] Identifying important ideas because we had to find so much information and write it down. [On getting ideas for writing] Usually I just stop and think about what's going on in the world today and that gives me ideas. [On connections] The tasks before it just organized and gathered information about a subject and then you tie it all together in Task Six. [On himself as a writer and thinker] I come up with very different ideas about things and my topics are strange.

Dillon stayed with the idea he came up with in the drawing and used most of what he wrote in the chart, but he did not indicate in Task Six that the intended audience for the editorial was the president of the United States. Maybe he dropped this idea altogether, or maybe that was still his intention—but he forgot to inform his readers. We can agree with him that his ideas are very different, but knowing that he stops and thinks about what is going on in the world today gives us confidence in him as a thinker. (Years later, when we are disposing of trash in the way Dillon suggested, remember. You first heard about it right here!)

Kara's Portfolio

Task Four: Generating Ideas  
Figure 10

I WILL WRITE MY PAPER ABOUT Recycling





Task Five: Organizing Ideas  
Figure 11

MAIN IDEA: *We need to recycle if we're going to save the planet*

| QUESTIONS TO DECIDE                | DETAILS OR POSSIBILITIES  |
|------------------------------------|---|
| AUDIENCE?<br>FORMAT?<br>BEGINNING? | Mrs. Sisson / People who want to read this<br><del>REPORT</del> I don't know yet!<br>Article ← <u>Format</u>  |
| ISSUE/PROBLEM?<br>MAIN POINTS?     | We need to recycle more <u>OFTEN</u> !!<br>If we don't recycle, we'll run out of resources, and have to spend our money on research for finding new power methods (of production) |
| DETAILS/EXAMPLES?                  | If everyone would take time to recycle, the world would be cleaner, and we'd be a lot better off. Everyone needs to do their share, because we're all in this together.           |
| CONCLUSION?                        | If we don't recycle, we're like a ship in the middle of the desert there's not much we can do.  |

Kara decided to write a short article for Task Six:

Why Recycle?

"Why recycle?" That's what lots of people ask. "Why should I recycle if everyone else does? Isn't that enough?" Those, too are popular. What many people don't realize is that we're running out of our natural resources. Things like oil, coal, and other resources are running out. We won't have them around forever. Someday, when we run out, we won't have much of a choice.

We'll have to find another energy source.

It's not just about energy, though. Plastic is made from oil. Recycling plastic will save some oil, as well as some space in a landfill. What many people don't realize is the simple facts: recycling is easy, inexpensive, and good for the earth. What could be better?

What about paper? Every Sunday, thousands (no, this is not an exaggeration) of trees are used to make America's Sunday newspapers. If people would recycle paper, less trees would have to be used.

Aluminum cans? No problem! Take them to the store. You'll get five to ten cents for each one. The same can be done with glass bottles.

In short, recycling is a great thing. So, before you go to the store, put your old milk jugs, cardboard, paper bags, aluminum cans, glass bottles, and cracked Tupperware into the car, and do something nice for Mother Nature.

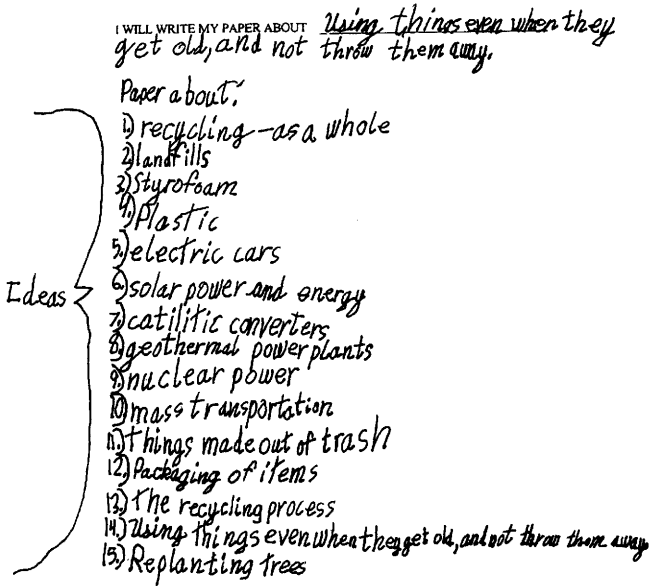
When Kara reflected about herself as a thinker and writer, she wrote:

I liked Task Four best because I love clustering. I get so many ideas out, it's lots of fun. Task Five was the hardest for me. I'm not an organized thinker. When I write, I like to just let the pen go, so my words flow out onto paper. I don't write as well when I'm constantly referring to a chart. When I clustered, I noticed I kept getting ideas about recycling. I figured I had a lot of ideas, enough so I wouldn't get Writer's Block, so I decided it was the right topic for me. Tasks One to Five sort of build up until you've been assigned a paper, so it's not such a shock. It makes you aware, and you have more ideas that way. I don't like organized writing. To me, there's nothing worse. I like to let my ideas flow, not harden in my head.

