



Seedlings Preschool has developed an innovative nature-based early childhood education program in Stony Plain. Our program is rooted in the belief that children have a developmental and instinctual need to connect with nature. Another innovative aspect of their program is their Reggio-inspired approach to early learning.

### A look at The Reggio Approach

The Reggio Approach derives its name from its place of origin, Reggio Emilia, a city located in Emilia Romagna in Northern Italy. Shortly after the Second World War, Loris Malaguzzi, a young teacher and the founder of this unique system, joined forces with the parents of this region to provide childcare for young children. Originally inspired by the need of women to return to the work force, over the last 50 years, this education system has developed into a unique program that has caught the attention of early childhood educators worldwide.

The Reggio Approach is a complex system that respects and puts into practice many of the fundamental aspects of the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky and many others. It is a system that lends itself to: the role of collaboration among children, teachers and parent, the co-construction of knowledge, the interdependence of individual and social learning and the role of culture in understanding this relationship.

At the heart of this system is the powerful image of the child. Reggio educators do not see children as empty vessels that require filling with facts. Rather they see children as full of potential, competent and capable of building their own theories.. This approach recognizes the right of children to realize and expand their potential, placing great value on their ability to socialize, receiving their affection and trust, and satisfying their needs and desires to learn. And this is so much truer when children are reassured by an effective alliance between the adults in their lives, adults who are always ready to help, who place higher value on the search for constructive strategies of thoughts and action than on the direct transmission of knowledge and skills. These strategies contribute to the formation of creative intelligence, free thought, and the individuality that is sensitive and aware.

### Project Work

Project work is a large component of the Reggio Approach but there is much more to this complex system. Each day the teachers reflect on the experiences of the children always

mindful to watch for “the ants instead of always waiting for the elephants”. The long term projects undertaken by Seedlings Preschool include an exploration of gardening, ways to look after the earth, and an art project that attempts to deepen the children’s connection to Rotary Park in Stony Plain. Another exciting project is what the children call ‘Project Coco’. Coco is a 12-week-old Bernese Mountain Dog puppy that attends preschool on a regular basis. Through their ongoing relationship with Coco, the children are learning how animals communicate, how they express feelings, and what animals need to thrive. They chart the puppy’s growth and notice changes as she develops. Linkages are made to important themes of empathy, communication, conflict resolution and healthy choices.

### The Reggio Teacher

The Reggio teacher is unique because she offers herself to the process of co-construction of knowledge, she releases the traditional roles of a teacher and opens doors to new possibilities. She resembles more a facilitator than traditional teacher. The Reggio teacher allows the children to:

1. Ask their own questions, and generate their own hypotheses and to test them.
2. To explore and generate many possibilities both affirming and contradictory. She welcomes contradictions as a venue for exploring, discussing and debating.
3. She provides opportunity to use symbolic languages to represent thoughts and hypothesis.
4. She provides opportunity for the children to communicate their ideas to others.
5. She offers children, through the process of revisiting the opportunity to reorganize concepts, ideas, thoughts and theories to construct new meaning.
6. She is a keen observer, documenter, and partner in the learning process.

### The Importance of Documentation

Documenting children’s daily experiences and ongoing projects gives meaning and identity to all that the children do. It is through the documentation that the teachers are able to gain insight into the thoughts of the children, determine further investigation for working on topics, create a history of the work and generate further interest. Seedlings uses a variety of ways to document the children learning ranging from posting daily quotes and photos on their website, displaying children’s work at the school, and holding their annual Artist’s Reception and Show in partnership with the Allied Arts Council and the Melcor Art Gallery.