**A Study of Imitation, Social Learning and Group Affiliation in the Steiner Kindergarten**

**Synopsis**

In light of recent findings that young children are often socially and emotionally unprepared for school (The Key, State of Education Survey, 2016), exploration of alternative approaches to Early Years education seems both timely and necessary.

The thesis of this research is that there are key relationships between imitation, group affiliation and social learning. The Steiner kindergarten provides a particularly rich environment in which to explore these relationships, due to its strong pedagogical emphasis on social, emotional and physical development over early academic competence and a unique approach to early learning based on imitation and promotion of group ethos (Parker-Rees, 2011).

With a view therefore to exploring the potential of imitation to support young children in an educational context, the purpose of the study was firstly to investigate its pedagogical significance in the Steiner kindergarten and secondly, to examine its affiliative role in the development of dyadic and group bonds. Classroom observations, teacher interviews and an extensive literature review were conducted with the intention of answering the following research questions:

* What is the significance of imitation to the Steiner kindergarten practitioner?
* How might social mimicry be associated with dyadic bonding and group affiliation within the Steiner Kindergarten?

The findings suggest that Steiner kindergarten teachers have a unique, complex perspective on imitation deeply rooted in Steiner philosophy, but that can also partially be interpreted in modern scientific terms.

Though the multiple limitations of the study must be acknowledged, observations of social mimicry in the children observed appear to support literature evidence for both a mimicry/liking link and an increased mimicry effect in ‘goal-based’ collaborations, potentially suggesting that inclusion for ‘out group’ individuals could be facilitated by having more ‘goal-based’ co-operative activities in the kindergarten sessions.

The research additionally speculates that meditative practice might enhance Steiner teachers’ ability to effectively role model, potentially leading to improved teacher training and subsequently enriched practice.