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THE PROCESS ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE
OF THE DIGITAL MEDIA PROJECT
“CULTIVATING CHRISTIAN MINDS AND CHARACTER”

Susan H. Maynor, B.A.

An Abstract with a Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a
Degree of Master of Communications with a Concentration in Digital Media

2006

ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on the process analysis and critique of the digital media project, "Cultivating Christian Minds and Character," made for Westminster Christian Academy in the summer of 2005. It includes both the actual promotional video production and the written analysis.

Westminster Christian Academy, a non-denominational, private, Christian school in West County, produces a promotional video each year for the parents and for various other marketing needs throughout the school year. For the school year 2005-2006, the theme was cultivating Christian minds and character. Having been both a student and a teacher at this institution, it was an honor and privilege to write, direct, and produce this video.

This project included all the steps in a typical video production, beginning with pre-production. Early meetings, technology lessons, and practice of programs dominated most of this stage, along with planning and brainstorming on how to communicate the theme. Once decisions regarding teacher interviews were made, production began.

A list of teachers was recommended, and interviews were set up, with the main question posed: "How do you, as a teacher at Westminster Christian Academy, cultivate the minds and characters of the students in your classes?"

With each interview, an important perspective was communicated that resulted in an educational truth shared by all the teachers. These truths became the “chapters” in the project. During this production stage, b-roll was shot both on campus and in certain sections of St. Louis that would support and enhance each chapter.

Once the interviews and b-roll had been completed, post-production began. The entire project was edited on Adobe Premiere Pro 1.5. This phase faced challenges with time and a family crisis but was completed in time to show the parents on the designated date.

This thesis includes a critique of the project, along with an exploration of the creative process, most specifically the intrinsic meaning in every creative piece.

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Pre-Production

The History of the Video

When I was thirteen years old, on a cold January day, I started my second semester 8th grade in a tiny school on Manchester Road. A school just six years old, with little reputation in the St. Louis community. My best friend from church, Kathy Golden, had invited me to visit her “Christian” school several weeks earlier. Eager to get out of Unified Studies, I happily joined her for a day of new friends and new beginnings. That night my parents had barely taken a bite of dinner before I announced that I wanted to attend Westminster Christian Academy. “The teachers are so nice, and the kids are so cool.” For an 8th grader, that’s really all that mattered.

After an evening of whispered discussion behind a closed bedroom door, my parents sat me down and asked, “Are you sure you want to leave your friends? They don’t have an orchestra, and we know how much you love the violin.” Not really, I thought. But I saw their point and after moment of deliberation, I enthusiastically answered yes because I knew it was what I wanted. I didn’t love where I went to school. I didn’t fit in very well and wanted something smaller. And I wanted to have a Christian education. So the love affair began.

Fast forward five years later, and now a senior in high school, my life was soon to begin outside the walls of Westminster Christian Academy. Memories of musicals, volleyball and basketball games, banquets, Student Council meetings, boys, and best friends made my four and a half years at WCA an unforgettable

experience. And I made a vow, a vow I was giving myself permission to break, but nonetheless a vow to come back at some point in my life and serve the school.

Fast forward again, fifteen years later, and my vow is fulfilled. I am a teacher, a mentor, a director, and a friend to many students at WCA. And I need to make a video for a culminating project for my Master's, five years in the making. It was time.

A History of Westminster Christian Academy

Westminster Christian Academy began as a brainchild of several families, many of whom were members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, because they wanted a Christian secondary education from a Reformed perspective. After several years of planning and with 72 students and several rented classrooms at Missouri Baptist College, Westminster opened its doors on September 7, 1976.

A man named George Knight, a professor at Covenant Seminary, was the leader and visionary behind this school. Several years before Westminster officially began, Dr. Knight and others began a movement to persuade people in the community that a Christian high school was needed. It was a daunting task, and though many families thought it was a great idea, most hesitated to commit to such a large-scale project. Within time, however, and a survey or two, the idea of a school gained enough energy, allowing for plans to take shape. By late 1975, about twenty students committed for grades 7-10, and the founding Board decided to move forward. Missouri Baptist College had experienced a drop in student

enrollment, and they were looking to rent out rooms, along with labs, a gym, and even the cafeteria. The timing was perfect, and the school began.

During that first year, weekly meetings and hours of work went into creating and refining this school. School colors needed to be chosen, a logo needed to be designed, along with various other decisions that would begin to define Westminster in years to come. At the end of the first year, students were able to participate in various sports such as basketball and softball, play in the band, sing in the choir and work with the yearbook or newspaper staff. And with one person in the Class of 1977, the graduation ceremony was held on May 31, 1977, in the Missouri Baptist College Auditorium, with Dr. Knight giving the commencement address.

