



EARLY CHILDHOOD

# BEST PRACTICE

CONFERENCE

THE BALANCING ACT:  
THE GRACEFUL CHOREOGRAPHY OF TEACHING



13 & 14 APRIL 2024 | QLD

8:30am – 9:00am	Registration, Networking & Exhibitors
9:00am – 9:15am	Conference Welcome
9:15am – 10:15am	<b>OFFERING OUR BEST TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN OTHERS</b> <i>Amy Kirkham</i> In the current climate of quality assurance, accountability, ratings and even marketing, the phrase “best practice” is being heard more often than ever. So, what does this actually mean? How can we do our best and why do we want to? You are invited to revisit some key Montessori principles, to reflect on your practice and consider how you might raise it to the next level.
10:15am – 10:30am	<b>BEST PRACTICE SHOWCASE</b> Showcasing a best practice initiative from the Montessori community. Schools and centres are invited to contribute to a poster series.
10:30am – 11:00am	Morning Tea, Networking & Exhibitors
11:00am – 12:00pm	<b>HOW TO GET KIDS TO LISTEN</b> <i>Sylvia Arotin</i> This session addresses the frustrations educators and parents face in supporting children's challenging behaviour. It introduces effective communication techniques to transform their interactions with children and explores the underlying causes of children's behaviour. The session also provides strategies for handling stressful situations with confidence including practical examples and scenarios. This session aims to help attendees apply these techniques in real-life situations, focusing on building children's abilities in self-regulation, effective communication, understanding boundaries, and boosting self-confidence and motivation. The conclusion emphasises the transformative impact of these approaches on both educators/parents and children for a more harmonious classroom or home environment.
12:00pm – 12:45pm	<b>MONTESSORI LEADERSHIP FOR THE TRANSFORMED ADULT</b> <i>Vicki McKinnon</i> Montessori educators facilitate, guide, scaffold and support children’s learning by applying Montessori principles in their classroom. As careers progress, educators often move into positions of management and leadership within their school or service and encounter a range of demands that their educational preparation might not have equipped them for. Awards, agreements, National Employment Standards, workplace bullying, work performance plans, dealing with complaints, compliance, personal issues of team members, terminations, warnings, counselling, documentation, and hopefully often, celebrations. How does one apply Montessori principles with adults? What is the prepared environment of a workplace that enables the team-members to flourish? When issues arise, how does the leader dance between the demands of regulation, customer-expectation and Montessori respect for the individual? How does he or she balance these requirements gracefully, exhibiting the wisdom so necessary to choreograph the culture? What does the Montessori ‘transformed adult’ look like in leadership? This presentation will explore the application of Montessori principles to leadership within a Montessori school or service.
12:45pm – 1:45pm	Lunch, Networking & Exhibitors
1:45pm – 2:30pm	<b>BALANCING THE GROWTH AND NEEDS OF ALL CHILDREN IN AN INCLUSIVE MONTESSORI EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT</b> <i>Fiona Jones and Stacey Palmer</i> On Call Children's Therapy Network (OCC Therapy) is a dynamic occupational therapy practice who have worked with Indooroopilly Montessori Children's House (IMCH) for over eight years. During this time our OTs Dr Fiona Jones, Stacey Palmer, Georgia Gibbs and Emma Wilson have developed a number of positive initiatives to support inclusive practice for our clients as well as for all students attending the centre. In 2023 a targeted kindy program was developed in collaboration with IMCH staff to provide strategies and professional development for educators to implement at a whole classroom level to support children's regulation, behaviour and engagement in class activities. The Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) conceptual practice framework was used to support observations and recommendations throughout the project. The program will continue to grow and more collaboration between IMCH and OCC Therapy is planned for the future.
2:30pm – 3:15pm	<b>ARE WE ACTORS IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SCRIPT?</b> <i>Zac Zachar</i> Media coverage/commentary over recent years, on the state of education in Australia has been, to say the least, “less than rosy”. They are even looking at reviewing how we train our teachers! I am not an academic, rather a long time in-the-classroom practitioner. The title of my presentation comes from John Taylor Gatto. I want to believe that we have entered into education from commitment and passion. What I wish to do is for us to have a conversation guided by a series of questions that scratch the itch of self-knowledge as we build a shared experience of our purpose as teachers and what we can do for the future of education.
3:15pm – 3:45pm	Afternoon Tea, Networking & Exhibitors
3:34pm – 5:15pm	<b>NURTURING CONFIDENCE, TEAMWORK, AND ARTISTRY IN CHILDREN THROUGH CIRCUS SKILLS</b> <i>Flipside Circus</i> Flipside Circus is Queensland's largest youth arts organisation. They are a not-for-profit with a reputation for excellence in training, performance and industry support for Australia's world-leading circus sector. Circus is the perfect blend of physical discipline and artistic expression. It provides benefits including a sense of achievement, confidence building, teamwork, focus and resilience. In this practical workshop, a team from Flipside Circus will share how educators can implement activities that are motivating, energising and loads of fun, encouraging cooperative and non-competitive physical movement in a safe environment, and are suitable for children of all ages and fitness levels. Not only will it be educational, this workshop will also be a lot of fun for delegates as well!
5:15pm – 5:45pm	Break & Networking
5:45pm – 10:30pm	

