

# Just What Does a Director Really Do?

by Clare Cherry

---

*It's January and it's been raining. But it is a wonderful day, and I get ready for work with great enthusiasm. As I drive to school, I feel really comfortable and secure. Evaluations of all of the students have been finished. I enjoy the cooperation of a super staff. All current paper work is out of the way. My spirits are high. I arrive at the school planning to "float" through the classrooms; interacting with teachers, parents, and children; enjoying the prestige of my position — hard earned after 29 years in the same job.*

**7**AM I enter the building and start down the stairway to the nursery school level (the building stands on a below-street-level patio). The sewage is backed up, flooding the restrooms and hallways. Warning bells are ringing from an unknown sump pump signal that is located in a room that I had never had cause to enter in 29 years. Out come mops, buckets, wet boxes to be discarded, rolled up rugs to be dried out and perhaps discarded, and prayers that it won't happen again.

A teacher arrives at work amidst the mopping and flooding. After going into her classroom, she reports back to me that a window was broken during the night, a parent is coming in for a conference in three minutes, and she doesn't have time to properly clean up the glass. Since all of my available staff is busy helping me mop, I go to the broken window

area, sweep up the glass, and move a large piece of equipment in front of the broken area to protect it until I can have it repaired.

I telephone the insurance agent about the broken window.

I telephone a glass repairman.

I telephone the plumber.

I go to the refrigerator to put my sack lunch on a shelf and discover that a large pitcher of leftover hot (now cold) chocolate has spilled on the top shelf. With chocolate running everywhere, I get a couple of big wet sponges and begin cleaning the inside of the refrigerator. I also mop up the puddle that has run out on the floor. I thoroughly wash the chocolate out of the mop I used to avoid getting complaints from the night janitor (am I the day janitor?). I also wash out the bucket that had

contained the water for the mop, and of course I wash the sponges.

Earlier, when coping with the sump pump crisis, I had noticed some cardboard cartons shoved under the corner of a stairway where someone had put them to "get them out of the way" in spite of fire regulations prohibiting storage in such an area. There is so much dust accumulated on and around the boxes that I have to immediately sweep and mop the floor as well as sneezingly dust off the boxes before I can even remove them. They have obviously been there for some weeks, so I feel it would be fruitless to try to identify the transgressor.

Finally, through with my third mopping job of the morning (is it only 8:30 AM?), I go towards my office to greet children as they arrive. On the way, I hear someone whimpering in the lavatory and investigate. There is a two and a half year old who has been left by her mother in the care of her five year old brother while the mother went to the office to enjoy a cup of coffee in the parents' reading area. The five year old skipped out when he discovered that his sister had messed her pants, the toilet, the floor, her clothes, and even the sink. I soothe the crying child, not knowing that her mother

is just across the hall, find her some clean clothes, and handle the clean-up job until her teacher, summoned by another child, arrives.

**9 AM** I start towards my office again, not so sprightly as I had an hour earlier, only to meet up with two boys running in from the yard, which is closed because of the heavy rain outdoors. I discover that they have soaked up a puddle of muddy water and have to have every bit of clothing changed and a hot drink to warm them up.

I finally make it to the office, only to find that my secretary had an emergency call and left shortly after she arrived, and that my bookkeeper called in that she was having car trouble due to the wet weather and would be late. A teacher has taken care of the office until I get there. So I become *the* office person.

A newly enrolled child arrives with her father. I ask him for the forms which had been given to the mother to complete. He states that the mother brought the forms in the evening before on her way home from work, along with a check for the first month's tuition. I look in the incoming mail basket, the outgoing mail basket, and the top of my secretary's desk. I unlock the bookkeeper's file cabinet, since checks are often slipped in there late in the day, but can find no loose checks.

I start to leave the office to ask the late-in-the-day staff where they put the forms, but the father becomes very nervous because he is late for work and doesn't like all this red-tape nonsense. He thrusts his child into my arms, puts her lunch pail down with a bang on the desk, and storms out. I call him back to tell him that I must at least have an emergency medical care authoriza-

tion and that I need to know where I can contact either parent. He signs the paper I hand him, mumbles something about getting up earlier, gives me his work phone number, gives his screaming daughter a kiss, and leaves.

I hold the crying child on my lap. To distract her, I open a picture book and there, inside the cover, are the papers and the check.

I suddenly become aware, along with a couple of staff members, that the heating system is turning itself on and off. I go next door to the utility room and spend a few moments looking at the various lights and buttons and pushing the reset button. Nothing happens. I press it again and the system turns itself off completely. I go back to my desk and call the serviceman. I arrange for all of the children (180 of them) to go to some empty meeting rooms in the adjacent building to keep warm until the furnace is fixed. I get out the movie projector and search frantically for an old film that I remember having stored away for just such an emergency; but of course it isn't where I thought I had put it.

I get a phone call about a car pool which hasn't arrive at school because all of the drivers are ill. I make some calls and arrange for a substitute driver to pick up the waiting children.

I am notified of a dangerous accumulation of mud at one of the entrances and frantically look around for someone to help clean it up. But everyone is involved with the children in the other building, so, armed with a shovel, I brave the wet and cold to get rid of the mud.

The furnace repairman arrives and shows me the button that I should have pushed in order to get the

system working properly. The heat beginning to flow, everyone is told to return to their classrooms.

