

# HOW DO STUDENTS RECEIVE HELP FROM TEACHERS? INITIATING ASSISTANCE IN SMALL GROUP CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS

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## Abstract

How do teachers decide when and how to help their students if not explicitly asked to do so? Based on conversation analysis of 14 hours of video-recorded small group interactions in secondary schools, we discovered that teachers and students orient to subtle actions built through embodied conduct, to decide whether or not assistance is needed. We also found that problem-solving can be initiated without disturbing students' progress and that the teachers' movement creates opportunities for students' to recruit their assistance in small group classroom interaction. The study contributes to conversation analytic and educational research by showing that embodiment is crucial for receiving and offering assistance in classrooms. In addition, this article provides insights into how experienced teachers manage the subtle and negotiated aspects of supporting learning in classrooms, an important and recurring part of classroom management that has received little attention in previous research.

*Keywords: assistance, embodiment, teacher-student interaction, desk talk, classroom management*

## Introduction

Teachers negotiate a range of subtle and 'silent' activities to create opportunities for learning. For example, when teachers move around in the classroom and monitor students' group work, opportunities emerge for shared engagement in ongoing academic tasks. Teachers may decide that their assistance is needed and approach a group to offer assistance, or students may use the teacher's presence as an opportunity to seek assistance.

Teachers' assistance is an essential part of classroom management, understood as 'the actions teachers take to create, facilitate, and maintain an effective learning environment' (Wolff *et al.* 2021: 135). Classroom management is studied from various perspectives in educational research (Doyle 2006; Martin *et al.* 2016; van Driel *et al.* 2021), with more ecological or proactive approaches focusing on how effective classroom management depends on teachers' abilities to interpret and act on the moment-to-moment learning opportunities in classrooms (Martin *et al.* 2016; Doyle 2006). Teachers are relying on their 'professional vision' (Goodwin 1994) or 'noticing' as the outset for decision making in classroom management. Thus, developing a professional vision is of crucial importance for preservice and novice teachers (van Driel *et al.* 2021; Wolff *et al.* 2021). Recent studies have used eye tracking to access experienced and novice teachers' noticing, while they observe video recordings of others' teaching (eg. Stahnke and Blömeke 2020; 2021), as well as using at-the-moment eye tracking while they teach (eg. van Driel *et al.* 2021). Findings suggest that experienced teachers notice more opportunities for supporting students' learning than novice

teachers and that small group work represent a more challenging format for preservice and novice teachers.

While previous classroom management-studies mainly focus on teachers' actions, this study investigates classroom management as an interactional and negotiated achievement, and, accordingly, 'jointly constructed' by teachers and students (Doyle 2006: 100). Using conversation analysis (see Sidnell and Stivers 2013) of authentic, video-based classroom interactions, we examine how embodied practices and noticing, as aspects of classroom management, are sequentially developed in classroom interaction. More specifically we investigate what constitutes embodied practices and how such practices are used to initiate joint problem-solving in classrooms. Although previous studies have acknowledged the potential for assistance due to a teacher's presence (e.g. Greiffenhagen 2012; Jakonen 2020), we know little about *how* precisely such opportunities emerge, moment by moment, and whether students and teachers have systematic ways of negotiating potential teacher interventions. We argue that analysing and understanding the micro details of teachers' and students' bodily conduct is important for teacher training, as such knowledge provides insights into how teachers' presence and mobility affect students' learning opportunities.

#### Offering and receiving help in small group classroom interactions

Teaching is intrinsically embodied: teachers rely on gazing, head nods gestures and body position to perform their work. Previous research has shown that teachers and students engage in finely tuned embodied and verbal conduct during classroom interactions, (e.g. Gardner 2019; Hall and Looney 2019). Studies of teachers' and students' embodied practices have looked at the distribution of turns in whole-class interactions – for example, by examining students' hand-raising practices (Sahlström 2002) and teachers' nominations of next speakers (Mortensen 2008; Kääntä, 2012; Fasel Lauzon and Berger 2015). Studies of turn allocation have shown that embodied allocation is contingent on visual access and the possibility of a shared gaze and that an pointing gestures are deployed sequentially when turn-taking is relevant (Mortensen 2008, 2009; Kääntä 2012: 172).

