



Working On Worship (7)



When parents join you for Collective Worship

Below are some brave, or maybe desperate, postings in school newsletters highlighting an issue which seems to beset many schools which encourage parents to join them for Collective Worship.

Young children in Assemblies

We greatly value parents coming to be part of Class assemblies and our whole school assembly on Fridays. The children work very hard to prepare for their assemblies and we believe in valuing their work and sometimes courage to stand up in assembly and speak. We very much want parents to share these wonderful experiences. However, we respectfully request that toddlers and babies brought into an assembly are taken out as soon as they become restless or begin to cry.

A QUIET Request!

Firstly, we'd like to say we are delighted so many of you attend our assemblies on such a regular basis and support your children. However, could we please remind you all that the request for silence during the children's entrance and exit of the hall is an important part of the day. It is a mark of respect and good discipline for them to learn at this stage. Currently parents appear to be the ones 'letting the side down' so could we please ask you all as parents to show the same restraint as your children. We understand that younger siblings cannot be silenced but the actual majority of noise is made by parents. We expect silence from the moment the listening music is started and until the last child has left the hall. We would be grateful if you could all try hard to adhere to this. Thanks for your co-operation.

Do these sound familiar? It is true that there can be some really positive outcomes when parents join you for assembly but sometimes the negatives seem to outweigh the positives.

Below you will find suggestions for solving the noise issues but also some things to help you look more widely at parental involvement in Collective Worship.

Some things to think about:

What have you invited parents to? What are *they* expecting?

- If they have come for a celebration assembly, they will want to clap and take photos. *Tell them when they can do this.*
- If they have come to see their child perform, they will be waiting to wave and call their name. *Have a waving moment.*
- If they are sitting with their friends, they will chat, to each other or on the phone! *Are there ways of breaking up the seating?*
- If they have to wait for a long time before assembly, their babies and toddlers will be restless. *Assemble the children first and then allow the parents in – maybe combining this with waving and a song.*



And remember that if no-one has explained the protocols, or none have been decided, they are unlikely to live up to them.

Consider your expectations of the occasions when parents come into Collective Worship. Re-read the quotes. How realistic are you being?

How can you improve your Collective Worship planning?

Try addressing these 4 words in relation to planning Collective Worship ...

GATHERING	Why are you gathering? Do children know? Parents? Is it best to gather in silence or to have a quiet moment later, to listen to music or to sing?
ENGAGING	What will the Christian content be: a Jesus story, something about a festival or a particular Christian value? Will the main activity be a story? Children sharing their work? Giving out prizes and certificates?
RESPONDING	Will a candle be lit? Will there be quiet reflection or a prayer to say e.g. the Lord's Prayer? A song? Can parents say a prayer, thanking God for the children's talents? How can the children's work be offered to God?
SENDING	How will you dismiss people? Will you say a special prayer or blessing? Are there thank you's to say? Could you sing as you go? And maybe wave to the parents?

Can a Celebration Assembly become Collective Worship?

Parents are often invited to a festival assembly e.g. for harvest, a class assembly, as presented by their children, or a 'Celebration' Assembly.

In all schools there is a requirement for an act of worship, rather than assembly. Schools could hold an awards or Celebration Assembly separately from Collective Worship but most use the same occasion. It is tempting to concentrate on the giving of the awards and forget to provide time for worship. This is a shame as the two can complement each other.

A Celebration Assembly is a chance to show appreciation of those who work hard, try their best, demonstrate commitment to Christian /school values, etc. The rounds of applause, giving of stickers and certificates etc can turn into an occasion to thank God for talents, gifts and achievements.

Our acknowledgement of the worth of children's work can help them understand about 'worshipping' God. Worship means 'giving worth to'; Christians worship God through prayers of thanks and praise, through singing and dance and in some churches through a 'clap offering' or round of applause for God himself! We can move from the certificates and awards into a song of praise which celebrates God's love and goodness, pointing this link out to the children and adults as we do so.

Celebration Assemblies are also about 'good news', sharing and celebrating it publicly. For Christians, sharing the story of Jesus Christ and of God's love and forgiveness is 'gospel', the real 'good news'. Sharing short stories or sayings of Jesus as part of a Celebration Assembly would be an appropriate and natural way of transforming it into Collective Worship.



Some ideas for doing it RIGHT!

SELLING it RIGHT ... it's a special occasion

- Ensure parents know why they are coming - provide information – on the school website, in the newsletter but also on the day - maybe on a card given out by children or on the projector.
- Give the right impression when they arrive - ensure an adult welcomer (governor?) is on hand to greet parents and direct them to where you want them to go. Give the welcomer an official badge if it will help.

SEATING them RIGHT where you want them!

- Gather parents in a 'holding area' before assembly, maybe with coffee – leave coats, bags, push-chairs here - and bring everyone in together.
- Organise 'single depth' seating rather than rows - spread chairs around perimeter of hall, possibly intersperse with staff and governors.

STARTING RIGHT means being focussed from the beginning

- Provide a strong focal point for parents waiting in the hall e.g. lighting on a display, slides of children in school or a small choir of children performing – these need to be 'on' as parents come in.
- Use a good song-leader to teach parents some simple celebratory songs, suitable for pre-schoolers too. If brave, give parents shakers for the little ones with instructions to hide until the appropriate moment.

STAYING RIGHT on time!

- Start on time and speed awards up by seating winners together in one spot and taking certificates over to them.
- Have one great big clap and a 'congratulations' type song e.g. the one from 'Songs for Every Assembly' ('Out of the Ark' music).
- Take photo of children on the winning bench for parents to have later – do during celebration song.

CELEBRATING RIGHT ... providing the opportunity to worship God

- Develop a ritual to introduce this moment, overlapping with the awards part of the assembly e.g. clap winners, sing a congratulations song, carry in a big 'Celebration' candle, invite a child / parent / governor to light it
- Make this a special moment – invite a moment of quiet when flame lit. This can be followed by a prayer of thanks and a song of praise to God.

SENDING OUT RIGHT with a sense of purpose

- Use a good finishing song to leave by rather than just music.
- Encourage children to wave to parents.

What if parents don't come at all?

- *Devise a simple explanation for Celebration Assemblies which children can illustrate and give out to parents when the opportunity arises.*
- *Connect Celebration Assemblies with something else e.g. coffee and cakes, parenting course, open 'day', an event at the church.*
- *Plan a Celebration at a different time to draw in different parents.*
- *Use winners' photos to encourage parents or grandparents to come next time.*