## Conference Party

Join us for, some say, the highlight of our conferences, at our Conference Party! You'll have a chance to network, talk to speakers, eat party food, then dance the night away. Food and beverages included.





8:30am – 9:00am

Arrival, Networking & Exhibitors

9:00am – 10:00am

### RECONCILIATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

*Bec Bridge*

This year has shown us that there is still a great divide surrounding Reconciliation in Australia. As a nation we appear to have come to a stand still and in order to move towards a reconciled Australian we need to be brave!! As Montessorians, I can think of no better allies to walk alongside First Nations Peoples on the Reconciliation journey. We, as prepared adults, naturally observe and reflect on ourselves daily in the environments we create. During this session participants will be supported to reflect on themselves and their practices with a cultural lens. The Montessori pedagogy naturally aligns with the five principles of Reconciliation and collaboratively we will weave these together to support you to bring Reconciliation into your environments.

10:00am – 11:00am

### MINDFUL TEACHING, MINDFUL LEADING: CONNECTING WITH SELF AND STUDENTS

*Jane Newman*

How well you understand and connect firstly with yourself, and then ultimately with those you teach, lead or influence will have a huge impact on your level of success or perceived success in your respective role. This workshop will equip you with the knowledge of why and to a great extent, how the brain makes decisions and functions to meet one of our five basic needs. For teachers, this will give great insight into your students and the ways to best motivate them for learning without controlling, rewarding, or punishing. It will also offer a number of practical tips for managing yourself in the moments when situations become overwhelming or challenging. For leaders, understanding and clarifying how you show up and lead yourself, so that you can intentionally and confidently lead those around you in a strong and connected manner.

11:00am – 11:15am

Morning Tea, Networking & Exhibitors

11:15am – 12:00pm

### BUILDING STRONG NEURAL PATHWAYS FOR MATHEMATICS IN YOUNG MINDS

*Dr Shelley Dole*

Through interaction with their environment, children develop early numeracy capabilities. Intentional teaching capitalises on the informal mathematics and numeracy knowledge that children bring with them from their home environments as they enter early learning and formal school environments. Of utmost importance is ensuring that the joy of learning, and that interest, wonder and love of mathematics, is fostered and strengthened. This is the key role of the teacher. In this presentation, the importance of concrete materials and hands-on activities for building rich, conceptual mathematics schemas (neural pathways) in young minds is elaborated. Young children's future learning of mathematics is considered through revisiting some general principles of brain science associated with memory, recall, practice, as well as brain interference and the theory of constructivism. Alignment to Montessori philosophy and signature practices associated with the absorbent mind, the prepared adult and the prepared environment will be drawn.

12:00pm – 12:45pm

### PARENT EDUCATION EVENTS THAT WILL HAVE THEM LINING UP AT THE DOOR

*Mark Powell*

Are you an educator who spends countless hours each year preparing for parent information evenings, only to have the same few parents turn up time after time? Why is it that those parents we most wish would come are the ones least likely to show up? While some parents may find it interesting to hear about the curriculum and our beautiful materials, most parents aren't that interested in what their child is learning at school because knowing how the stamp game works doesn't affect their family's well-being on a day-to-day basis. In this presentation Mark Powell will show you how to help parents learn to use Montessori principles at home in ways that will not only help them enjoy parenting more but will also reinforce what is happening in your classroom. This could be the most valuable parent education program you share with parents!

12:45pm – 1:45pm

Lunch, Networking & Exhibitors

1:45pm – 2:30pm

### ENABLING EDUCATORS TO DEVELOP HABITS OF EFFECTIVENESS FOR THEIR GROWTH IN MONTESSORI PERFORMANCE

*Elizabeth Goor*

Is your work-life a bit of a circus? Do you need ideas to realign your balancing act around time, expectations, responsibilities as well as finding ways to work with colleagues that are not on the same page? We will work together to unpack the day-to-day issues that you have raised at a previous conference, to consider a mission, vision and strategies for you to enable you to improve outcomes for you and your students. Let's create a personal framework that you can work with to balance effective habits that will have a lasting impact on you.

2:30pm – 3:30pm

### COMMUNICATION MASTERY - WHEN KIDS FIGHT

*Ferne van Zyl*

Let's face it when a child fights with us or when children fight with each other it is challenging to know what to do and what to say! In this practical hands on workshop for parents and educators dealing with children from 0-12 yrs we will explore:

- What happens when we focus on "Being fair" or "Giving equally"
- How to set clear boundaries on hurting behaviour towards us and each other
- How to intervene helpfully when kids fight
- Helping them resolve difficult conflicts







# Brisbane Airport Conference Center



The conference will be held at the Brisbane Airport Conference Centre which is perfectly situated between the Pullman and ibis Brisbane Airport. For accommodation, there are two options: either the 5 star Pullman Brisbane Airport or the more budget conscious 3.5 star ibis Brisbane Airport. Understated elegance are the hallmarks of the Pullman Brisbane Airport Hotel with 132 perfectly appointed rooms and a range of stunning spaces available for guests and visitors. Sleek architectural lines meet minimalistic furniture, vibrant colours and cool design features at the ibis Brisbane Airport hotel. The conference centre and hotels are located in the hub of the airport precinct, within walking distance (a casual 5 minutes) of the Domestic Terminal and just minutes drive from the International Terminal. They are easily accessed via the Gateway Arterial roads or the city's public transport network, including AirTrain.

## Accommodation Options

### Pullman Brisbane Airport

**PROMO CODE: MONTESSORI**  
**10% DISCOUNT**  
<https://bitly.ws/3co39>

### ibis Brisbane Airport

**PROMO CODE: MONTESSORI**  
**10% DISCOUNT**  
<https://bitly.ws/3cnZm>

Please book directly with the hotel using the links above. The hotels are not holding any rooms for the event, so please **book your accommodation as soon as possible** as we cannot guarantee availability.

Conference and Accommodation Location: 2 Dryandra Road Brisbane Airport QLD 4008



## SPEAKERS



### SYLVIA AROTIN

Sylvia Arotin is a leading early childhood speaker and educator, director of My Montessori and founder of the Guide & Grow brand, a Montessori online support platforms with over 240,000 members. Guide & Grow came from a vision to help raise tomorrow's children. To create a movement towards supporting caregivers on their path to raise our future generations. With its roots in Montessori, positive communication, positive discipline and building children's emotional intelligence it is a holistic approach to guide parents and educators to grow so they can help their children to grow and build lifelong skills. Sylvia's wealth of knowledge and drive has helped paved her way to success throughout the years. She holds an International Montessori 0-3yrs training, 3-6 AMI Assistants training, an International Communications degree and a Masters in Teaching specialising in early childhood (0-5 yrs).



### REBECCA (BEC) BRIDGE

Rebecca (Bec) Bridge is a proud Marrawarri woman who lives and works on Yuggera Country in Queensland. She holds a 0-3 AMI Diploma, a Diploma in Children's Services, and is a trainer in training and has over a decade of experience working in Montessori schools and centres. In 2015, she had the privilege of supporting some of the Montessori based Strait Start Programs in the Torres Straits and has provided culturally safe environments for First Nations students to complete early childhood education placements and practicums. Bec is passionate about closing the gap for First Nations People in Australia and has been a Reconciliation Action Plan coordinator, a guest speaker at Educator Yarning circles and a Masterclass speaker for the Koori Curriculum.



