Dear Families, Students and Staff,

On any given day we see children act upon their world. They figure out how to move their bodies; if, when and how they will share; and how to play out an idea and have their opinions heard and acted upon by their peers. It is far easier, as adults, to do for children, to be the generator of the ideas and of the solutions. Yet in our classrooms this work falls on the children.

In the infant room, we may find a child climbing out of a riser. What a triumph to hold on with two hands and to balance while raising one leg over the side! On another occasion, an infant chooses a favorite toy to bring to a sad friend; the toy is extra special because it is the one that will cheer up her friend.

On any given day, you never know where play will take you. Last week, I sat waiting for the bus (on the riser) with a toddler. I knew it would take a while for the bus to come because another toddler had declared this to be the case when playing with the first toddler. So we waited and the child must have sensed my discomfort because she explained (possibly apologetically,) that the bus takes a while to arrive. “I wish I had remembered a book,” I mused. She smiled and jumped out of the play to find us a book. You can do this, in play, adjust your scenario and find a new solution for a friend.

Flexibility is also critical in preschool play where there’s a room full of individuals with lots of ideas. I often wonder why the preschoolers don’t forget where they are in their play as they can take quite a while to negotiate their ideas before proceeding with a scenario. Of course they’re not bound by what limits their possibilities, but use their language to adapt and create. “How about this? You be the baby.” “Ok, but we are not at school, we are in my house.” And so it goes. Every step requires a belief that your idea is worthwhile, that you will be heard, and based on ideas put forth, new negotiations and shifts accommodate each other’s ideas and the scenario grows and becomes more involved as children try out their new, now shared ideas.

Listening and flexibility come into play when children are not able to come to an agreeable solution, say, about who might use a toy. One day, a parent and a teacher sat, responding to the children’s emotions, asking them to continue to brainstorm. Finally, one boy said, “I have an idea!” which became the solution for the use of the toy. Our classrooms are a place to conceive ideas and the “having of them,” as the Duckworth article of the same title declares, is thrilling.

I revel in these moments because of the joy and satisfaction children find in their own efforts. Given the support to do on their own, and the space to play, the “having of ideas” and the doing of their ideas within a nurturing place where their ideas are accepted gives rise to new possibilities and the good feeling that comes along with arriving at an idea that is your own.

This year marks the start of my fourth year at the Rita Gold Center. It has been a tremendous journey to get to know you and the children. Together, we have watched as the children grow and make use of their new abilities. Each semester, the children figure out how to use the materials in the classroom and rely on themselves and each other to make their ideas work for themselves and for each other.

This is an inaugural issue of the RGC newsletter after a long hiatus. A special thanks to Liz, Clare, Maria and the newsletter committee for bringing the newsletter back to life. The Rita Gold Center is a remarkable place with a wealth of energy and rewarding pursuits among the children, parents, students and staff. Each issue promises to bring a taste of the ideas that course through our daily lives so that we can savor them and celebrate our pursuits.

Warm regards,

Patrice
WHO WE ARE

Susan Recchia  
*Faculty Director*

Patrice Nichols  
*Onsite Associate Director*

Krystal Astwood  
*Administrative Assistant*

Infant Room

Ji Yeoun Lee  
Erica Russo  
Megan Hanley  
Ashley Mitchell  
Emma Gehrman  
Monika Soroko  
Gabrielle Maertz  
Shelly Nakamura  
Megan McCauley

Toddler Room

Emmy Fincham  
Kara Roop Miheretu  
Akiea Gross  
Sunny Lee  
Mia Bensouda  
Sandra Basile  
April Carpenter  
Julia Almeida Braga  
Monika Soroko

Preschool Room

Kuan-Hui Leu  
Margaret Rizon  
Tran Templeton  
Karina Malik  
Julianne Toce  
Nick Shapiro  
Esther Hong  
Monika Soroko

Art & Music Program

Marta Cabral, *Art Studio*  
Claudia Cali, *Music*  
Gloria Hyewon Roh, *Music*  
Clare Na, *Music*  
Valerie Ong LiQi, *Music*

WHO'S WHO?

Susan  
Patrice  
Krystal

Kuan  
Emmy  
April

Marta  
Sandra

Continues on next page
SAVE THE DATE

FALL 2013
Nov. 27
1:00 p.m. Closing
Nov. 28–29
Closed
Thanksgiving holiday
Dec. 5
6:30–7:30 p.m.
End of semester
Potluck Dinner
Dec. 11
11:45 a.m.
Parent Workshop
Early Language Development in Young Children
by Dr. Celia Genishi
Dec. 20
Last day of fall semester

SPRING 2014
Jan. 6
Center Re-opens
Jan. 17
1:00 p.m. Closing
Jan. 20
Closed
MLK Jr. Day
Feb. 6
12:30–2:30 p.m
Mid-winter Tea Party
Feb. 24–March 14
RGC Art Exhibition
March 7
4:00–6:00 p.m
RGC Art Exhibition Reception
March 17–21
Spring Break
May 2
Closed
Staff Development Day
May 14
6:30–7:30
End of semester
Potluck Dinner
May 16
Last day of Spring semester

Stay tuned for more faces in the Spring!
CLARE FRIEDRIECH, Liam's mom.

