

YARDSTICKS

Children ^{IN THE}
Classroom
Ages 4-14

3rd Edition

CHIP WOOD



Foreword by William Crain

NORTHEAST FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN, INC.

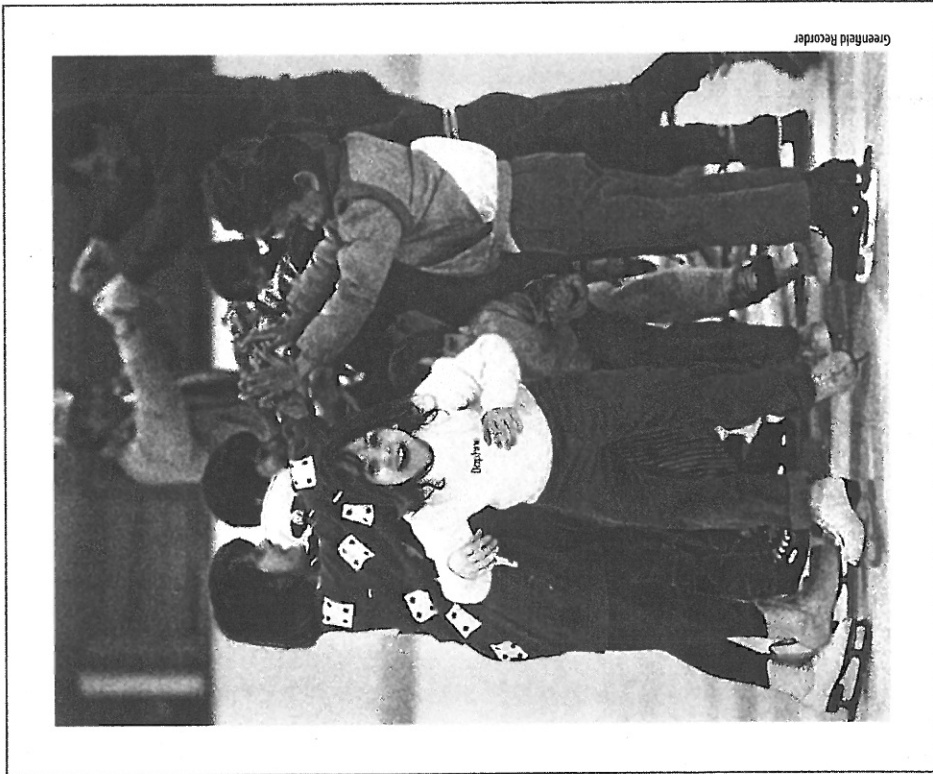
Seven-Year-Olds

*"On a bicycle I traveled over the known world's edge,
and the ground held. I was seven."*

An American Childhood | by Annie Dillard

Years ago, Massachusetts teacher Bob Strachota devised a way to teach soccer to seven-year-olds that shows a clear understanding of the age, plus a streak of genius. Bob divides the field into three equal sections—a midfield and two goal zones. A class of twenty to twenty-two youngsters is first divided in half to make two teams. Each team is then divided into thirds, and a third from each team is assigned to one of three sections of the field. Thus, three to four players on each team are restricted to their third of the field. The play is fast and furious in each section, but as soon as the ball passes over a section line, the players in that section must only watch as play is passed on to the next section.

This adaptation of the game responds, almost poetically, to seven-year-olds' need for restriction, a need related to their tendency toward self-absorption and self-consciousness. "Sevens Soccer" at the Greenfield Center School, where Strachota teaches, enables all sevens to experience a measure of success on the playing field. Without these clear boundaries, many would choose to avoid altogether the perceived risks of actively engaging in the game. Others would dominate the field and show off for anyone watching.