Mobility – that is, 'movement of peoples' whole bodies' (Haddington *et al.* 2013: 4; see also Jakonen 2020: 162) – is crucial in teaching, especially during group work. Teachers' mobility during group work has been described as 'making rounds' (Mehan 1989: 10; see also Greiffenhagen 2012: 12) or 'between desk interactions' (Amri and Sert 2022: 667) with specific pedagogical purposes. When making rounds, teachers create trajectories and build infrastructures for learning (Tanner 2014) and they can monitor and assess students' progress with a given task as well as provide assistance and maintain classroom control (Greiffenhagen 2012: 36).

A basic observation is that teachers do not 'just start' participating in their students' small group work. Teachers and students move from being copresent in the classroom to being coparticipants (see Mortensen and Hazel, 2014: 46), thus creating a participation framework (Goffman, 1981). Particularly relevant for this study are findings on how 'moving into interaction' (Mortensen and Hazel 2014) is accomplished using verbal and embodied resources, which helps create a common focus of attention (Mortensen and Hazel 2014: 65).

Previous classroom research has mostly focused on *summons* – that is, actions ‘typically designed to solicit the recipient’s attention’ (Schegloff 1968: 1080) – specifically how students summon the teacher by hand raising and/or using an address term (e.g. Cekaite 2009; Kántää 2012; Gardner 2015; Jakonen 2020). Students compete for teachers’ assistance through elaborate and repeated summonses (Gardner 2015). The success of the summons is affected mainly by teachers’ engagements with other students and by the possibility of gaze contact (Kántää 2012), proximity to the teacher and the loudness of the summons in relation to the noise level in the classroom (Gardner 2015: 45f). A few studies also have explored more implicit ways of engaging in interaction in classrooms. More specifically, students’ embodied trouble displays are relevant for the design of teachers’ next turns (Fagan 2019: 105), and students rely on interpreting the embodied work of their peers when requesting assistance in student–student interactions (Jakonen 2015).

Teachers’ availability and mobility are important aspects of implicitly created opportunities for assistance (e.g. Cekaite 2009; Jakonen 2020) and may lead to teacher–student desk interactions to solve task-related problems. Especially relevant to this study are Jakonen’s (2020) findings, which show that teacher movement and body positioning may create opportunities for instruction. As Jakonen (2020: 162) noted, teachers’ movement is a highly regular but unexplored professional practice. Jakonen argued that teachers’ trajectories in classrooms can be analysed as ‘in situ displays of professional embodiment’ (Jakonen, 2020: 180). Jakonen (2020) illustrated how a teacher’s mobility leads to instances of ‘occasioned instruction’, – that is, instruction based on and sensitive to student problems there and then (Jakonen, 2020: 165). Although Jakonen’s study provides an overview of situations in which availability leads to instruction, our study scrutinized the negotiation process *before* the occurrence of potential problem-solving interactions. More specifically, we examined how teachers and students decide that instruction is required, analysing extracts in which teachers and students were ‘moving into assistance’, revealing a negotiation process that played out over a sequence of verbal and embodied turns. Thus, our study contributes with new knowledge on how problem-solving is initiated, and thereby enabled, in small group work.

### Recruitment: managing the implicit need for assistance

Offering or requesting assistance, a key feature of human cooperation and collaboration, is common in classrooms and everyday interactions (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014: 2; Rossi, Floyd and Enfield 2020). In classroom group work, students and teachers explicitly request or offer assistance, that is, they clearly summon or provide help. However, explicit ways of securing potential problem-solving help do not cover the entire range of situations in which assistance is managed, as assistance may also involve implicit negotiations whereby the teacher’s presence or availability is the only prerequisite. *Recruitment* is one way of conceptualising assistance as co-constructed through verbal, vocal and non-verbal conduct (Kendrick and Drew 2014, 2016; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014). Recruitment involves the interactional process of getting others to do something for you (Rossi *et al.* 2020: 6), and includes indirect and embodied indications that help is needed or offered if needed (Kendrick and Drew 2016: 2). All learning environments entail an emerging potential for assistance, and in our study we aim to identify how displaying and offering the need of assistance, which we conceptualise as recruitment, is achieved. We posed the following research questions: How do

teachers and students initiate assistance-based interactions in group work and what are the embodied and verbal resources needed for such initiation?