The next year displayed massive growth, causing the Board to look for a new facility. Des Peres School, located on Manchester Road, was up for sale. Though an elementary school by structure, this was to be Westminster's home for several years. The Board thought the building would suffice for years; however, within four years, the school had outgrown its home. The school moved to the old West Ladue Junior High in 1982, allowing for the 265-student enrollment and a whole lot of vision for something bigger and better.

During its first year at the Ladue Campus, the school underwent an accreditation process through the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS), the midwestern branch of the National Association of Independent Schools. One of the most immediate benefits of being an accredited school was Westminster's athletic teams' ability to compete in the Missouri State

High School Activities Association. Over the years, however, ISACS has helped to improve, develop, and change the direction of the school, giving it the maturity that it has today.

During its first few years, several people served as leader/Headmaster of the school. In 1985, however, it became clear that a serious search must take place to find a leader that would plant roots and help WCA grow. Mr. James Marsh, from Fort Lauderdale Christian School, was the perfect man for the job. Marsh used his expertise to start a senior service program, eliminate the mortgage (over a 10 year span), expand the existing facility, support and grow many, many, many programs, and create, with the help of others, a unique Philosophy of Curriculum.

Today Westminster houses over 850 students, grades 7-12, including the Learning Center, which serves students with learning difficulties. Recently, Westminster purchased a piece of property in Town and Country, with the hope of expanding to two campuses, a middle school and a high school. The vision continues with the hope of more growth and more students to experience an excellent Christian education.

The Initial Meeting

In March of 2005, my husband was diagnosed with a very rare, very terminal cancer. He had surgery to remove as much of the tumor as possible and was scheduled to undergo radiation and chemotherapy over the summer and into fall. As one can imagine, our world was rocked off its course, as we had a three-

year-old and a one-year-old, not to mention everything else that went with a terminal illness. In January of 2005, I had decided not to return to my part-time teaching position in the fall, so our income was going to shrink at the end of July. With long-term disability looming in our future, it became apparent that returning to work might be a necessity. Jim Marsh, the headmaster, called me in June and offered me the position of Community Relations, which would begin the first of August, because he knew our family situation.. Part of this job was overseeing the Ignite video, the promotional video that was shown to parents at the beginning of each school year. I wasn't sure about the job, but I did know that I wanted to do the video, because I saw it as an opportunity to finish my master's project and, in addition, help the school communicate their message to the parents. And I told Jim that I would make the video no matter if I took the job position or not. And I would complete it without pay, as it was to be my grad school project, and there was a limited budget when it came to projects like this. The initial meeting took place in early June.

Peggy Johnson, the current Director of Community Relations who was moving to Director of Admissions in August, looked at me with her inquisitive brown eyes and said, "Our theme this year is teachers. We want to communicate how teachers cultivate the Christian minds and characters of students at WCA." And then she proceeded to list nine or ten or eleven teachers—I don't exactly recall the number—that were to be interviewed. And that was it. Nothing else. Just a hopeful look in her eyes that this would be great. Shit. My throat tightened and my head hardened, and I felt panic creep up the back of my neck. I thought,

“Can I do this? There is so much going on...two little children, terminal cancer. This is insane.” But, instead, I smiled and said, “This is great. I will contact these teachers and set up interviews right away.” We chatted a bit more, and I left with nothing but a list.

So I prayed.

The interesting part about this whole pre-production experience was how little the people “in charge” could articulate exactly what they wanted. All I was given was a list of teachers, and it was left to me to develop and define this communication tool that was to be shown to the parent community. The task felt daunting, difficult, and scary. But somewhere deep in my soul, there was a breath of confidence. I did know the school, its essence and character, for I had been a student, an alum, and even a teacher. But could I put together something that could express that? I studied the list of teachers, took a deep breath, and began making phone calls. Asking the right questions to get the right answers would be the key to fitting the puzzle pieces of this project together. What those answers were, I was not sure, but I needed to start somewhere.

I made phone calls, set up interviews, and generated my own list of questions that I thought would gather the picture I was hoping to find. One of my biggest fears was the ability to use the media available to communicate a message. I could see how I wanted it to look in my head, and I was afraid my knowledge was too limited to get there.

The Tech Lessons

I had two secret insecurities going into this that I did not share with anyone but my husband and my media tech friend, Han. One was the fact that I really didn't know what the hell I was doing, and two was audio and lighting. Though audio and lighting are not directly related, it did not boost my confidence if I admitted to more than two insecurities. I approached my friend and colleague, Han Kim, to give me a crash course in interviewing. A Video Production Cluster taught me about white balance and focus, but that was five years ago, a very long time. And suddenly I was dealing with wireless microphones and channels and lights and backgrounds and smacking lips.

Han runs the Media and Tech department of Westminster, he and his small gang of high school techies. I had taught most of his followers in my Digital Communications classes and quickly discovered that they knew way more than I did. But to cheer my teaching insecurities, I repeatedly told myself that my creative genius was going to pull me through this project. Yeah, right. I would soon learn that a project has a mind of its own.