Greenfield Recorder

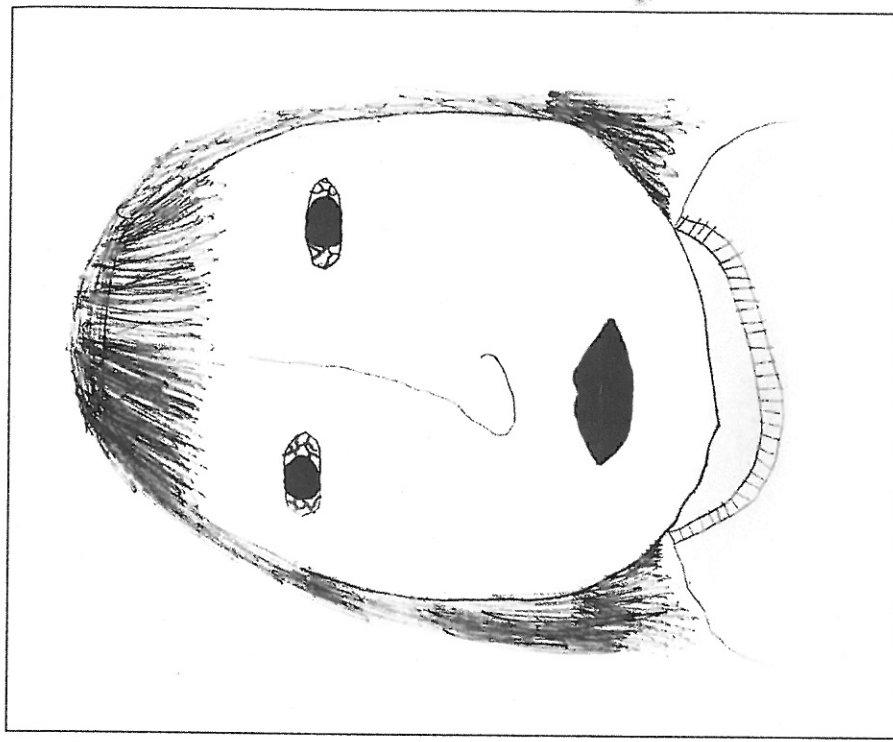
Sevens can be extremely moody, sulky, and sometimes depressed. They are often content to spend long periods in their rooms, alone by choice, reading or listening to music or playing with animals or dolls. At school, too, they like to be by themselves and appreciate quiet corners for reading or working. They also like working with a best friend, although relationships may be on one day and off the next.

This is an inward, consolidating period of growth. Sevens have developed a good working concept of right and left and general directionality. Visually, they tend to focus on small details that are close to their eyes. Their tiny printing is anchored to the baseline of the paper, their finger grasp down on the lead of the pencil, their heads resting on their arm or desk as they write, sometimes with one eye closed. Because of their close-up visual concentration, sevens have great difficulty copying from the board, so this task should be minimized.

Sevens are hard workers and often perfectionists. Whereas sixes are fond of the pencil sharpener, sevens adore the eraser. If they make mistakes they will erase and erase, sometimes putting a hole right through the paper. They want to be correct and they want their work to look good, too. Because of this tendency, they take a long time with everything they do and get very upset when not given enough time to finish their work. Timed tests can be extremely upsetting for sevens. Unfortunately, second grade these days is requiring more and more of this type of assessment.

If you schedule a class of seven-year-olds to take a spelling test at the end of the week, requesting that they spell the words correctly and in their best handwriting, you are almost guaranteeing failure. Sevens can do their best work in spelling or in handwriting, but not both at the same time.

Sevens love the routine and structure of school and appreciate their personal relationship with the teacher. Substitute teachers



often feel frustrated with sevens, who constantly tell them, "That's not the way our teacher does it!"

In the classroom, sevens are good listeners and still enjoy being read a story. They show great interest in new words, number relationships, and codes. They like working and talking with one other person (while playing board and card games or working on puzzles) but don't always do well on group projects.

At six, children are noisy, verbal, active, and brash; at seven, they are quieter, more specific in their speech, passive, and sometimes tense. Sevens' industriousness is now concentrated on individual work. They home in on what they can do and practice it over and over. If someone copies their work, seven-year-olds can become extremely upset. Music lessons, often introduced at this age, can be both rewarding and frustrating.

"I quit!" is often heard at home and on the playground, but it's not because sevens don't get their own way, although that's a frequent interpretation. They may walk away from a group game or a family project because of an overwhelming feeling of inferiority. Sevens' feelings need to be protected. Teasing, joking, and especially sarcasm are painful to the seven-year-old. Being laughed at for a wrong answer or a "silly" idea can produce anger and tears.

At six, a child might respond to these feelings with a punch. Seven-year-olds are more apt to drive these feelings deep inside and are less apt to risk themselves the next time they are called on to answer in class or asked to do something. They are hypersensitive to physical ailments as well, both real and imagined.

Seven is an age where children are driven by curiosity and a strong internal desire to discover and invent. As they consolidate logical thinking, they begin to organize their internal mental structures in new ways. Now they can classify spontaneously: "Black bear, brown bear, grizzly bear, koala bear," they chant excitedly. They are intensely interested in how things work and love to take things apart and put them back together again, if they can. Working in a block corner holds as much fascination for the seven as for children at younger ages. Interlocking blocks and other small manipulatives are favorites, and sevens delight in making miniature accessories for their block structures or social studies dioramas.

Sevens are beginning to deal with concepts of time, space, and quantity with increased sophistication. Although they must still act direct-

ly on their environment if they are to learn, they are increasingly able to represent their understanding symbolically in writing and drawing. Writing can be a favorite activity when teachers give seven-year-olds extended periods to create their own stories.

Song

Science and social studies take on new meaning as sevens show increasing interest in the world around them. This interest will expand through ages eight, nine, and ten, and children will begin to identify areas of personal enjoyment and concern. It's important for children to study and understand their own city or town before using textbooks to examine desert or mountain villages in foreign countries!

The child's increasing ability to do math without manipulatives, to infer, predict, and estimate, makes mathematical concepts particularly accessible at this age.

Seven is an age of intensity. Individualized activity consolidates new cognitive structures and feelings. A balance between hard work and self-assessment produces a sense of competence, setting the stage for greater self-direction at older ages.

Seven-Year-Olds: Growth Patterns

PHYSICAL

- Often keep their eyes focused on a small, close area
- Sometimes tense
- Like confined spaces
- Can be sensitive to many hurts, real and imagined
- Have improved physical abilities (for example, are better at playing sports)

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

- Inward-looking; sometimes moody, touchy, depressed, sulky, or shy
- May change friendships quickly and feel “nobody likes me”
- Need security and structure; rely on adults for help and constant reassurance
- Don't like taking risks or making mistakes
- Sensitive to others' feelings, but sometimes tattle
- Conscientious and serious; have strong likes and dislikes
- Keep belongings neater at home and school than at six

LANGUAGE

- Listen well and speak precisely
- Enjoy one-to-one conversations and like to send notes
- Rapidly develop their vocabularies
- Show great interest in meanings of words and enjoy all sorts of codes

COGNITIVE

- Enjoy repeating tasks and reviewing learning
- Like to work by themselves slowly and finish what they start
- Bothered by mistakes and try hard to make their work perfect
- Good at classifying—sorting buttons, pictures, leaves, shapes, etc.
- Like to be read to
- Enjoy board games as well as computer games
- Enjoy hands-on exploration—taking things apart and discovering how they work
- Increasingly able to reflect on their learning

Seven-Year-Olds in the Classroom

VISION AND FINE MOTOR ABILITY

- Writing, drawing, and numbers are tidy and small, if not microscopic; work with head down on desk, often covering or closing one eye
- Find cursive handwriting difficult, even if begun in earlier grades but usually achieve competency by third grade; copying cursive in workbooks is visually easier for them than copying from the board
- Anchor their printing and drawing to the baseline; find filling up the line space difficult
- Often hold pencil near point with three-fingered, pincer-like grasp that they find difficult to relax

GROSS MOTOR ABILITY

- Prefer board games to gym games; playground games such as jump rope, four square, and hopscotch are more popular than team or large-group activities

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Need a classroom environment suitable for sustained, quiet work periods
- Because of their strong need for routine and closure, need time to finish their work; appreciate a “heads-up” that it’s time to prepare for transitions
- May find timed tests especially troublesome
- Like to work by themselves or in two’s

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COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Enjoy memorization along with codes, puzzles, and other “secrets”
- Comfortable with emphasis on high-quality products and proper display of work
- Like to repeat tasks
- Like to review learning verbally or frequently touch base in other ways with their teacher
- Enjoy inquiry activities; often work well in “discovery” centers; like to collect and sort
- Not fully able to read without vocalizing—still sometimes whisper to themselves during “silent” reading

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

- Frequently change friends but accept teacher’s seating assignments
- Prefer working and playing alone or with one friend
- Find classroom changes upsetting; need teachers to prepare them in advance when substitutes will take over the classroom
- Need humor and games to help moderate their seriousness
- Can get sick from worrying about tests, assignments, etc.
- Changeable; close communication between teachers and parents helps ensure their needs are understood

Seven-Year-Olds: Curriculum

READING

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Do less partner reading and more individual reading (their greater strength at this age)
- Continue phonics work; ready for intense phonics instruction in small groups
- Do written reading comprehension assignments

WRITING

Expect from these children:

- *Writing:* Longer stories with beginning, middle and end, including "chapter" books in some cases; great interest in the story line; tendency to include everything from "breakfast to bed"; writing before drawing and sometimes even writing without drawing; readiness to begin nonfiction writing as a way to show learning from science or social studies investigations
- *Spelling:* Correct spelling slowly emerging from transitional spelling; increased phonetic and sight word fluency; ease in learning capitalization and punctuation; readiness for formal spelling program (teachers should still accept "invented" spelling because children still do not see revision as necessary or important)
- *Writing Themes:* Family; friends; sleeping over; losing teeth; trips; pets (often including first stories about the death of pets); nightmares; worries about the death of family members, illness, war, famine, or other serious issues

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WRITING

- *Handwriting:* Very tight pencil grasp down on the shaft of the pencil, often right on the lead; their letters are often microscopic in size and anchored to the baseline; not a good age at which to introduce cursive handwriting (better for younger or older children)

THEMATIC UNITS

(Social Studies, Science, Current Events)

Favorite themes for children this age:

- Our neighborhood
- How systems work (plumbing, lighting, heating in our school; how we get our milk; how the cafeteria works)
- Jobs people do
- Things we are good at
- Cultural and racial diversity and discrimination
- Natural science topics (pond, forest, meadow, etc.)

MATH

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Do more computation with money and time
- Do more complex mental mathematics and solve equations
- Work with fractions by measuring, weighing, and comparing
- Experiment with symmetry and other simple geometry by using, for example, unit blocks or pattern blocks
- Do simple computation with multiplication; do division based on experience with concrete materials
- Continue practicing mathematical skills by playing games