Although Kara ended up with a well-organized paper, it was a struggle for her. Many students (and teachers) who go through the motions of clustering just make an outline in circles. For Kara, however, clustering is a tool that really works. She likes to go with the flow that clustering enables her to generate. Consequently, Task Five was a hindrance rather than a help to her; yet it did make her mindful that she needed to work to organize her paper. She explains that the preliminary tasks got her thinking about the topic, so writing the paper was not such a shock. Consider that for a minute. Did you ever think that a writing assignment out of the blue is like someone throwing a bucket of cold water in your face? That's the feeling a lot of students experience, especially when they have little confidence in themselves as writers. Kara, however, is not one of these. She has plenty of ideas, and even though she resists categorizing them in a linear fashion, I really don't think they have "hardened" in her head.

Barak's Portfolio

Task Four: Generating Ideas  
Figure 12



Task Five: Organizing Ideas  
Figure 13

MAIN IDEA: *Use things even when they get old*

| QUESTIONS TO DECIDE                | DETAILS OR POSSIBILITIES   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| AUDIENCE?<br>FORMAT?<br>BEGINNING? | <i>classmates, teacher, Charlotte O'Brien<br/>persuasive essay.<br/>Question?</i>  |
| ISSUE/PROBLEM?<br>MAIN POINTS?     | <i>Use things till they wear out<br/>1. save old thing<br/>2. use till worn out<br/>2. do not throw away, use<br/>for something else</i> |
| DETAILS/EXAMPLES?                  | <i>The machine will change old run-down<br/>things into new fresh shiny things.</i>  |
| CONCLUSION?                        | <i>we should all do our part to<br/>save the environment. Using things<br/>again and again certainly helps!</i>                          |

For Task Six, Barak wrote a fictionalized account of an invention which will save the world:

#### The Renewal Machine

Before the Renewal Machine we were a wasteful, trash-filled society. And we still would have been if not for this marvelous invention of Professor E. Pluribus Unum. The Renewal Machine works as simple as it sounds. You simply put an old rundown item into the machine, push the button and—zap—its [*sic*] just like brand new! Oh, by the way, since new machines can be made from one (1) Renewal Machine, they're free! All right then here's an example. Ordinary scrapaper [*sic*]. You find scrapaper around the house all the time. Now, instead of throwing it in the trash as you would have before, put the paper in the machine, push the button and look! You've got brand new paper! Even more than you had in the beginning. Now, let's look at a harder example. Take a computer for instance. An old, broken, out-of-date computer. Again, put it in the machine, push the button, and—zap—a brand new, working, top-of-the-line computer! Impressed? There is also another feature. The Renewal Machine shrinks or enlarges to the size of the item, so that it does not take up much

space. This system is great, although it does have one side effect. To most earth-loving people this effect is great, but for earth-hating energy wasting people, it's their worst nightmare. As a person uses the machine, he or she gets kinder, more energy efficient, and his or her drive to save the planet increases to the point where a person no longer needs the machine. Then he or she may pass on the Renewal Machine to a new person so that it may work its magic on them. The cycle will go on and on until no one will ever waste again. This machine will not only save our planet but bring peace to all countries of the world. There will be no hunger because the Renewal Machine can also turn something into nothing. An example: Take the scraps from your meal, put them in the machine and then, five minutes later you literally have a meal that could feed the entire country. And there will be no homelessness because a homeless person can turn his cardboard box into a three story mansion. As Professor E. Pluribus Unum once said, "The Renewal Machine is limited only by the imagination."

Barak explained that he liked Task Four best because it is easy for him to think of ideas. He writes:

Although this was my favorite, I pretty much enjoyed all 'tasks.' But I do not think 'task' was a good word for the items since they were so fun! I thought Task Six was the most difficult because it was where all the tasks became important. Most of the time, I get ideas off the top of my head. But sometimes I get ideas while I read, watch TV, or just from being outside. Lots of times I get ideas from listening to music. Without all the other tasks it would have been very difficult to do Task Six. I get ideas out of nowhere. When I think something is very good, most people think they're strange or impossible. Well, to me anything is possible and anything can be good. That is the reason I am so creative and think the way I do.