Han and I met at school on a sunny June afternoon for this crash course. I had never used lights, other than natural light, nor wireless microphones for interviewing. Recently, the school had received as a gift two Sunpak lighting tripods and lights, both adjustable. Fairly straightforward and not too technical. We practiced different looks, watched for shadows, and discussed the problem of lights and glasses.

Sound was a little more confusing, but my little experience from directing high school musicals came in handy. Each interviewee was to wear a wireless microphone, clipped to a collared shirt. I needed to make sure the channel was set correctly, either A or B, depending on which one I preferred, and I needed to control the volume, which would include lip smacking and ambient sounds from the room. My headphones hooked directly into the camera, which gave me the clearest and cleanest check on sound.

When the lessons were over, I found myself encouraged. First, so much of what I learned in Video Production came flooding back, and secondly, it was not all that difficult to learn. Neither seemed too daunting. I was sure I would get all hot and nervous when I actually did the interview, but I needed to trust in myself and know that I could do it.

The Preliminary Practice Video

In March of 2005, I received the biggest shock of my human life. Cancer. Terminal cancer. Suddenly my vocabulary included words like sarcoma and pneumnectomy, and discussions included topics like heaven and treatment options and second opinions. Without going into extensive detail, this “shock” dramatically affected this project—emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. In fact, I did not commit to this project until late May when radiation treatment was pending. However, cancer and my family’s delicate predicament made this project sweeter and richer than I could have ever anticipated, the first of that being the yearly gathering of friends.

Every year my husband's college friends gather for a whole lot of eating, drinking, talking and sitting around. They call it Sussurando. The name of the gathering is not important, but for clarity, this preliminary project is called the Suss video. I actually did not decide to make this video until a morning after an evening of drinks and laughter. With all that had happened in our life the last three months, I knew this could be the last of the Sussurandos that would include my husband. Why not a video?

Again, this gathering was a whole lot of eating, drinking, talking and sitting around. How could I make that interesting? How could I tell a story? The more I thought about it, I realized the story was easy—loyal friendship—and my audience was really only that particular group of friends. Impressing with camera angles and mood lighting was not the focus but bringing to life the personalities of all involved and trying to capture the essence of Sussurando was. I did not set up certain shots or focus too much on audio. Instead, I did my best to capture images that were meaningful and funny and interesting.

After I got home and began looking at the all the shots, I decided it needed to be series of stories, the first being the basic introduction of characters. I also decided that because my audio was pathetic, most of what I shot would be set to music. My brother had recently sent me a mix CD, and I knew immediately my choices.

Once I determined the idea of short stories, it was easy to see what needed to be included. The one big event of the weekend—a poker tournament—was the only story that needed to be chronological. The rest of the stories were more

subject-driven, rather than event-driven. I outlined my thoughts and chose music, some for the lyrics and some for the beat, to go with each story.

1. Introduction of Characters – “Mr. Blue Sky,” by ELO
2. The Poker Tournament – “Triplets of Bellevue,” from the movie
3. The Idiosyncrasies – “Where is the Love?” by The Black-Eyed Peas
4. The Intimate Moments of Friendship – “One of These Things First,” by Nick Drake
5. Montage of Stills – “Faeries,” from the soundtrack, “Amelie”
6. End Credits and Epilogue – “A Little Help From My Friends,” by Macy Gray

The biggest reason as to why this video was so important to my project was how it gave me comfort with Adobe Premiere Pro 1.5. Five years ago I edited my first video on IMOVIE. Simple transitions, a few effects, and a basic timeline. That was it. And I thought that was hard.

Then came Adobe Premiere. After I had my first child, I did not want to work full-time anymore, and a teaching position opened at the high school (I had been teaching middle school) for a digital communications teacher. This position opened because my dearest husband, who had been teaching several classes in the media department, was leaving teaching. In order to provide for our family, my husband planned to pursue a career in project management and freelance writing. This provided me the perfect schedule to teach a little and be with my child. The relevance of this is that during the three years I taught this class, I learned Adobe Premiere, the video editing program I used for this project. I also mastered Adobe Photoshop, which I also used for this project. However, teaching and using are two different experiences. Therefore, making the Suss video provided me the time and the project to solidify my comfort with editing my own project, rather than someone else's.

The Influences

I have watched film since I was a little girl. I have many favorites, from my many different phases of life, and have found that over my life, I think in pictures. Several films, books and people influenced this project, as well as years and years of knowing an institution.

