

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 data projector, is something many schools aspire to achieve. Most schools have children organised to set out chairs and benches, some use pupils to record what happens or to sit with younger pupils to help them cope with singing, sitting still and so on.

Teachers in school 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.

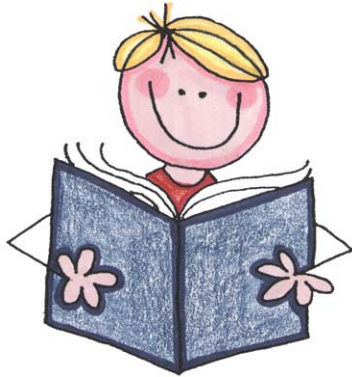
In a Christian sense it is equally important to look to children as having an important role to play in leading the faith community; Jesus welcomed children and used them as models of faith for his followers, rather than as inferior beings to ignore.



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.

SIAS 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 SIAS reports read:

- *Enable pupils to play an active part in CW*
- *Make more opportunities to play a bigger 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, SIAS suggests, there is often insufficient involvement of pupils in planning and evaluation. It recommends schools investigate further ways in which different groups of children might take responsibility for planning and leading occasional acts of worship. It also says that evaluation of CW would be improved by *systematic* involvement of pupils.

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Letting children become involved in leadership in worship requires us to ask several important 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. Some schools build a 'bidding prayer' or introductory sentence into the start of CW which helps children imbibe a sense of purpose e.g.

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

This can be read by a pupil after a candle is lit or after 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.*

### **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 Diane Matthews on 01473 298570 or [diane@stedmundsbury.anglican.org](mailto:diane@stedmundsbury.anglican.org)

**Values for Life** (Jumping Fish pubs, Gloucester Diocese) 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.

## What elements of CW can children lead?

| Before CW                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | During CW                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | After CW                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Setting up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Song words</li> <li>• Selecting and setting up CD</li> <li>• Putting out chairs</li> <li>• Preparing worship table</li> </ul>                                          | <p><b>Gathering</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singing as others arrive</li> <li>• Lighting worship candle</li> <li>• Saying a welcoming sentence / greeting</li> </ul>                                                          | <p><b>Clearing up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervising children leaving</li> <li>• Holding doors</li> <li>• Putting away equipment and chairs</li> </ul>                                      |
| <p><b>Welcoming</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greeting children at door</li> <li>• Meeting visitors at main entrance (and helping them set up)</li> <li>• Adding visitor's name to projected welcome slide</li> </ul> | <p><b>Engaging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce a visitor or the storyteller</li> <li>• Drama</li> <li>• Holding props</li> <li>• Telling or reading a story from story-chair</li> <li>• Showing a video-clip</li> </ul> | <p><b>Recording</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking teacher who led CW to fill in a record book e.g. theme, content and song</li> <li>• Doing it themselves</li> </ul>                            |
| <p><b>Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing music / songs</li> <li>• Finding or writing prayers</li> <li>• Preparing video / visual material</li> <li>• Training for new helpers</li> </ul>                 | <p><b>Responding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking and answering questions</li> <li>• Reading or saying prayers</li> <li>• Singing or playing instruments</li> <li>• Leading actions or signing to songs</li> </ul>          | <p><b>Evaluating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using a simple grid for evaluation</li> <li>• Showing grid to School Council, governors, etc</li> <li>• Reporting back to School Council</li> </ul> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p><b>Sending</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blowing candle out</li> <li>• Announcing final song</li> <li>• Saying the 'Grace' or other closing prayer</li> </ul>                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |