



Abigail Shabtay

Assistant Professor,
Children, Childhood, and Youth program,
Department of Humanities,
York University

email: ashabtay@yorku.ca

Children, Youth and the Performing Arts in a Pandemic

An interview with Professor Abigail Shabtay (Humanities) who is an Assistant Professor in the Children, Childhood, and Youth program. She is currently the Principal Investigator for three SSHRC-funded projects related to children, youth, and the performing arts.

What are some of the projects you are currently working on, focused on young people and the performing arts, in Canada?

I am currently the Principal Investigator on three SSHRC-funded projects, all three of which are relevant to children, youth and the performing arts. The first project is a partnership with a Toronto-based theatre organization (the Young People's Theatre), where we are researching how children and youth can engage in collaborative playwriting through online mediation. The project is quite exciting because the young playwrights will eventually get to see the plays that they have created interpreted and performed (online) by adult actors.

The second project involves a partnership with a touring Canadian theatre company (Roseneath Theatre), which performs their own original plays in schools across the province. They cannot go into schools to give performances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so instead they are working to develop plays specifically for online spaces. These plays all deal with social justice and youth activism, and we want to ensure that these complex issues are communicated effectively in an online setting. I am researching this process, and also working with undergraduate research assistants in *Indigenous Studies* and [Children, Childhood and Youth Studies](#) to develop study guides on the plays' themes. These study guides will support teachers across the province in examining the topics with their students.

The third project is the annual [Children, Youth and Performance Conference](#), which I run each year. The conference is usually housed inside the Young People's Theatre; however, this year we have re-envisioned it for an online setting. This conference is a 'knowledge exchange' between researchers, practitioners, educators, community groups, and artists who conduct performance work with, for, and/or about children and youth. We have more than 120 presenters from across the country and abroad, who will be sharing their interactive workshops, research presentations, panels, and performance pieces with attendees. In addition to a SSHRC Connection Grant, this conference has received support from the VPRI, the Robarts Centre, FGS, and LA&PS; we also have a panel supported by the Helen Carswell Chair. The conference will take place from June 25th until June 27th, 2021 (registration will open to the public in early April).

How did you choose your research focus for these projects?

My work in the [Children, Childhood and Youth Studies](#) program tends to focus on children's rights, youth activism, child-centred research practices, children's theatre, and drama-based research methods. Through this work, I often connect with



The Robarts Centre Reflections on Research series asks our associates to go beyond the specifics of their research findings, which are often published elsewhere, and to instead reflect on the scholarship process and the subjective factors that brought them to the work.

Robarts is a 21st-century research engine for the study of Canada and "Canada in the World." Areas of expertise in Canadian studies at York, which has one of the largest concentrations of Canadian specialists globally, span multiple faculties and disciplines including arctic sciences, geography, visual and performing arts and cultural studies; political science; anthropology; and Indigenous studies.

Visit us online for more information:
<https://robarths.info.yorku.ca/>

community theatre organizations. Last year, I saw that these organizations were facing an urgent need to adapt to the realities of COVID-19 – many theatre companies had to cancel their seasons, and performance-based programs for children and youth were being cancelled as well. I spoke with some of these organizations and thought about ways that I could leverage my position to help support and research the adaptation of their programming for an online setting.

I also try my best to develop research projects with my students in mind. It is important to me that my projects help connect students with public and community-focused organizations so that they can gain experience that will help them achieve their future goals. I have hired several graduate and undergraduate students to help with aspects of these projects, and through this work they have had opportunities to work directly with community organizations and make connections with local artists. When I conceptualize projects, I work to create opportunities for students to develop and showcase their skills in areas that specifically interest them. I am working with some amazing graduate and undergraduate students on these projects!



Children, Youth and Performance

ONLINE CONFERENCE 2021



Is there anything that surprised you going into your research this year?

I am excited about the external support for these projects. Arts-focused work can sometimes be overshadowed, but I think this past year has reinforced the importance of culture and connection. I am so glad that this research is being valued, as it is making a huge difference for the communities and young people involved.

For more information:

Faculty Profile: <https://profiles.laps.yorku.ca/profiles/ashabtay/>

Children, Youth and Performance Conference Registration (2021): <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/children-youth-and-performance-conference-2021-tickets-139078971949>

Children, Childhood and Youth Program: <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/huma/ccy/>

ROBARTS
 CENTRE FOR CANADIAN STUDIES

Email: robarths@yorku.ca
 Website: <https://robarths.info.yorku.ca>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/RCCSYork
 Twitter: www.twitter.com/RobartsCentre