Robert McKee's, *Story*, taught me about direction, and it helped me organize and focus the story I wanted to tell. He bottom lines the most important factor in making any creative piece: "Story is about originality, not duplication. A story is not only what you have to say but also how you say it. If content is cliché, the telling will be cliché. But if your vision is deep and original, your story design will be unique" (McKee, 8). I remember reading that and wondering how does one make a promotional video for a school interesting and original? I have seen so many, and they are all exactly the same. The viewer sees pictures of the school, the students and teachers, and learns how many activities it has, and how many degrees the teachers have. And depending on whether or not it is to raise money, one will learn of any impending projects. That's it. That's what a school video is.

I was not interested in making one of those. I wanted to tell a story. A real story. A story of what Westminster is, not what it might want to become. And not how many degrees were held within its many classrooms. Instead, I wanted to communicate the hearts of the teachers and show the larger community of parents what a Westminster education truly is.

Years ago, my brother Stephen moved to Los Angeles to become a screenwriter, and he has been quite successful. He loves talking about writing and what works and what does not and story and character and essence and meaning. Many of these discussions included my husband, who also had the gift of pen, however more in the form of essays and articles. Both my brother and my husband Brian have always been incredible role models for me as writers. When I lived in Los Angeles years ago, Stephen and I used to sit outside on my little porch, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, discussing movies and stories and directors and writers. And my husband and I had dreams and plans of great stories that would be written to encourage others. Throughout this whole project, Brian and Stephen sat on each shoulder, whispering encouragement and stimulating creativity and believing that in spite of life's greatest blows, I could make this video.

The movie, *13 Conversations About One Thing*, a movie directed by Jill Sprecher, greatly influenced the structure of my video. It is series of interwoven stories that moves around in time, organized by titles. I have seen that before in other shows—*Frasier*, *Sex in the City*—and I thought it would help organize my video, though this idea did not come until after all the interviews had been conducted, and I knew what I wanted to say. I felt as though it set the tone for each segment because the pace was slower, more reflective.

Production

The Interviews

The Advancement team at Westminster had made a list of questions that I was to ask for each interview—a little about family, history, likes, and dislikes—with the primary question being, “How do you cultivate Christian minds at WCA?” At first, I thought there were too many teachers on the list, and with all these questions, it would be better to focus on one or two teachers. I even asked a professor friend who teaches film at Baylor University what he thought about this long list and little direction. He suggested exactly what I thought, to chronicle one teacher and who they are and how they cultivate minds. So with only that brainstorm in my mind because I truly had no idea what this would look like, I forged forward into the interviews.

I spoke to each teacher individually before his or her interview, giving a revised list of questions and encouraging thought before we met. I knew all of the teachers, which was a gift that immediately gave comfort to both of us. Being interviewed is not easy, and I quickly learned that being the interviewer is challenging. I now have more respect for and understand why Katie Couric is so successful. Asking the right questions is the key to getting the answers you want.

My first interview was with Susan Schmersahl, the Learning Center teacher for the Middle School. Her interview did not end up in the final product, but she was one of the best interviews I conducted. She is smart, articulate, and enthusiastic, and those qualities were evident in the interview, and I remember thinking the whole video should be about her. I encountered lip smacking and the

thought, "I can edit that," and when the interview was over, I thought, "Not too bad." And it really wasn't.

Most of the interviews were generally the same, though I encountered different challenges from which I learned. For one interview, I had unplugged the audio on the camera, missing all his audio for the first few minutes. Fortunately, I caught it before I got to the important question. The subject also wore glasses, and I struggled for quite a few minutes to get the lighting just right. For another interview, I did not realize until it was all over that the focus was on the books behind the subject. But all in all, they turned out well, and I was surprised at how much footage I had from which to work.

As I asked the teachers questions about life and family, it was glaringly clear that so few of them had ever sat in front of the camera. Who does on a regular basis? I wanted to put them at ease, let them relax. I observed the lack of comfort, but when I asked how he or she cultivates the minds of students at WCA, something changed. Muscles relaxed. Smiles appeared. They got confident. Ask anyone about what they like to do, and it is easy to get an earful. The best example of this was Scott Holley, Dean of Curriculum. I have known Scott for years. He was Mr. Holley to me for the two years I sat in his classroom taking vocabulary tests and discussing literature, my favorite being *The Once and Future King*. He became Scott, my mentor and friend after college graduation when I began to pursue my teaching career. And Scott he stayed when I began to teach at WCA. Secretly, he scares the shit out of me. He's brilliant and serious and every time I have a conversation with him, I walk away thinking "did I think I was

funny when I opened my mouth and out flew that incredibly stupid comment?" But over the years, I think I've earned his respect as an educator. He was stilted and tight talking about his family that he loves and adores. He even asked to answer some of the questions again because he thought he "messed up" on his answer. But when I asked him the question about the students, the words tumbled out, gracefully and eloquently. In fact, his segment of video was my favorite to put together. And the perfect ending to the series of truths that were expressed.

Sometime after the third interview, I knew the direction of this video. Each teacher, when asked the question regarding cultivating minds, lit up and relaxed for the first time in the interview. They suddenly felt comfortable and were able to talk about their passion and what it was that they were called to do on this Earth. Each had a specific, beautiful gold nugget that represented the very essence of a Westminster education. It was not about how many degrees they had or what activities they did in the classroom, but rather a more formative instruction of the soul and mind, an invaluable part of any education.

When I had completed the interviews, I had hours and hours of footage, but it was clear which segments I would use. I actually knew which pieces I wanted while I conducted each interview. The teachers wrote the script for me with their organic words. And I would not want to write it, as it was so much more powerful coming from the voices of those who are in the classroom with the students. The issue I knew I would face would be taking each of these rich nuggets and putting them together to tell the story. The clay was in front of me, and it was now time to sculpt.

The B-Roll

I have this beautiful memory of my husband sitting in the passenger seat of my car, brainstorming with me the b-roll I would need to make this thing work. Because he had taught at Westminster for several years, he was of one mind with me. We spent a glorious Friday morning driving around the Etzel neighborhood, the University City Loop, and Downtown. Two of the interviews stressed the importance of culture, and I went to the places I loved.

For most of it, I used the tripod. I have an issue with tripods because they take too much time to set up, and often the natural moment disappears before the tripod is even opened. With a video such as this, those moments were gold, so most of my cutaway of students was handheld. However, some of the culture and classroom shots could be set up with the tripod, and I did that as much as I could. Handheld is great for capturing what you want, but it is not steady, and that is often apparent in the final product.

I love the University City Loop and felt it had so much to say in my video. It is a beautiful mix of ideas and culture and represents so much more than the bubble of West County. I experienced that bubble growing up and was determined to open the minds of the parents that would see this video. Having grown up in St. Louis county, I was taught to fear the Loop. I was never allowed to go there, and I know there are still parents in the Westminster community who think it is a scary, dark place. That is one reason why I chose it. I felt it supported the idea that Westminster teaches students to make choices and decisions, and it does not try to hide them from the world.

Most of my student shots were completed the first two days of school, a week before the video was to be finished. I wanted current shots and took a huge risk, knowing my time was limited. Seniors were going on a work day the first Friday of the school year, and I wanted authentic shots of them working and being in the world. I also wanted shots of those interviewed interacting and teaching their students. Some of the videos that had been done in the past did not have b-roll that supported the script. I remember thinking—and knowing—that some of the shots were fabricated and made to fit the written script. Yes, that is filmmaking, but, again, my purpose was to capture the authenticity and essence of this school. And that meant extra work.

The Statue of Liberty and Ground Zero shots were taken several weeks before school started when my family took a trip to New York for a consultation at the Sloane-Kettering Cancer Center. I am sure I did not plan to use them, but they were perfect for the culture shots I needed for both two of the segments that dealt directly with preparing students to be out in the world.

The Structure

I have spent most of my adult life grading papers, most specifically academic essays. Therefore, I think in Introduction/Body/Conclusion. A three-act structure of sorts. I knew from the beginning what I wanted for my introduction, a series of still images of teachers, like pencil drawings. The body was each gold nugget, appropriately titled, to give a clear picture of a

Westminster education. And the conclusion was to focus on the four definitions of 'cultivate.'

For each gold nugget or body paragraph, I needed to come up with a title. I sat with my husband and watched the interviews over and over and over again, hoping and praying something would come to mind. The first breakthrough came with Scott Holley's interview when he stated, "...it's not about protecting....rather about transforming this world..." Transforming the world. That was it. I knew that every teacher at Westminster basically felt the same way—to train students to go out into the world and make a difference.

From there, the rest came. I decided on gerunds, mostly because of the word "transforming." And I felt the gerund indicated process rather than final product. A high school is simply a step in one's life process.

The Script

I did not have the opportunity to write as much for this video as I anticipated. But I actually enjoyed it so much more. I found it a privilege to hear from those that are excellent in their profession, and I knew my words would never be as powerful or as eloquent as the words of those teachers. I walked away from each interview impressed and excited at their abilities and their dedication to Westminster.

I did, however, write and record the voiceover for the final conclusion. My purpose was to reiterate the definitions of 'cultivate' that have been the theme

of marketing at Westminster for the last few years. The four definitions appear in poster form in the Student Commons on campus.

Westminster teachers teach the students to discover the great world God created.

Westminster teachers cherish and nurture students as God's individual children.

Westminster teachers train and refine students to integrate their faith into the very fabric of their lives.

Westminster teachers prepare and grow students to transform the world in the place God intended it to be.