At Rita Gold, we take pride in our teachers being researchers, our parents being students and professors, our researchers being students. That the children are also co-researchers is often overlooked. Tran Templeton, a Curriculum & Teaching Graduate Assistant in the Preschool Room is studying just that through her image-based research study.

The preschoolers and teachers take about 120 photos per day, sometimes captioned. “They tell the story of what their children are doing in school,” says Tran. “The cameras just become this ubiquitous part of the classroom... especially the early childhood classrooms. Parents want to know what’s going on. It’s a convenient way of letting parents know what’s going on in school.”

Tran was inspired by a class she took with Wendy Luttrell at CUNY. She engaged in conversations about whose story was being told through photos: is this a story the children would tell about their own preschool experience? Are we telling their stories because they don’t think they’re capable of telling them themselves?

She knew the kids were picking up the camera frequently and decided to do something with it. Her research allows her to ponder what it is they are thinking and what stories they are telling us.

While it’s still early to declare any findings, Tran noted that many of the things the preschoolers talk about when describing their photos come as a surprise, such as the composition or mechanics of taking photos. “We often think of kids as not noticing things or not being capable of understanding adult concepts. But they’re talking about why is a photo light, or dark, or how come it’s so dark when it wasn’t nap time.” The children spend a great deal of time investigating and putting clues together.

So far, Tran is using disposable cameras but hopes to start using digital cameras. She is also exploring the subjects that go beyond images, such as themes of friendship which emerge with this group of children.
SUMMER OUTREACH TO CHINA

LIZ VAN HOOSE, Clara’s mom.

For four weeks last summer, Rita Gold teachers Kuan-Hui Leu and Marta Cabral visited the Princeton International Children’s Learning Center in Shenzhen, China. The school’s founders are hoping to bring the learning styles they encountered in Princeton, New Jersey, to their community.

Housed in a former army theater, the school was still under construction when Kuan and Marta arrived. A classroom had been set up to serve as both a training arena for the teachers and a demo space for prospective families. Working through translators, Kuan and Marta helped the teachers lead activities that would cultivate the play-based, child-directed learning that shapes the program here at Rita Gold.

“They wanted an ‘American curriculum,’” Kuan said. While he and Marta were able to impart that no single curriculum prevails in the U.S., even the task of conveying Rita Gold’s particular philosophy presented unexpected challenges. The classroom makeup changed as different families toured the school, so it was difficult to show the kinds of learning moments that can arise as relationships grow over time.

Moreover, because the visiting families were evaluating the school, Kuan and Marta’s training role involved salesmanship, too: “We were asked to spell out what the children were learning, to break down the results of play-based learning so that the directors could market it to parents,” Marta said.

Ultimately, the most fruitful training opportunities lay outside school grounds. Shopping for classroom materials in the local market, Marta was able to demonstrate what made certain items more ideal than others, and how a classroom could be designed to guide and inspire children while leaving openings for the children to grow and contribute to their own environment.

Marta and Kuan hope to return to Shenzhen next year. Meanwhile, they have stayed in touch with the Princeton International teachers, brainstorming ways to make the Rita Gold teaching philosophy workable in their context.
It has been a busy and intense fall for families of preschoolers born in 2009. These families are in the process of exploring ongoing school options for their soon-to-be five year old. If families are interested in an independent school, families submit an application. To be considered, there are tours, open houses, parent interviews, school evaluations, test dates, child play groups, and other school events to attend. A busy schedule for sure, but a very helpful process to consider who your child is and what you want for your child and for your family in an ongoing school.

Last year, children transitioned to both public and independent schools including PS 166 G&T, Fieldston, Calhoun, Anderson, Harlem Success Academy, and The School at Columbia. The decision making process was drawn out for many of the families. Despite the long process, in the end, families are pleased with their child’s ongoing school. This year, there is more interest in independent schools and families have submitted over 40 applications to various schools across the city.

We are heading into the final stages of the independent school process and will soon begin the public school process. The transition to an ongoing school is a significant change for the children. RGC alumni transition well. Susan Recchia’s and Dana Bentley’s research (2013) found that parents describe how their children generalize skills and competencies learned as preschoolers to adjust to the demands of the kindergarten curriculum and social environment. Parents described their child drawing on their personal strengths such as self-assurance and self-awareness; social adeptness and flexibility; and the ability to read and navigate environments. We can also see this as alumni continue to visit the preschool room to talk about this rite of passage.

Good luck to our families throughout the kindergarten and pre-k admission process!