

Buckets!

6 reasons why your church needs a big stack of buckets

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October 2017

Each church I've been in, I've gone out and bought a pile of buckets, and we use them practically every week, at Preschool Music Group, but also in church sometimes. Why have lots of buckets? Here are 6 great reasons:

1. Buckets are great drums, and teach music

Who needs expensive drums? \$1 coloured buckets from the hardware store are excellent. Take off the handles, trim off any sharp edges, and you're away laughing. They're OK for hand drumming but better with wooden drum-sticks (ideally fat dowling cut about 20cm long). There are heaps of songs to learn drumming to, from those specially written for drumming, to rock songs, to Pacific Island or African drum recordings. Older kids can sit on one bucket and have 3 or 4 buckets in a circle in front of them, as well as things that make other noises when you hit them, and they feel so awesome with their 'drum-kit'! If you have drums in church, why not put out some bucket drums near the main drums and get the kids up to join in. There's no one cooler than the drummer! Drumming also teaches maths, with heaps of ways to practice counting.

2. Buckets are great for hiding in, and teach 'object permanence'

I don't quite understand why, but give a little kid a bucket and the first thing they do is put it on their head! I guess they like that they can do it all by themselves. I guess they like the way it changes the sounds they hear. But it is also such a great game of 'peek-a-boo', which is all about the developing brain coming to grips with the astonishing idea that things continue to exist even when you can't see them. Kids like putting the bucket on mum's head too.

There are lots of other things than can hide in buckets. Often when kids arrive at preschool music session there is a circle of buckets upside down on the mat, and they can't wait to lift up the bucket to see what's inside. It might be a soft toy, or an instrument. This would work really well for a kids'-time activity in church.

3. Buckets are great for catching things, and teach sport skills

At our preschool music group we often put on some cool dance music and set an activity involving the buckets. A popular game is throw and catch; kids can throw balls or beanbags into a bucket. An adult can hold the bucket and try to catch with it. Kids quickly improve their accuracy and ball skills. And things like this are excellent for prompting adult's creativity about things they can do at home with everyday items.

4. Buckets are great for clean up, teaching shared responsibility

When you have a mess, with lots of things scattered, the fastest way to tidy up is to give each child a bucket and get them to collect things into it.

In worship this could be also very useful, for special collections, for congregational activities involving pens, or anything really.

5. Buckets are great for construction, and teach engineering

So far all my suggestions for buckets involve one bucket per child. But what happens when you put buckets together? UP happens! There are two techniques for building with buckets: one involves alternating which way the buckets face and stacking them higher and higher. The other method is like building blocks; first make a wall, then buckets going on top have to cross between 2 buckets in order to stack up a level. You can just see the kids' brains ticking over double time trying to work all this out. And it is very interactive, teaching team work. But the very best bit, of course, is knocking it down! We've used this in worship with the story of the wall of Jericho. You could also create walls for drama sets, or caves, or towers ...

6. Buckets are great for inventing new ways for using buckets!

Last Thursday one of our older preschoolers looked at the buckets, and carefully put one foot in one bucket and the other foot in another. I watched as she tested out whether she would fall over, and I held her hand as she experimented with walking. To her great delight she discovered that she could slide off across the hall, letting go of my hand. She was ice skating! It took about 3 minutes before all the other children had noticed her and tried it themselves, even the just-walking toddlers. No adult gave instruction; the kids just observed each other and took the initiative trying out this new thing, all by themselves. It was hilarious to watch, and the adults were in awe of how all the kids were learning amazing social skills as well as creativity with their own bodies and the equipment.

The point about plain plastic buckets is that they are so ordinary. Everyone has them at home. They are cheap, colourful and multi-use. You don't need expensive toys or fancy equipment. Children learn by that fabulous interplay between self and others, when they try something and see how other people respond, when they copy and experiment. The great thing about what we do as church is that we create safe space, where little children and mums and dads and grannies feel accepted and free to be themselves. This reminds the adults who come that what matters at home is the relationships, paying attention to each other and playing together.

Kids often arrive for the first time shy, hiding behind grandma's legs. But it doesn't take long before they start exploring. And if they recognise some equipment and songs and games from last week they quickly start learning. I get a huge amount of joy from seeing kids and adults enjoying each other and exploring their own creativity. Buckets are great for that!