Post-Production

The Editing

I have never thought of myself as an egotistical person. I know I have offended people with tactless comments or saying all too quickly what is on my mind, but being all about myself makes me uncomfortable. Looking back over my childhood, it is easy to see how my lack of confidence and extreme insecurity could only be rooted in the narcissistic mother I had. Therefore, it made sense that I would have no self-esteem, much less any ego. But I learned how wrong I was. I do think highly of myself, so highly that I obsess and worry and panic over small details because they have to be perfect the first time. This made editing a challenge, but one of the greatest creative experiences I have ever had.

There were several things about Premiere Pro that were new to me after my practice video. The master sequence on the timeline was a new upgrade from Premiere 6.5, and it made all the difference in the world when editing. I edited

each segment individually, including the introduction and conclusion, and then put them all on a master sequence timeline. I could then edit each individual sequence if I needed to, and it would translate to the master. When I put on the music underscore, I was able to put that directly onto the master, which gave me freedom to match it to the exact frame I wanted.

Editing each segment worked basically the same way. I went through each interview and found the gold nugget that I wanted to use. I then memorized it. This helped me to visualize what I wanted to see while I listened to each teacher speak. I had planned most of my b-roll, so I knew I had most or all of what I needed to make each segment work. Once I had everything visual in place, I then worked on transitions, which were mostly cross dissolves. I thought about doing more cuts, but that felt too harsh or too quick for the nature of this video. I did not use any of the preset transitions, as I find most of those not to my liking. I prefer a cut or a dissolve or maybe a fade to black.

Each clip needed its color balanced, and some needed brightness and contrast adjusted. Most of the b-roll was shot in natural light, and I knew by playing with saturation and color balance, I could make it look as rich as a vivid dream. I do not think it actually turned out as rich as I had in my mind, but it certainly looked better than the original clip.

Audio proved to be the biggest learning experience for me in the editing room. I did not know too much about it, as most of what I had edited had been music. During the last days of editing, my friend Han came over and taught me all about audio fades and dissolves, audio mixing, and audio effects. The help

was invaluable, as I was able to clean up several issues such as ambient noise, lip smacking, and lots of “umms.”

The Challenges of the Conclusion

The last week in August, one week before the video was to be shown to parents, my husband was admitted to the hospital with pneumonia, a side effect of the radiation he had endured. It was devastating. Through this whole journey of cancer, we were constantly in uncharted waters, and now I had this huge project that had so much riding on it. The video was not in any shape to hand off to anyone else. And my heart ached to not be by my husband's side for a bit, but we called a best friend, who hurried over and was able to take him and get him admitted to the hospital, giving me a few hours to get the video to a place where it could be given to someone else to finish. I still had a few segments that needed editing, and I did not want anyone else deciding what should or should not be included. And I had a particular idea of what I wanted visually. My friend Han would have been the one to take over the project, and though he is technically brilliant, I was concerned that he would miss the message I was trying to convey. That afternoon, as my husband got settled in the hospital, I worked diligently to get the video to a place that would only need technical editing. I knew the conclusion was not going to get finished that night, but I had the script completed and trusted Han to find the appropriate video clips. As it turned out, what I thought would take four or five hours, only took two. I had the great blessing of

spending the evening with my husband, watching him enjoy the first meal he had eaten in days. All of this occurred five days before it was “due.”

The next day, I spent most of the day with my husband, and we talked about what to do with the video. If I walked away from it now, I did not think I could use it for my culminating project. Brian did not want me to give it up and, though it meant being apart that evening, he insisted I stay home and work on the conclusion, the last piece that still needed to be completed.

I knew what I wanted, but I was fried—emotionally, physically, and spiritually fried—and I knew there was no way I would get it to look like much of anything. I put my children to bed that night and assumed I would stay up until the wee hours of the morning. I actually fell asleep in my son’s bed and woke about 8:45 p.m., slightly panicked. As I sat in front of my computer, I began to pray. “Help me” was all I prayed, over and over and over again.

I had written the script earlier, so I had already defined the four aspects of cultivate that I wanted to highlight. All I needed was the video clips to support each definition. I started digging through cutaway. Within two hours, I was finished, or at least ready for voiceover and audio, the last pieces of the project. I cannot even remember many details of that evening or what truly happened to pull it together, but it just happened. Every clip I needed was there. In retrospect, I think I stepped out of the way of myself and let the images tell the story, rather than try and control and hold on to some expectation that had to be fulfilled. For that, I will forever see art as having its own intrinsic meaning, not just what the artist wants to create.

The Critique

This video, compared with others that had been made in the past for this particular school, was content rich, and much less graphic intensive. I did that on purpose for several reasons, the most important being the story I wanted to tell. I felt this story did not need cheesy graphics or anything flashy to take away from the eloquent words of the teachers. Graphics are impressive, yes, but can often be distracting and too fast-paced for a story such as this. With so many interviews, this video took on a life of its own, one that needed sculpting and editing, rather than more bells and whistles.