## Method

Our data consisted of video-recorded classroom interactions from 14 lessons of Norwegian language and literature and natural science in four Norwegian secondary schools located in four urban areas in the southern part of Norway. The 14 lessons were taught by four teachers, each of whom had 7+ years of teaching experience. Seven student groups participated in the research (each with 25–30 students aged 14–16 years). The researchers had no previous connections with the schools, teachers or students. The recorded lessons were regular lessons during the semester and included various classroom activities, including small group work. All instances of small group work during the 14 lessons were included in the data. At several points during small group work, teachers and students (re)engaged in interactions. The moments when interactions were initiated, which we called ‘entries’, constituted the dataset for the analysis. The dataset consisted of 226 entries in total.

The lessons were recorded using a camera and an additional microphone attached to the teacher. All data were anonymised, and all participants signed a letter of consent. The project was approved by the Norwegian Centre of Research Data. Data were transcribed using verbal transcription conventions from Jefferson (2004), and embodied transcription conventions developed by Mondada (2014) and were analysed according to conversation analytic methodology (Sidnell and Stivers 2013) combined with multimodal interaction analysis (Broth and Keevallik 2020). Conversation analysis rejects a priori assumptions about the data, and analyses participants actions as they progress turn-by-turn in interaction. Consequently, the sequential analysis recognizes how classroom management rely on both teachers’ and students’ participation (see also Radford *et al.* 2011: 626).

In the initial phase of the data analysis, we identified a total of 226 group work (re)entries. Analysing the details of the entries, we further identified the following three main types of entries based on who initiated the interaction: *student-initiated entries*, *teacher-initiated entries* and *jointly initiated entries* (see details in Table 1). Further on, we focused on the last group, the jointly initiated entries, where the teachers and students follow more subtle and negotiated paths to receiving/providing assistance. We found that students and teachers engage in soliciting and providing assistance without, at first glance, explicitly formulating that being the issue, relying on fine-tuned verbal and embodied resources. The conversation analysis enabled us to achieve a micro-analytic understanding of the interactions by studying the participants’ verbal and non-verbal resources (face, hands, body) and uncovering the role of such resources in the meaning-making process. A key principle in conversation analysis is to identify peoples’ actions by examining the responses that the actions receive during the following speakers’ turns; in short, by employing the principle of the next-turn proof procedure (see Heritage 1984: 255). Therefore, when analysing the jointly initiated entries, an important validation procedure involved examining how the teachers’ and students’ bodily and verbal resources interplayed in sequences.

Student-initiated entries ( $n = 54$ )	Explicit. Students summoned and/or explicitly requested assistance and used verbal initiation cues: ‘I don’t understand anything.’
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	‘What do literary devices mean?’
Teacher-initiated entries ( $n = 115$ )	Explicit. The teacher approached the students and used verbal initiation cues: ‘How’s it going?’ ‘What have you learned about renewable energy so far?’
<b>Jointly initiated entries (<math>n = 57</math>)</b>	None of the above. Teachers and students negotiated the need for assistance more implicitly. Focus of analysis.
$N = 226$	

Table 1. Three main types of entries

## Analysis and results

Analysing the 57 jointly initiated entries, in which no explicit summons or teacher approach foreshadowed assistance (see Table 1), we identified the following *recruitment process* for initiating assistance:

1. Pre-recruitment **potential** for assistance. The teacher is not currently engaged with other students. No specific move to offer/seek assistance is made, though proximity, movement and gaze may increase the opportunity for recruitment.
2. **Key move** to initiate assistance/recruitment by leveraging the *potential* for assistance. The key move can be implemented using non-verbal resources, such as the teacher turning around or moving in the direction of the student(s).
3. Initiating **assistance**. Teachers and students engage in joint participation and a problem or an offer of assistance is explicitly formulated. This is the *outcome* of Step 2, whereby the key move functions as the recruitment of assistance and the transition towards an instructional sequence.