A mother arrives to discuss future enrollment of her child. While we are talking, I give the child some paper and crayons to use at a small table near my desk. Quickly the child dashes to the blackboard and scribbles the purple crayon in big sweeping strokes as high as she can reach. Mother says, laughingly, "Isn't that cute?" As soon as they leave the office for a classroom visit, I get out the blackboard solvent and start cleaning off the crayon marks, knowing that I will have to cope with the resultant strong medicinal odor for the rest of the day.

I write a letter to be sent home notifying the parents that one class of children has been exposed to chicken pox.

I help a newly enrolled two year old acclimate to the school.

I keep an appointment with a parent to explain that her son is a happy, normal, curious, fun-loving, quick-thinking child. Twenty minutes later I re-explain the same tale to the child's incredulous father.

I notify someone over the telephone that I am not interested in a sale of government surplus pencils and to please take my name off their telephone list.

I notify someone over the telephone that I have already received three other calls regarding tickets for the Sheriff's Rodeo.

I notify someone over the telephone, for the third time this week, that someone by the name of Bruce absolutely does not work for us.

My secretary returns from her emergency errand, and I leave the office

for a coffee break. In the staff room a teacher notifies me that she is getting a divorce and will be leaving the school at the end of the current school year.

I complete an evaluation form for a student teacher who is leaving class before the end of the semester.

I chase a puppy out of the building, through the rain, to his home across the street.

I double tape the corner of a rug over which someone has tripped.

I apply a bandaid to a scratched finger even though I can't see the scratch.

The bookkeeper arrives, full of apologies for being so late. I help her check the adding machine to see why the tape won't print.

I'm told by a couple of teachers that on a rainy day such as this there just isn't enough room for all of the adults to hang up their dripping wet coats and other gear. I measure a space in a corner of the hallway for installing a new coat rack for staff persons.

**11 AM** The rain stops. I hear a loud noise and go outdoors to investigate. I summon some classes of children and their teachers to get bundled up to go out and see the road crew digging up the pavement right in front of the school.

My 11 AM appointment arrives. I explain to an irate couple that the reason their child was bitten was that another child was retaliating for having been bitten by their child. They insist that their child would never bite anyone. I discuss the normalcy of such behavior for a two and a half year old.

I show a visiting educator from Japan through our school and try to explain why there is so much conversation and movement going on all about us.

I get an ice pack out of the freezer for a child who has accidentally bumped his nose against another child's head.

I remove a splinter from another child's hand. She then tells me she got the splinter at home but she screamed so loud her mother gave up trying to remove it. I ask her why she didn't scream when I removed the splinter. She replies, "Because you always like to take out splinters."

The man arrives to repair the broken window. I ask the children if they want to watch him fix the window. I help the teacher get them settled across the room where they will be safely out of the way but can still see what is going on.

The plumber arrives to repair the defective sump pump. He shows me a reset button that is located under a metal cover that has to be opened by loosening a screw. I ask if the cover has to be on; he replies that it does because it's located outdoors. I ask if he minds if I leave the screw to the lid off so I can get in easily in case we have any more trouble. "That's not the way it's done," he replies, and tightens the screw with an extra turn. When he leaves, I loosen the screw and take it out. It falls out of my hands and through a grating; that matter is settled.

A parent comes in to pick up her child early. She tells me that my car has a flat tire, and that I have apparently left the lights on. I call the automobile club to fix the tire. I ask one of my teachers to see if my car will start.

I unlock the utility room for some company representative to inspect the newly installed furnace. I tell him about having had to call a serviceman earlier in the day. He says I should have notified him. I tell him that we were without heat and couldn't wait. He replies that they have certain channels to go through.

Two children bring me a note from their teacher saying that they forgot their lunch. I get a couple of apples and carrots from the refrigerator, plates, and about a dozen crackers. As I reach for the jar of peanut butter, it slips through my fingers and crashes to the floor. I tell the children that I'll find something else for their lunch. Remembering my own tuna sandwich, I go to the refrigerator. But when I pick up my lunch bag, I find instead three dry onions. I find some sliced cheddar cheese left from this morning's snack, so I am able to complete the lunches for the two children.

I hear some noise out in the hall and go to investigate. Two teachers are arguing about who is supposed to bring their children to get washed for lunch first. I send one class to use the restroom upstairs and suggest that they do this every day.

I pour myself a fresh cup of coffee, reach for some cheese crackers to take the place of the lunch I left at home, and begin to feel very sorry for myself. Twenty-nine years! Maybe I'm getting too old for this kind of work.

**1 PM** Warily, I sit down at my desk to read a report I had taken out of the file cabinet earlier. I can't find the report. I look around, check the mail basket, check the floor, and look in my top desk drawer. Panicky, I ask my secretary about it. She says, "Oh, I put that in the file cabinet. You'd left it on your desk."

---

A teacher comes in and reports that he's getting a cold and needs to go home as soon as possible.

A child is brought into the office with a very flushed face. I take her temperature and find it to be 101 degrees. I call her father at work and am told he is out to lunch. I call her grandmother, who is listed on her emergency card, and am told she has the flu. I call the neighbor who is also listed on the emergency card. She tells me she has no car.

A couple come into the school with a bag of freshly prepared tacos and burritos from their restaurant for me to share with the staff at lunch time. "We just wanted to let you know how much we appreciate this school and especially your flexibility and caring."

Just in time.

I guess I won't quit.

And looking out of the newly repaired window, I see — you guessed it — a rainbow.

*Clare Cherry was director of Congregation Emanu El Nursery School and Emanu El Elementary School in San Bernardino, California; associate professor at California State College; and author of numerous child care books including **Creative Movement for the Developing Child** and **Nursery School Management Guide**.*

Reprinted from **Child Care Information Exchange**, January 1984.