As a communication tool, I think this video turned out well. The message is clear, the story is focused, and the shots are interesting. The thesis of this project—how do Westminster teachers cultivate the minds and characters of the students—was boldly answered with each interview, and was driven home by the brief conclusion, leaving the audience with a vivid picture of a Westminster education. If a parent was interested in the curriculum, they could visit the office and peruse the curriculum binders. However, this video spoke volumes as to how the teachers feel and think about their classroom, their students, and their profession, something you could not find in a binder.

The shots were interesting because typically in a school promotional video one does not see the Statue of Liberty or the Tivoli Theater or seniors out sweating and working in the community. This is not to say it could not be done, but often those hired to shoot it do not necessarily know where to go. Standard shots of students talking, eating, laughing, playing, and learning are what one

would see. My video had many of those, however, it took it a step further and dug a little deeper into the meaning of this type of education.

As content rich as I feel this video is, it is technically quite elementary. I kept it simple on purpose, but I think if I had had more time, I may have improved on, at the very least, the introduction. It did not really turn out the way I envisioned, mostly because what I should have done is taken stills of the teachers I wanted, so I could set up the shots, instead of taking them from the video. The one that did not work was L.B.'s head shot that appeared at the top of the screen. I wanted something at the top, to give it variation in layout, but it was not a good picture. I kept it in because it was the best I had, and I felt that it needed to be there for the flow of the introduction. Again, more time would have given me an opportunity to improve this.

Each of the segments had elements that worked and elements that did not work. In "Building Relationships", L.B. Graham was incredibly articulate, though he was slow. I put him first because I thought he introduced and clarified the direction the video was heading—an introduction paragraph to the body paragraphs. Because his clear and direct content was simple to edit, I began editing his segment first. I did not particularly like the zoom for his interview, as I thought it was too close but not distracting enough to redo it. He was one of my first interviews, and I improved with experience.

The "Loving God" segment had a terrible background. The subject, Florence Lewis, has been a part of the Westminster community for many years. She and her husband have served the community as parents, teachers, and

administrators. And communicating with them is often difficult, as they are quiet and reserved. I was cautious to make sure my questions did not offend or confuse them. I also wanted to make sure they felt loved and appreciated, as they had recently come out of a very challenging family situation. I happened to be in the same room I had done some other interviews, and in order to be different, I changed the background. A poor choice, however. The other part of this segment that bothered me was its length. She had a whole other piece I was going to include, but the b-roll would have been almost impossible to get, and I felt an audience would not enjoy just watching her speak on the terrible background. I wanted what she said included, so I chose to keep the shorter piece and make it the best I could.

The segment, "Thinking Biblically," was one of my favorites to edit. I like Ken as a person, and I have known him for several years. He teaches American government, western civilization, and We the People. Every year he takes his We the People class to the state and national competitions and always does well. I thought this one turned out well, with a variety of shots, supporting the message conveyed. One of the greatest lessons I learned with this segment was the fact that when shooting, I often stop the camera a few seconds too short. I actually learned it through this entire project, as there were moments in editing when I struggled because I did not have enough footage or I jerked the camera. This has profoundly impacted projects that I have completed since this one, and for that, I am grateful.

“Understanding God’s Design” was a key component for the video because it focused on the middle school. Mollie, the middle school counselor, was my favorite interviewee. She engaged with me and smiled and interacted with the camera. Of course, the focus was on the books behind her and not her sweet, beautiful face. I did not notice that until I had loaded the footage and began editing. I decided that it was not terrible, and I knew I would never get what she said verbatim, so I compromised and kept it so I could keep her words. This segment also suffered from not enough boys. When I shot in the middle school, I had only a very brief moment when kids were available. Middle school students are not savvy in front of the camera; many made faces and looked too much into the camera, making it all too obvious that they were in the video. I was limited in what I had to work with, and I felt that it was not balanced with boys and girls.

Nicole Collett was an excellent interview. However, she talks and talks and talks and does not always come up for air. That posed somewhat of an issue in editing because I had to find a natural place to cut. I did the best I could, though I feel like it left the viewer unsatisfied, as though she had one more point to make and did not have time to finish it. My favorite shot of students appears in this segment, the shot of the two boys listening to her on the first day of school. The lighting, the angle, the boys—all of it seemed to work.

Eric Bain, the subject of “Standing in Your Faith,” is the varsity basketball coach and physical education teacher, and a man greatly respected and admired by many of the students. He was also the easiest interview, as he knew exactly

what to say, and actually included the greater picture of Westminster's philosophy of education. In this segment, it was clear that I follow too closely to the words, almost assuming my audience can not grasp understanding without the visual. Though that was never my intention, I follow the script almost word for word.