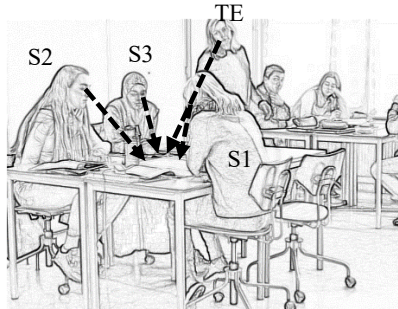
Further on, we will show how the recruitment process is negotiated during desk work. We will describe how the participants moved from being co-present in the classroom to becoming co-participants via recruitment processes. Extracts 1–4 illustrate this recruitment process in complementary and/or contrasting ways. There is a continuum that ranges from examples in which the teacher’s presence clearly marks potential for assistance (Extract 1) to cases in which the teacher’s potential availability is less clear-cut (Extracts 2–4). We will examine the less clear-cut cases most closely because they best illustrate the fine-tuned bodily and verbal conduct that occurs in formulating and solving interactional problems. In these cases, availability did not emerge at first; rather, it was a by-product of recruitment. In Extract 5, teacher availability does not result in explicit verbal recruitment. However, as we will argue, this extract supports our argument regarding the recruitment of a teacher as a *potential* condition in the interaction and not a direct consequence of the teacher’s availability.

### Recruitment at the Desk (Extract 1)

Extract 1 shows that the teacher’s presence is established and noticeable before the actual recruitment process begins. This is an example of a clear-cut type of recruitment process in which, first, the teacher’s presence is established, and second, students use the teacher’s presence to receive feedback without having sought the teacher’s assistance in the first place.

The extract is from a lesson in Norwegian language and literature where the assignment was to write down three rules for verb conjugation in Norwegian Nynorsk. The students had been working on the assignment for some time and were summarising what they had written down. In the example below, S1 starts reading from the paper.

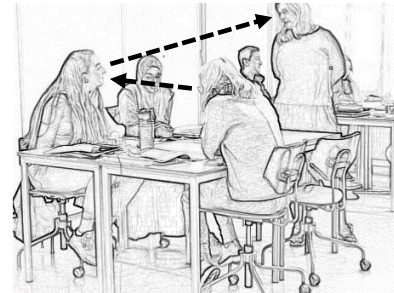
Extract 1 DT\_Ø1\_12a



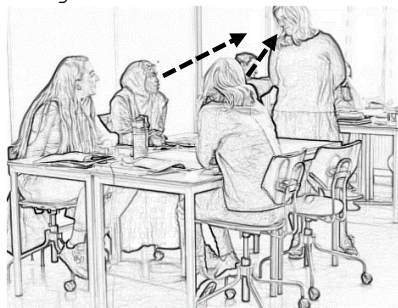
#fig1.1



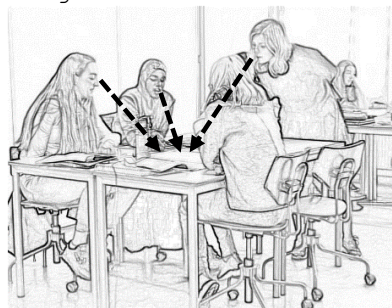
#fig1.2



#fig1.3



#fig1.4



#fig1.5

- 01 S1: Eh:m: (0.2) +a verb slutter på a i preteritum  
**Eh:m: (0.2) +a verbs end with a in past tense**  
 tea: +moves to desk, gaze at working sheet-->
- 02 og a er i #presens.  
**and a ar in #present tense.**  
 fig: #fig1.1
- 03 +(0.6)  
 tea: +hands on back, positioning body by desk-->
- 04 S1: .hh og e verb slutter på (.) e er i #presens (0.5)  
**.hh and e verbs end with (.) e ar in #present tense (0.5)**  
 fig: #fig1.2
- 05 S1: Og t:e e eller de e i preteritum.  
**And t:e e or de e in past tense.**
- 06 (1.3) #(0.7) #(.)  
 s3: #gaze to TEA  
 tea: #gaze to S3  
 tea: #nod/smile to S3  
 s2: #gaze to TEA  
 s1: #gaze to TEA  
 fig: #fig1.3 #fig1.4
- 07 S2: Så [har vi tre ]::,  
**Then [we had three ]::,**

08 S3: [Det var det vi hadde,]  
**[That was what we had,]**

09 @ (0.4) £ (0.5) # (0.5)  
s2: @turns and points to work sheet-->  
tea: £leans towards the work sheet-->  
fig: #fig1.5

10 S2: Jeg har den og hun har den, og så  
**I have that one and she has that one, and then**

11 [har hun begge de to.  
**[she has like those two.**

12 S3: [Da har vi:  
**[we have:**

13 (.)