### DR SHELLEY DOLE

Dr Shelley Dole is a mathematics education researcher with a passion for advancing educational practices. Her career in education began in the classroom where she served as a dedicated primary and junior secondary school teacher for over 10 years. She began her academic career as a teacher educator at QUT, later taking up positions at University of Tasmania, RMIT and the University of Queensland, and most recently as Professor and Head of School at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Her commitment to fostering a love for mathematics in young minds laid the foundation for her scholarly pursuits as chief investigator of several Australian Research Council (ARC) grants, notably into the importance of proportional reasoning as a key to numeracy, proportional reasoning as fundamental to mathematics and science, and numeracy across the curriculum.



### FLIPSIDE CIRCUS

Flipside Circus is Queensland's largest youth arts organisation. They are a not-for-profit registered charity with a reputation for excellence in training, performance and industry support for Australia's world-leading circus sector. In their 30 years of operations, they have trained more than 1 million participants, reached audiences of over 1.5 million and been a catalyst for the development of Queensland's circus sector. They have helped to train generations of professional circus artists, worked with world leading trainers, and became Queensland's largest youth arts organisation. They offer training programs, artistic programs, community and social circus programs and support for Queensland's circus artists and independent companies. They have a Brisbane Circus Centre in Hamilton, Queensland.



### ELIZABETH GOOR

Elizabeth Goor is an enabler of change, with qualifications in health planning, management, early childhood, and high school education to name a few. She brings a measured and wise approach to her work. Having spent the largest part of her career in Montessori preschool and school leadership she understands the pressures of external systems on organisational environments as well as required change and transformation at an individual level. She is committed to working with an holistic approach to stabilising organisations and resolving tensions that create waste and has consistently delivered greater outcomes for schools and preschools. Elizabeth is Director of Quality Management and Planning with Montessori Australia and facilitates the Montessori Quality: Authentic Practice Focus Group.



### AMY KIRKHAM

Amy Kirkham has worked in Early Childhood since 1988 as an Early Childhood Teacher, Play Therapist at the Royal Children's Hospital, Montessori Directress, Lecturer, Consultant, Trainer and Examiner. Amy has been the 3 to 6 AMI Director of Training in Melbourne since 2008 and has offered courses in different parts of Australia and Asia. She is also currently a member of the 3 to 6 Training Faculty in Beijing and Taipei. Amy is actively involved in the provision of Montessori professional development, including parent and community education. Her dedication and contribution to Montessori has been recognised in Thailand, China and more recently in Australia where she was the joint Montessori Living Legend Recipient in 2023 of Montessori Australia's inaugural Montessori Recognition Awards.



### VICKI MCKINNON

Vicki McKinnon is the owner and CEO of Building Futures Pty Ltd who operate 3 Montessori Long Day Care centres, a Registered Training College, family day care services and the software company Your Child's Day. Originally a secondary Music and English teacher, Vicki moved into the early childhood sector in 1994 before "Discovering" Montessori and training with Mrs Duyker (AMS) in 2001 she has since worked determinedly to see her services implement and embed the Montessori philosophy and practice. Vicki has spent time serving early childhood communities in Peak Body roles and has invested in developing Montessori training to be accessible and affordable suited to the childcare profession. Vicki holds a Bachelor of Music (Education), Grad Dip Ed - Early Childhood, Diploma of Montessori Education, Diploma of Business, Cert IV in Training and the Australian Owner Manager program.





## JANE NEWMAN

Jane Newman has spent more than 20 years working in various teaching and leadership roles in Primary schools and across the Early Years sector in Queensland. She is a strong advocate of the state schooling system and the importance of finding the right educational environment to allow for optimal engagement and growth for all. She was Principal of Grovely State School where she lead and grew the Montessori stream within this unique setting.



