

## **Field Interview Assignment**

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Students with High-Incidence Disabilities

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### **Field Interview Assignment**

Walking into Charlotte Oduro's classroom, it is evident that she is ready for a diverse range of learners. There is a variety of seating and work surface options available. The walls are adorned with posters featuring social-emotional prompts, the stages of the learning process, and information and reminders pertaining to their current focus of study. A smart board is located at the front of the room, along with several whiteboards throughout the space. The atmosphere feels active and engaging. Ms. Oduro is employed by The Renaissance School (REN.), which just merged with its sister school, Rolling Hills Prep (RHP), a month ago. Renaissance was established to provide a high standard of quality education for children with special needs. Under the leadership of their new Head of School, the two schools have now combined, along with a third program called REACH, which was created as an elementary school (the other schools are middle and high schools) for children with special needs. The staff from all three programs, now unified as one school, are being trained and certified in UDL to form a single program that addresses diverse learners.

As a preschool director myself, I chose Ms. Oduro for an interview for two reasons. The first is practical: my school is the most inclusive in the area, as we regularly receive referrals to our program from several local agencies and neuropsychologists. Therefore, finding someone who does what I do with the required education wasn't going to be easy. Second, my son was one of Ms. Oduro's students last year, and I greatly admired her ability to navigate challenges effectively.

Although she has held numerous roles at RHP and REN, she most recently served as the eighth-grade lead teacher. In this position, she teaches History and Language Lab and advises a specific group of students. She views her role as a coach who helps students become their best

selves, understanding that this looks different for each child. For some, this involves addressing academic needs, which requires unpacking what that means. She collaborates with other professionals, counselors, the Director of Student Services, the Director of Student Support Services, and fellow teachers to ensure that all academic needs are met. In cases of social-emotional needs, Ms. Oduro is on the frontline.

“We are like EMTs in the sense that we are first responders; we are intake and then have to decide how I can ensure that your needs are met in my space?”

She explained that the next step is the hardest. After determining how to support the student’s success in her classroom, she needs to address those needs in her colleagues' classes. If she has identified what works for a child, she must communicate that to the other teachers so they can add their own spin while remaining consistent.

Ms. Oduro has worked intermittently at RHP and REN since 2006. She has held various positions at both RHP and REN (when they were two separate schools), including learning specialist, high school teacher, and middle school teacher. In 2006, she left to pursue her master’s degree in public health and taught adults in a different setting. Though she enjoyed her time outside of a traditional classroom, it just wasn’t the same. In 2010, she returned to REN.

Ms. Oduro expresses her love for REN because she feels her mind is always engaged. She continually adjusts and analyzes her strategies, evaluates, and addresses the diverse needs of each student. RHP is consistently innovative, she notes, recalling a training session on learner variability (even though that term wasn’t used at the time) in the early 2000s that still informs some of her methods today. The school consistently provides opportunities for educators to learn and grow, and the team of educators is enthusiastic about their development. There is a culture of growth where teachers are motivated to learn and apply that knowledge in their practice.

As mentioned before, the RHP community is currently training in UDL. Ms. Oduro appreciates the training but feels that, in many ways, it reflects what they already do—at least from the REN side of the conversation. She recognizes that the teachers in RHP, many of whom left before this official transition, were less able or willing to adopt this new approach. She is excited about integrating the schools and ensuring everyone is on the same page because she understands that each person is a unique learner, regardless of whether they have an IEP. On a personal note, I love that she has always maintained this perspective because my son falls into what she describes as a “Tween,” not in terms of age but of learning. She defines a “tween” as a learner who does well in mainstream settings but thrives in an adaptive environment. These learners are often overlooked in the current public school system.

Interestingly, when asked whether she or the school has ever considered PBIS or MTSS, she was unfamiliar with the term Multi-Tiered System of Support but recognized Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. However, she thinks that those systems are better suited for larger schools, which are less capable of addressing each child in an individual and tailored manner. They already have a comprehensive system for student support and feel that the staff is well-versed in various strategies, making them proficient at tackling the challenges they face. As a parent, I should note that there are “pillars” of values displayed everywhere, along with awards based on those values at the end of the year.

I asked how teachers learn about a child’s learning needs. She explained the process: the IEP is shared with student support services, who possess the most expertise. They review it, summarize it, and offer their suggestions to the staff. The staff then meets to discuss each student’s learning needs. Afterward, they conduct regular collaboration meetings, as previously mentioned, with all original records available for review as necessary. However, there are

instances, like my son's case, when a child arrives mid-year or has not yet been identified, making it more about getting to know the learner over time through informal observations. I asked how she involves parents and families in their approach, and she replied that as an eighth-grade teacher, she finds most parents have already been informed about the program and are very supportive of what they can expect.

Upon examining the overall classroom practices shared by Ms. Oduro, numerous best practices become apparent. The focus is on executive functioning through graphic organizers and learning planners, as well as on learner diversity, employing various modes of representation, engagement, and assessment. While some challenges exist, such as the previously mentioned staff departures, the integration of diverse programs and training in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is guiding this school confidently toward modern best practices. As one of the families involved, we feel fortunate that our children are part of it.

Interview question for Charlotte Oduro

1. How long have you been teaching here at Rolling Hills Prep?
2. What is your role?
3. What brought you to this field?
4. Have you taught in any other schools?
5. What were the strengths of the program that brought you back to REN?
6. What is your teaching philosophy?
7. What types of learners do you work with?
8. How are their individual learning needs identified?
9. How do you meet the needs of all of your students – especially those with disabilities?
10. Is this a collaborative community?
11. Who do you collaborate with?
12. How does the collaboration function and what role does it play in your classroom? The school? and for each child?
13. What are your touch points with parents?
14. How do you help the parents understand your approach?
15. Do you utilize specific instructional and behavioral practices in your classroom?
16. I know that the staff of the school is now training to be UDL certified. Were you familiar with UDL before?
17. What do you think of this change?
18. Will it affect your classroom and/or collaboration?
19. Does the school regularly provide and promote continuing education?
20. Given the strain that teachers are often under (especially today), how do you care for your own wellbeing, energy and investment in the field?