

I have managed to get interviews for a few teaching positions, but always feel I let myself down in the observed lesson. I'm not sure what those lessons are marked against or how to pitch them. Plus, even though they only last 20 minutes, I have had a bit of low-level disruption in them.

What you said

Fiona McDonnell

Your lesson needs to stand out, so don't go for the safe option. Think of some exciting science experiment, art activity or poetry work. Acknowledge on your lesson plan that it could get noisy, but that you want the children to be enthused and to discuss the activity in animated terms. Don't go for a lesson that involves handing out endless bits of paper; the children can become restless.

The expert view

Lessons are crucial in interviews: the school wants to know how you are rather than how you appear on paper or in interview. Without watching your lessons, it is hard to be specific about what the observers are not seeing, but I can make some general comments.

1. Every minute counts. Have a structure that is obvious – three parts will do just fine. Include a brief starter that introduces the topic and grabs their attention – and that of the observer. Follow this with a good main that introduces new content. Get them using this content so they aren't too passive. At the end, check their learning with a decent plenary to show progress.
2. Sometimes you get lucky and the class is so unfamiliar with you that they are too cautious to misbehave or are cowed by the presence of the observers. If they do muck around, you need to bring them in with a gentle touch rather than a clobber, because the instinctive reaction of a kid will be, "Oh, yeah? Who do you think you are, Mrs Interview Lesson Teacher?" So if the bad behaviour is low level, then a low-level response works best. Tap the desk, wait for them to stop talking, say "thanks" when they do.
3. If the bad behaviour is serious, you may want to ask them to step outside. I do not like sending out, because it is usually a cop out, but for a short lesson it might be a useful containment tactic. Just make sure you nip outside and get them back in if possible. A good observer should not expect perfect behaviour – they should be looking for what you do about misbehaviour.
4. If the bad behaviour is really serious, get the observer involved. If you do not, you look weak. Or use the school's on-call system or other procedures. Ask about the behaviour code before you start the lesson. That way you will be forewarned.
5. Finally, I always advise any teacher new to a class, no matter how transient, to indicate that good behaviour is important. Make sure you send out short cues about what you expect: be there first; have all resources set out, and the lesson aims on the board; look them in the eye as they come in; tell them to sit in their normal seats; and introduce yourself with confidence. Tell them it's a pleasure to be there teaching them and you want them all to do really well. A bit of positivity goes a long way.



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