



Working On Worship (13)

Letting the Children Lead

Involving children in planning, delivering and evaluating acts of Collective Worship, rather than simply being asked to read a prayer, or work a projector, is something many schools aspire to achieve. Most schools organise children to set out chairs and benches; some pupils record what happens or to sit with younger children to help them cope with singing, sitting still and so on.

Teachers seek to empower children, giving them the opportunity to participate, take ownership of their learning, set their own agenda and give them a real voice in evaluating and planning activities. Children are used to being consulted e.g. in School Council, and used to taking a lead. Asking what their contribution might be to 'leading' Collective Worship is therefore a very natural one.

In a Christian sense it is equally important to see children as having a role to play in leading the faith community; Jesus welcomed children and used them as models of faith for his followers, rather than as inferior beings to ignore.

Government circular 1/94 applies to all schools, community and church, and says CW in schools should aim to *'encourage participation and response, whether through active involvement in the presentation of worship or through listening to and joining in the worship offered.'* The law clearly expects pupils to contribute to CW, rather than be passive.



SIAMS reports clearly expect children to be involved in leadership of CW in quite a broad sense i.e. not just being out at the front speaking to the assembled school. Typical recommendations from SIAMS reports in the past have read:

- *Enable pupils to play an active part in CW*

- *Provide more opportunities for children to lead and evaluate CW*
- *Give pupils more opportunities to say their own prayers in CW*
- *Involve the pupils more fully in planning and leading CW*

Where CW is weak, there is often insufficient involvement of pupils in planning, delivery and evaluation of worship. It makes sense for schools to investigate further ways in which different groups of children might take responsibility for planning and leading occasional acts of worship.



Evaluation of CW can also be improved by *systematic* involvement of pupils using a very simple evaluation grid, maybe using 3 stars and a wish or one developed by staff / pupils from the SIAMS framework.

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Letting children begin to lead worship requires us to ask several key questions e.g.

### **Can children understand the purpose of Collective Worship?**

It is hard for children to lead on any aspect of CW (planning, preparing, delivering or evaluating), with no idea what CW really is. A 'bidding prayer' or introductory sentence at the start of CW can help children imbibe a sense of purpose e.g.

*We come together on this new day  
To give God thanks and sing his praise.  
To pray for all who need God's aid.  
To say we're sorry and learn his ways*

This can be read by an individual or a 'worship team' immediately after a candle is lit or a song is sung.

### **What is legitimate participation?**

As parents can withdraw children from CW by law, it makes sense to think which children *can* be involved in leading assembly and to offer a wide understanding of what leadership involves.

Some older children sort this out for themselves e.g. the Muslim boy who wanted to be part of the team leading song actions in a church school and who justified it by saying he was not singing the words.

Simple pointers:

- Ask for volunteers for 'drama' as children arrive rather than when CW is under way. Tell children specifically if you want a 'Jesus'.
- Ask for volunteers for prayers, preferably in advance. Maybe have a sign-up sheet rather than a rota with everyone's names on it.
- Offer practical roles which do not involve speaking or reading prayers e.g. working with equipment, sitting in a family group and helping with behaviour, evaluating CW.

## How do children start leading Collective Worship?

Children develop confidence to speak and help in their own classroom. The beginnings of participation and leadership in worship also start here.

**Decide** what children could do in this simple format for classroom CW:

*Play quiet gathering music while a circle of children gathers on the floor, placing a candle in the middle.*

*Make a simple ceremony of lighting the candle (maybe using words: We light this candle to show Jesus is the Light of the World / to celebrate this day together and to remember God is here too).*

*Share good things / things to be thankful for OR read a story.*

*Sing or say the Lord's Prayer or school prayer, maybe holding hands.*

*Blow the candle out. And put away other props.*

Children can use the above outline from a very young age and older children can help lead the younger classes. A simple book of Bible stories and a class prayer can give even more substance for pupils to work with.

## What resources are there to help children lead Collective Worship?

**Flippin' Praise** is a resource designed to help children plan worship. It introduces a four-part structure: Gathering, Engaging, Responding, Sending. The book has pages to 'flip' over so you can mix and match ideas for different parts of CW. Once children are confident with this structure, they can plan class or school CW with balance and variety.

Flippin' Praise costs £10 and can be obtained from [www.cofesuffolk.org](http://www.cofesuffolk.org) / 01473 298570 or Jacqui.studd@cofesuffolk.org

**Values for Life** (now out of print but used in many schools) is based around 18 Christian values. It provides 5 weeks of material and leaves a 6<sup>th</sup> week for class assemblies. Each class can provide an act of CW for this final week. Try allocating for example Year 4 to reflect on the assemblies in Week 4, share their own ideas on the subject, choose their favourite song and story from that week and add a prayer. Repeat with other classes as necessary / practical.

**Roots and Fruits** (pub. Imaginor) is the successor to 'Values for Life'. The structure makes it possible again for pupils to be involved e.g. in leading opening words, being involved in drama, giving short talks, and also in talking partner discussion. A 'Worship Works' award scheme is included and very simply encourages children to become leaders within the planning, delivery and evaluation of Collective Worship.



## What can you add to elements of Collective Worship children can lead?

| Before CW                                                                                                                                                                                                               | During CW                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | After CW                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| <p><b>Setting up</b></p> <p>Song words<br/>                     Selecting and setting up CD<br/>                     Putting out chairs<br/>                     Preparing worship table</p>                            | <p><b>Gathering</b></p> <p>Singing as others arrive<br/>                     Lighting worship candle<br/>                     Saying a welcoming sentence / greeting</p>                                                                                      | <p><b>Clearing up</b></p> <p>Supervising children leaving<br/>                     Holding doors<br/>                     Putting away equipment and chairs</p>                                      |
| <p><b>Welcoming</b></p> <p>Greeting children at door<br/>                     Meeting visitors at main entrance (and helping them set up)<br/>                     Adding visitor's name to projected welcome slide</p> | <p><b>Engaging</b></p> <p>Introduce a visitor or the storyteller<br/>                     Drama<br/>                     Holding props<br/>                     Telling or reading a story from story-chair<br/>                     Showing a video-clip</p> | <p><b>Recording</b></p> <p>Asking teacher who led CW to fill in a record book e.g. theme, content and song<br/>                     Doing it themselves</p>                                          |
| <p><b>Planning</b></p> <p>Choosing music / songs<br/>                     Finding or writing prayers<br/>                     Preparing video / visual material<br/>                     Training for new helpers</p>   | <p><b>Responding</b></p> <p>Asking and answering questions<br/>                     Reading or saying prayers<br/>                     Singing or playing instruments<br/>                     Leading actions or signing to songs</p>                        | <p><b>Evaluating</b></p> <p>Using a simple grid for evaluation<br/>                     Showing grid to School Council, governors, etc<br/>                     Reporting back to School Council</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p><b>Sending</b></p> <p>Blowing candle out<br/>                     Announcing final song<br/>                     Saying the 'Grace' or other closing prayer</p>                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |