

# Respect for the Individual and Cultivating Community

— Dawn Warfield

The following was written in response to a teacher training reading assignment of Michaela Glöckler's article, "The Spiritual Foundations of Waldorf Education," published in *Waldorf Early Childhood Education: An Introductory Reader* (WECAN, 2017).

I appreciated this article as an introduction to the spiritual aspects of Waldorf that I am very much in the beginning stages of understanding. One passage in particular struck me: "...respect for the development of the individual while at the same time cultivating a sense of responsibility for the whole" (Glöckler 249). Especially in the past few months, and particularly in the United States, first with the pandemic and now with our country's reckoning with race, this has come to the front of my mind. How do we raise children to feel a sense of responsibility for their fellow human beings? We see images in the news of people still refusing to wear masks because they don't want their "individual rights" infringed upon. We see people taking offense at the suggestion that "Black lives matter" because they don't consider that, as a country, we have not shown that we understand and value this, either historically or in our present moment.

I've never felt a greater sense of urgency or responsibility for getting it right when it comes to being an educator and also a parent. This, again, is where being worthy of imitation is crucial. I'm learning, as the author states, that the will of the young child is developed through imitation (251). I take this to mean imitation not just in the form of the care for my work in the classroom, the songs that I sing, and the bread that I bake, but first and most importantly in how I see the children before me, intentionally and unintentionally. Of course, I love all of my students. Of course, I think they are deserving of the same opportunities, no matter their race.

But that is not enough. We as educators must first do the work of understanding our role in upholding the systems that have oppressed marginalized people in our country for so long. Then we must actively seek to undo these systems at every turn. Only then can we be truly worthy of imitation. ♦

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