Abstract

This study employed the lenses of auto-ethnography and ethnography to investigate technical theatre arts and design in the academy. Ethnography can be described as qualitative research from an *emic* perspective or an “insider” point view. Auto-ethnography is, “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.1). Qualitative data was gathered through informal interviews and conversations with peers from high school, college and university; colleagues in the professional theatre and the academy; my experiences as a student, artist, teacher and researcher of technical theatre arts. The study examines what enables or constrains learning in technical theatre arts; student access to faculty members, equipment and adequate facilities; program choice; teacher training; industry involvement, networking and employment opportunity inquiry and curriculum reform. Poetic inquiry is used as an ethnographic tool throughout and the findings support the use of enquiry-based methods to reinvigorate the curriculum. This reflexive ethnographic work is important and timely because of the continued funding cuts and loss of programs in the technical theatre arts and design. This study illustrates the strengths and benefits of an examined and updated technical theatre arts and design post secondary education that utilizes aspects of performance studies and the potential interdisciplinary applications and academic merit. Recommended changes to current technical theatre arts and design curriculum in the academy are discussed.
Keywords: auto-ethnography; ethnography; theatre arts; production; performance studies; pedagogy; technical; student; university; design; scenography; performative inquiry; poetic inquiry; practice-as-research; praxis based research