

Montessori inclusion training in Milwaukee

A European inclusion model with a Montessori history comes to the U.S.



BY **DAVID AYER**

A prominent, decades-old European Montessori inclusion model, little-known in the English-speaking world, is coming to the U.S. this summer, to be presented in English for the first time. The Hellbrügge Foundation's work springs from a historic collaboration with the Montessori family and early Montessori teacher trainers, and the Foundation's work supporting children with special needs is well-established in Germany.

Dr. Theodor Hellbrügge (1919–2014) was a highly influential German pediatrician and researcher who specialized in a medically supported inclusive approach to children with disabilities. Hellbrügge became interested in the Montessori approach in the 1960s and founded Aktion Sonnenschein (“The Sunshine Project”) in 1968 as an inclusive “Montessori kindergarten” for children with special needs. The organization is now a foundation operating a network of schools and supporting inclusive education for children through age eighteen.

Hellbrügge worked with Maria Montessori's son and collaborator Mario Montessori in the 1970s, and they co-authored *The Montessori Pedagogy and the Disabled Child* in 1977. In 1976, an AMI Special Education course

was launched at Aktion Sonnenschein under the direction of AMI trainer and Montessori associate Margarete Aurin, and the course continued until 1996. (Aurin trained with Maria Montessori in Barcelona in 1933 and was Mario Montessori's course assistant on the first AMI course in Frankfurt in 1954.)

In 1996, AMI, under the direction of Montessori's granddaughter Renilde Montessor, wanted to divide the course into a Primary diploma course and a Special Education endorsement, but Hellbrügge resisted the separation, so AMI and the foundation went their separate ways. In 1991 Hellbrügge established the Theodor Hellbrügge Foundation, which supports education, training, and research in special education, as well as the promotion and construction of centers for special needs children throughout Germany. The Foundation continues to offer (non-AMI) Montessori inclusion teacher training at the Primary and Elementary levels and will launch its 60th course this year.

English-speaking Montessorians have visited and studied at the Foundation and the Aktion Sonnenschein's schools over the years, and Foundation professor Joachim Dattke presented at a NAMTA Conference in Phoenix in 2014, but Hellbrügge's work has not been widely available in the U.S. However, this summer a new Montessori organization, Montessori Medical Partnerships for Inclusion (MMPI, online at Montessori4Inclusion.org), working with the Penfield Children's Center and Penfield Montessori Academy, will bring the Foundation's Montessori Inclusion Training to Milwaukee, Wisconsin for the first of several two-week programs. According to MMPI,

“Incorporating inter-disciplinary medicine, state-of-the-art developmental habilitation and social pediatrics, the Montessori Inclusion model offers a holistic and well-rounded approach to aiding a child's development and optimizing social inclusion in Montessori schools.”

The course is open to Montessori trained teachers, administrators, coaches, consultants, and trainers from all Montessori organizations. Information and registration are available at Montessori4Inclusion.org

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