

Vignette: Documentation Specialist becomes MIE Researcher through the A-T-S Framework

One of the profound ironies of my experience at NEC has been that I came seeking pure artistic training, and what I found prepared me to be not only an artist, but an educator and scholar as well. Despite this, I did come to the MIE program with a natural predisposition to scholarship. My background from a liberal arts University, with a minor in Computer Science, had exposed me to the joys of rigorous, logical thought and dialog and I have always enjoyed stretching my brain in that sort of way. Of an assignment in my very first semester at NEC, I reflected

When Larry [Scripp] introduced us to [the Artist-Teacher-Scholar framework], I could see clearly that this was the path to go down to make this stuff a reality in my life. I saw in the ... framework contradictions to my way of thinking: I had written my Undergraduate Thesis along the Artist-Scholar lines, yet I had spent my undergraduate time working/thinking against the Teacher-Scholar lines. There was only one logical outcome to this conflict, which was to overturn my cynicism about teaching and find a way to bring education into my life wholeheartedly.

I was already aligned along the Artist-Scholar path, it was part of my self-identity although I had no idea that it was only going to be strengthened by my experience with the MIE department. I struggled for a number of semesters to find a voice that was authentic to me as a Teaching Assistant, first in the MIE department and then the Solfege department. Eventually, I found it:

One of the core inquiry questions of MIE is ‘How does reflection enrich the learning process?’ and so my inquiry has been ‘How can electronic communications media — a blog or an email list — promote and facilitate class engagement and reflection in between class sessions? How can I [as a Teaching Assistant/Documentation Specialist] use these mediums to keep the class engaged in reflective learning?’ . . . I have been working to try to promote this kind of reflective inquiry in between class sessions.

At the same time, my background in technical thinking had been a huge asset to the Research Center – I had found myself deeply involved in several of the Research Center's big report-projects (MusicVentures, DELTA) and in charge of computational matters (such as a major upgrade in our statistical software). The challenges were always great and beyond what I imagined myself doing at the time, but the insistence of the Research Center on artistically authentic research and the power of the ATS framework kept me engaged. At the end of my internship, I reflected on the experience:

Artists, people who hold great insights about both the arts and their impact on education, are often reluctant to also self-identify and participate as researchers, and as such they withhold from the world their valuable knowledge.

This year, I have been officially hired as staff by NEC to be a Research Associate and continue my work in the Research Center. I have been working increasingly as the head of the CMIE Research Team, managing much of our data scoring, analysis, and feedback-interaction to our research partners in Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Mississippi.

I hadn't expected it – both when I started and when I ended the MIE program -- but the techniques, materials, and perspectives developed to score and analyze student work in our research work have also been tremendously helpful in developing grading mechanisms and devising assignments for my private and group trumpet class teaching. The “conflict” that I felt between Artist-Scholar and Teacher has been resolved.