14 TEA: Ja, da er det hvert fall to viktige punkt da.  
**yeah, then there are at least two important points then.**

In lines 1–5, S1 reads from a paper on the table, citing the grammar rules that the students wrote down together. The teacher moves from a group in the back of the classroom, approaches the group in front and looks down at the paper S1 is reading from while S1 is still reading (#fig1.1). The pre-recruitment potential is established. However, the students' gazes remain focused at the desk, while not paying any attention to the teacher's emerging presence.

Then, when S1 finishes reading, we see how the students orient themselves towards the teacher's presence. S1 stops reading and shifts gaze direction to look at S2, who looks up at the teacher slightly before the two other girls do as well (line 6, #fig1.3–4). This is the key move in the recruitment, where the students use the teacher's established availability to initiate an assistance sequence. However, gaze is not enough to make explicit who's supposed to be the next speaker (Mortensen and Hazel 2014) and does not in itself specify who the next speaker is or what kind of assistance is required. Two of the students formulate a case for assistance verbally in lines 7 and 8, S2 says 'Then we have three', overlapping with S3's utterance, 'That's what we had.' At this point, the teacher leans in and bends forward to see what S2 is pointing at, displaying her involvement in offering further assistance. Students S2 and S3 make their support case explicit in two different ways that overlap with each other, but the 'problem' to be solved is the same, they both request a 'task completed' confirmation from the teacher, which they (partially) get in line 14 ('there are at least two important points').

In short, this extract shows that, unlike instances when students summon the teacher, recruitment is negotiated and accomplished in a stepwise manner. This extract details the teacher entering the students' ongoing talk and the students orienting themselves towards the teacher's presence as an interactional resource and/or constraint. The students did not address the teacher with a clear problem, but the teacher's persistent physical proximity to the group led to recruitment and problem formulation, which ultimately led to assistance. This extract shows, perhaps unsurprisingly, that persistent proximity may enhance recruitability. However,

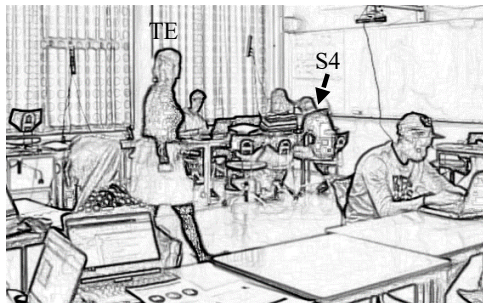
as we will see in the next subsection, this is not the only way in which negotiations of assistance may play out.

#### Recruitment from a Distance (Extracts 2-4)

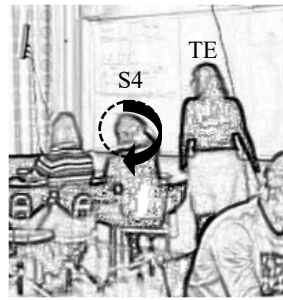
What makes the following extracts (2–4) different from Extract 1 is that the teacher’s co-presence is not established *before* the recruitment – that is, the recruitment occurs pre-arrival, without initial physical co-presence. In Extract 2, a student seized the opportunity for assistance when the teacher was walking by, even though the teacher was not focused on the student (as opposed to the teacher in Extract 1, who approached the group).

The students were working on an assignment on Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*. When the extract begins, the teacher is walking in the direction of the group closest to the whiteboard, passing the desk at which S4 is seated. When the teacher passes behind S4’s back, S4 turns slightly, and looks up at the teacher.

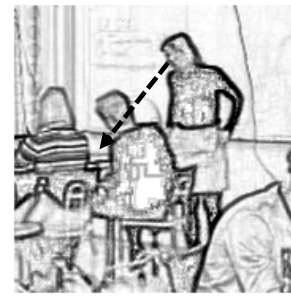
Extract 2 DT\_01\_4c



#fig2.1



#fig2.2



#fig2.3

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01          # (3.9)                                # (0.9)
    s4:                                     #turns head to TEA-->
    tea: #walks to whiteboard #turns to S4's desk-->
    fig: #fig2.1                                #fig2.2

02  S4:    Ikke sant Vildanden er et +drama?
        The wild duck is a drama +right

03  TEA:   ja, (p)
        yeah (p)

04          # (0.2)
    s4:    #looks down
    tea:   #fig2.3

05  S4:    °°yes: bra.°°
        °°Yes: good°°

06          (.)