When we look back at Barak's Task Four, we see the number and variety of his ideas. At this point there is no clue that he will come up with the renewal machine. In Task Five he stays with his main idea—to use things when they get old—but doesn't really progress much on paper until he starts to think about details or examples he wants to include. This is where he has his brainstorm: "The machine will change old rundown things into new fresh shiny things." His idea for a conclusion sounds pretty run-of-the-mill in Task Five; however, notice how it plays out in his paper: "As a person uses the machine, he or she gets kinder, more energy efficient, and his or her drive to save the planet increases to the point where a person no longer needs the machine." Now Barak is really cooking! This wonderful machine will solve all the problems of the world. Barak knows that his

strength is his creativity and feels confident that he can take a “strange or impossible” idea and turn it into something good!

## Conclusion

By taking advantage of the social nature of language-learning, the assessment supported a risk-free environment in which all students were able to obtain some measure of success. Interest remained high throughout the assessment. Students developed a strong sense of ownership, and a number of them wanted to include their multi-task portfolios as part of their class portfolios. In addition, their teachers were surprised at the variety and creativity displayed in the written responses to the tasks.

Not only does the multi-task portfolio provide excellent examples of why reflection about writing and thinking are so important to consider—for both student and teacher—it also enables teachers who have not had time to incorporate portfolios into their curriculum to participate in portfolio evaluation and analysis. Hopefully, this experience will serve to inspire these teachers to make portfolios an integral part of the writing curriculum in their classrooms.

Teachers whose students participated in a later pilot of the multi-task portfolio met together to develop an appropriate rubric (see Appendix) and then used the rubric to score the portfolios; however, they did not score the work of their own students. At the end of the scoring session, they left with their students' portfolios and were able to return these the next day. Teachers commented that their involvement in this project was one of the best professional development opportunities they had ever had.

As research and practice continue to inform us about writing and writing instruction, we must develop assessment models which encompass these findings. Camp explains that writers use different approaches and strategies to accomplish the same task; that they switch among processes and strategies depending upon their perceptions and plans for addressing the task; that they learn in process from each other; and that it is important for them to become aware of how they go about writing and how they think about it. Through assessments such as the one I have described, students enthusiastically take responsibility for their own learning; teachers see themselves as co-conspirators rather than omniscient purveyors of knowledge. Both class portfolios and large-scale multi-task portfolio assessments provide fertile ground for supporting a learner-centered curriculum as well as for increasing our understanding of how

students learn. The multi-task portfolios described here, developed as part of a statewide communications arts assessment, demonstrate how portfolio pedagogy can encourage large-scale assessments which are compatible with instructional goals. In the development of performance assessments that support theory and practice, we are, as Professor E. Pluribus Unum would say, “limited only by our imagination.”

## Appendix

*Missouri Multi-task Portfolio Rubric*

- (4) An *Outstanding Portfolio* contains evidence of
- superior understanding of resources as demonstrated in task responses
  - strong connections between ideas and tasks
  - fresh and/or insightful conclusions
  - strong control of language, vocabulary, and sentence structure
  - creative approach and individual perspective
  - writer's message clearly unimpeded by errors in conventions and mechanics
  - reflective statements that clarify task responses and explain strategies/processes
- (3) An *On-Track Portfolio* contains evidence of
- clear understanding of resources demonstrated in task responses
  - obvious connections between ideas and tasks
  - logical conclusions
  - clear control of language, vocabulary, and sentence structure
  - some creativity of approach and individual perspective
  - writer's message unimpeded by errors in conventions and mechanics
  - reflective statements that are relevant but may not be specific
- (2) An *Emerging Portfolio* contains evidence of
- basic understanding of resources in task responses
  - limited connections between ideas and tasks
  - facts restated in attempt to draw own conclusions
  - limited control of language, vocabulary, and sentence structure
  - little creativity of approach and/or individual perspective
  - writer's message that may be inhibited by frequent errors in conventions or mechanics
  - reflective statements that are minimal and general
- (1) An *Underdeveloped Portfolio* contains evidence of
- little or no understanding of resources and/or tasks
  - little or no attempt at connecting ideas and/or tasks
  - facts copied or restated rather than drawing own conclusions
  - lack of control of language, vocabulary, and/or sentence structure
  - lack of creativity of approach and individual perspective
  - writer's message that may be impaired by frequent errors in mechanics and structure
  - reflective statements that are minimal and/or irrelevant

(A *Nonscorable Portfolio* does not contain enough completed tasks to score. To be scored a portfolio must contain at least four tasks, including Tasks Five and Six.)