## O.C.C. THERAPY - DR FIONA JONES AND STACEY PALMER

We are delighted to have with us from O.C.C. Therapy Dr Fiona Jones and Stacey Palmer. Dr Fiona Jones has over 17 years experience working as an Occupational Therapist. She enjoys working with children and their families to support them to thrive and enjoy a childhood full of opportunity and joy. Fiona is a partner within OCC Therapy in Brisbane, and has presented at state, national and international conferences. Stacey Palmer has over 27 years experience working as an Occupational Therapist, working with children and their families in hospitals, schools, childcare and community settings. Stacey has her own three children and is passionate about supporting children and their caregivers to find joy in every day moments. Stacey has been working at OCC Therapy in Brisbane for 8 years and has enjoyed working with the amazing staff and developing inclusive classroom practice at IMCH during this time.



## MARK POWELL

Mark Powell first read Positive Discipline for his Montessori training in New York in 1994. This foundation helped him successfully manage 6-9 and 9-12 classrooms in the US and Australia for 27 years. Mark trained with Jane Nelson herself and also has a M.Ed. specialising in Conflict Resolution. He has published widely on Montessori education and designed many classroom materials now sold around the world. As a Montessori trainer he has delivered many workshops at international conferences and consulted for dozens of Montessori schools. In 2021 Mark joined Montessori Australia as Director of Education Services. He gives regular workshops on a variety of topics, although bringing this unique approach to relationship building to Australian parents and educators is a mission dear to his heart.



## FERNE VAN ZYL

Ferne van Zyl holds an AMI Assistant to infancy Diploma and has been working with young children in some capacity for over 30 years in some capacity. For over a decade she owned and operated Down Under 3, a Montessori based learning centre for babies and toddlers on Sydneys' North Shore. Through her work with parents and carers she began facilitating the hugely successful Faber and Mazlish parent workshops "How to Talk so Kids will Listen" and "Siblings without Rivalry" as well as developing a "Toileting Independence" workshop which earned her the nick-name "The Poo-Poo Guru". Ferne has provided training and support for hundreds of families on setting up environments for independence, effective communication skills and practical strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour.



## ZAC ZACHAR

Zac Zachar is a hands-on Montessori educator, conscious full time in-the-classroom teaching involvement for 40 years, from infants to adult learners, 37 years in Montessori Education. She is a member of the American Montessori Society (AMS) trained for Montessori 3-6 years (primary) and 6-9 years (lower elementary). Experience in United States as a trainer for several AMS training centres and presenter at AMS conferences. More recently, Zac has done Montessori training in Hangzhou and Beijing, China and is currently working with Montessori Academy group, Australia, to facilitate the training of early childhood educators in the Montessori method as they work to provide the Montessori experience to as broad a population as possible. Zac is passionate about the art of storytelling and runs workshops to share this with educators and parents.

## Conference MC:



## CARA MORRIS

Cara Morris has been working within the early childhood sector since the age of 17, where, whilst studying Education at university, she worked as a long day care Educator, and then in the after-school care sector. Cara holds a Bachelor of Education, Graduate Diploma of Learning Management - Early Childhood, then joined the world of Montessori within a Cycle One classroom at Building Futures Montessori. She undertook her Montessori training through Building Futures Education (Diploma of Montessori Education) then joined the Building Futures Education team as their Training Manager in 2012, entering the vocational training space and co-writing their nationally recognised Montessori courses. In 2021 Cara completed the AMI Montessori Administrators Certificate course. In 2024 she joins Montessori Australia as Relationship Manager and is excited to strengthen their ties with the Montessori community.



REGISTRATION

**TICKETS:** [conference.montessori.org.au](https://conference.montessori.org.au)

Ticket Type	Member	Non-member
Early Bird (to 23 Feb)	\$481.50	\$535.50
Standard (from 24 Feb)	\$535.50	\$598.50
Single Day	\$355.50	\$355.50
Concession	\$355.50	\$355.50
Conference Party	\$69.30	\$69.30
Recording	\$355.50	\$355.50

All prices exclude GST.  
Member discounts apply to Individual members, and staff of Montessori Australia member schools and centres.  
Concession discounts apply to full-time students in early education courses and holders of senior cards (copy of student/senior cards required).  
Buy 9 early bird or standard tickets and get 1 free (of the same ticket).  
Recordings of the proceedings will be available 3 weeks after the event to all attendees and those purchasing recording tickets.  
See conference website for details on ticket inclusions and for event policies.