07  TEA:   ((snufs)) det er det.
        ((sniff)) yes it is.

08          (5.4) / ((teacher leaning slightly towards S4s computer))

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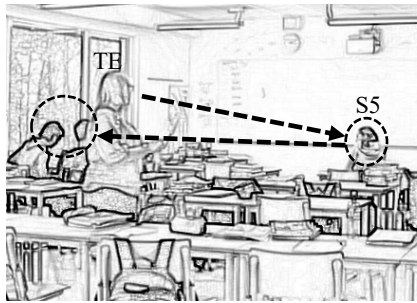
At the beginning of this extract, the teacher moves towards the whiteboard. No shared gaze is established to summon the teacher; in fact, there are no visible signs that the teacher is oriented towards S4 at all. However, as the teacher moves closer to S4, the teacher's proximity becomes a resource for recruitment, establishing what we have called pre-recruitment potential. When the teacher passes on the right side of S4 (#fig. 2.2), the student turns their head to the right, exploiting the teacher's physical closeness as a resource for the key move. The student makes their request for assistance explicit in line 2, '*The Wild Duck* is a drama, right?', a request for confirmation of knowledge (Solem 2016) that the teacher confirms with 'yeah' in line 3, followed by the student's third-turn assessment, 'Yes, good,' which ends the question-answer sequence. However, instead of walking away from S4's desk, the teacher leans in to look at the student's laptop and stays there for 5.4 seconds before the student poses an information-seeking question, 'Who wrote *The Wild Duck*?' which initiates a new question-answer sequence (not shown in transcript).

In Extract 2, establishing pre-recruitment potential happens 'on the move', as the assistance request is made possible since the teacher is passing by anyway. The request itself does not entail an extended sequence. However, the teacher remains committed, staying by the student's desk and making additional assistance possible. The student seizes the opportunity to engage in continued interaction with the teacher and poses an additional question (not shown in the transcript). In Extract 1, we saw that the teacher's continued presence led to additional interactional work, which is the case in Extract 2 as well. That is, recruitment provides a possibility for assistance at a more general or extended level.

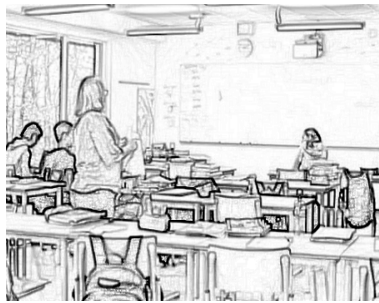
In contrast to Extract 1, Extract 2 shows 'pre-arrival' recruitment, as the teacher stopped her movement only *after* the student's key move. The student was evidently observing the teacher's movements in the room, as the teacher's movements in the direction of the student were the prerequisite for the student's initiation of the interaction. Walking is '*seen as beginning*' (Macbeth 1992: 143), and although the teacher's movement may not have been directed at the student, the student treated the movement as creating a floor (see Macbeth 1992: 144) with the potential for recruitment. Extracts 1 and 2 demonstrate that when a teacher is moving towards a group, the closer proximity entails potential for recruitment. However, as Extract 3 will show, bodily proximity is not a necessary prerequisite for the recruitment of assistance.

Extract 3 is from a natural science lesson during which the students worked on a group assignment. S5 asked some of the co-students how the project should be presented but received an inconclusive answer. The teacher was walking towards the other end of the room, but at one point, the teacher started looking at S5 while walking, potentially displaying availability.

