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## Cathy DePentu: Developing Whole, Productive, Creative Humans

[Cathy DePentu](#) 21st century skills, arts education, [Cathy DePentu](#), MAEIA Leadership Fellows, Pixar, programmers, STEAM, value of the arts

Simon Sinek's "Golden Circle" resonates with many arts educators. The concept "Start with Why?" is how we approach every project, every rehearsal and every performance. Starting with the reason, or goal for the performance is an "art-centric" learning and teaching process. Surprisingly, when I returned to school last fall, my district had shifted their focus to the "Why" from our previous data-driven, test-focused, "show me the numbers" improvement plan. We were directed to look for unique, creative ways to engage our classes—to "Start with Why?" Wow.

My first thought was that the district should go to the people who have been teaching this way for years...the arts educators. Perhaps WE could be a resource to assist all teachers as they begin to think about a new approach to how they work in their classroom. Our ability to keep classes of 60-80 (or more) students engaged, collaborative, focused and learning every day could be a valuable addition to those endless professional development days...

Recently, I went to the interactive Pixar exhibit at the [Henry Ford Museum](#). I went with a friend who teaches science, and it was fascinating to see things from her perspective. Obviously, Pixar films are made using the most advanced computer technology, and the programmers are experts in math and science. As we walked through the exhibit, I was struck by how our subject areas were linked in virtually every step of the creation of the movies! The exhibit featured videos of many of the programmers and technicians responsible for creating the characters and the storylines. I was very surprised (and pleased) at what I heard from many of the videos.

Virtually all of the programmers saw their work as using their math and science as a way to honor the artist's vision of the characters. One of the programmers had played the cello as a student, and cited using the process of practicing—doing things over and over again, using self-analysis and a willingness to fail and continue to try, as being characteristics that are exceedingly valuable to him now in his work.

The collaboration between the technicians, programmers and artists was so inspiring. I was impressed by the collective desire to use technology to honor an artist's vision. I hope that my fellow teachers will unite to value every subject and its importance in the development of whole, productive, creative humans.

Cathy Depentu is a [MAEIA Leadership Fellow](#) and serves as Director of Orchestras for Plymouth Canton Community Schools.