"Transforming the World" was my other favorite interview to edit. This contained the best content, and I enjoyed putting this one together. His face was too red, and I had already rendered and sent to print by the time I realized how red he really looked. There was a big difference between what it looked like before burning to DVD. And he had an audio glitch that I never quite figured out. It actually did not record a frame of audio, and there was not much I could do to remedy the problem. It is slightly noticeable, but more to the keen ear than the greater audience.

I received two amazing gifts upon the completion of this video. The first was in the form of a phone call, and the second was in form of a "private showing." Once the video had been shown to the parents, I got a call from Jim Marsh, my boss and mentor. He called to tell me how incredible he thought it was because it captured the true essence of a Westminster education. It was not the compliment that was the gift, but rather the confirmation that the purpose of the video was accomplished. The second great gift was showing my husband the video. After he was released from the hospital, we had a few quiet moments to watch it together, and when it was over, we both wept. He told me how proud he was of me, and that meant more to me than anything else.

Completing this video gave me courage and confidence. When I realize what little I had to start with, I am amazed at the final product. Yes, I would improve on many things, most specifically my handheld shots, but I am happy I did what I did. I wanted to tell a story, even if it was slightly messy in the technical department.

The Creative Process

In every creative endeavor—an essay, a story, a video, a sculpture, a painting, a dance—there is intrinsic meaning waiting to be discovered. Though we are the artist, each piece of art holds beauty and a message all its own. Anne Lamott, a writer I find witty, sassy, and without reserve, states in her book, *Bird by Bird*, “Just get it all down on paper...because there may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, that is so beautiful or wild that you now know what you’re supposed to be writing about, more or less, or in what direction you might go—but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and half pages” (Lamott, 23). I did not write for several pages, but shot hours and hours of video before I found that one minute that was pure gold. Each interview revealed a truth, not only meaningful to me as a teacher, but to me as an alumni and a potential parent. But I would have never found that gold if I had not trudged through the shit.

As I reflect on this creative process, I feel as though, in many ways, I was just the facilitator, not necessarily the pilot. The story was already written and the puzzle was going to be completed, I just needed to keep trying until the pieces all

fit together. The week before this was to be shown to the parents, I faced challenge after challenge—pneumonia, childcare, tendonitis, exhaustion—the list is too long. But the pieces were there, right in front of me. I learned that when a message needs to be conveyed, though there may be many ways to do it, there are only so many pieces to fit together. Because I knew my subject so well, it made it easier to think through and organize. The school, its essence and mission, is so engrained in my being. From student to alum to teacher, I have watched the school “grow up,” so to speak, which provided a safe place in which to create.

There are infinite possibilities when it comes to creative endeavors. No matter what medium a person desires, there are myriad choices and combinations that might result. In this particular project, it was a cut or a shot or even a transition that could change the look of the piece. I chose cross dissolve transitions with acoustic music and black title pages before each segment because I wanted it to be soft, like a conversation in a coffeehouse. However, the tone of the whole piece would have been different if I had chosen straight cuts with electronic music and flashy title pages, or maybe I would not have used title pages at all. It would have played faster and livelier, more like a nightclub, and the message, though the same, would have been communicated differently. But regardless of the choice I made, I learned that when something is made with meaning, sometimes the choices become more directed and more refined because it is not a free for all. Instead, the creative piece holds intrinsic value and beauty and becomes part of the greater story of life.

Making something is an amazing experience. One of the greatest lessons I learned while making this video was understanding that it was not the “something” one makes that has all the satisfaction, but rather the experience or the process of making it that is the real treasure. What distinguishes the ordinary from the extraordinary outcome does not exist entirely in the project itself, but rather in the qualities of the process. Process is what makes us grow and what allows us to become and achieve more than we could ever even begin to imagine.

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Anne Lamott has had one of the greatest influences on me as a writer and creator. She has taught me to explore, to take risks, and to forge through all circumstances in order to reach the prize at the end of the race. I took her philosophy of "Shitty First Drafts" and applied it to video and found that great things do emerge.

Rosenberg, Jacob. *Premiere Pro 1.5 Studio Techniques*. Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 2004.

This was my best source when learning the program. This book provided practice on advanced audio techniques and advanced graphics that came in handy during the editing phase of this project. The book included lessons that taught me skills essential to understanding Premiere.

Van Sijll, Jennifer. *Cinematic Storytelling: The 100 Most Powerful Film Conventions Every Writer Should Know*. Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005.

If one doesn't know much about shooting a film or telling a story with pictures, this is a great book to have. I found it helpful when I began thinking visually. It impacted the way I thought through shots, even though I was shooting a promotional video.

Westminster Christian Academy. <<<http://www.wcastl.org/>>>

The school website helped to organize the videography of the piece. It was important for me to know what activities were happening, and it actually allowed me to think out of the box on several occasions. I would find something that would trigger an idea that had not occurred to me. It also provided me with contact information.