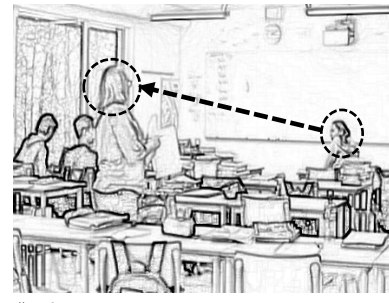
Extract 3 DT\_V1\_7c



#fig3.1



#fig3.2



#fig3.3

- 01 S5: man må- #må man- #man m[:å på en måte #eller-  
**you ha- #do you ha- #you h[:a like #or-**  
 tea: #stops and #turns to S5  
 s5: --((talking to co-students))-> #turns to TEA  
 fig: #fig3.1 #fig3.2 #fig3.3
- 02 (.)
- 03 S5: Pla[kat,  
**Pos[ter**
- 04 TEA: [hm?  
**[hm**
- 05 (0.7)
- 06 S5: må man ha- lage plakat, modell og power point eller er det::=  
**does one ha- make a poster a model and power point or is i::t=**
- 07 TEA: =eh n:ei?  
**=eh n:o**
- 08 S5: nei,  
**no**

In this extract, the teacher moves across the room and orients themselves towards S5 with their posture and gaze, establishing their availability as pre-recruitment potential. The key move occurs when the teacher stops their movement in line 1 and pivots the torso towards S5 (see #fig 3.1–2). The teacher’s stopping is both visible and audible, as their foot makes a noticeable stop sound. The student turns towards the teacher at this exact point (#fig 3.3), and utters ‘poster’ (line 3), which is the topic of their request for support. ‘Poster’ is partly produced at the same time as the teacher’s open-class repair initiation ‘Hm?’ (see Drew 1997), which indicates that when the teacher first stopped their movement, they were orienting themselves towards S5’s problem (making assistance relevant) but not towards what type of problem S5 had.

The explicit problem is formulated in the student’s alternative question in line 6. The teacher responds with a type-conforming response (Raymond 2003), ‘no’ in line 7. However, the teacher’s response is produced with a hesitation marker (‘eh’) and involves prolongation, which indicates that the no-response is not straightforward and needs elaboration. The teacher then moves towards the student while providing an elaborate response regarding the presentation support that the students could choose from (not shown in the transcript). At this point, the teacher initiates assistance, showing full commitment to assisting the student, as the

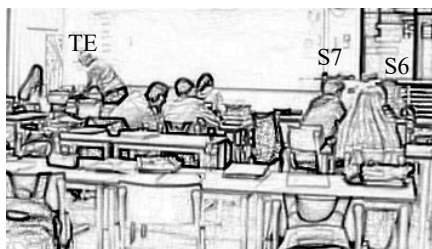
case for support was not resolved in a minimal sequence. The teacher moves towards the student when the need for assistance is established, which shows that the potential problem is not an issue that the whole class needs to attend to, i.e., the issue is treated as an individual, not a collective instruction (as opposed to the extract shown in Jakonen 2020: 175).

This extract shows that teachers can make themselves ‘recruitable’ from a distance. In contrast to Extracts 1 and 2, Extract 3 reveals that teachers can initiate the key move. The teacher established co-presence and displayed their availability as pre-recruitment potential. Thus, both students and teachers could initiate assistance. However, it was up to the student to formulate and specify the nature of the assistance needed. The extract also shows that availability can be achieved from a distance – that is, physical closeness is not a necessary prerequisite for assistance.

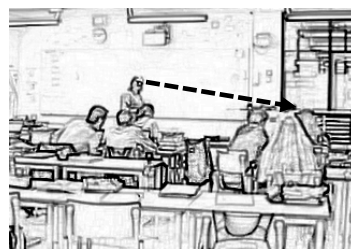
Extracts 1–3 have shown that a teacher’s potential co-presence provides opportunities for teacher assistance, which leads students to confirm the need for assistance and, consequentially, to formulate a problem. In Extract 4, below, there was no pre-recruitment potential when availability and recruitability were established. It seemed that the teacher ‘barged in’ on the ongoing interaction to offer her assistance, targeting a speaking student’s understanding, even though the student had shown no explicit signs of seeking the teacher’s assistance.

Extract 4 is from the same lesson as Extract 3, during which the students were working on a natural science project. In the excerpt below, S6 poses a question to S7 about ‘total refraction’ (the change in the direction of a light wave passing from one medium, such as glass, to another). The teacher leaves a group in the back of the classroom to walk to her desk, picks up a worksheet and poses a question to S6. The teacher does not visibly orient themselves towards S6 before this moment.

Extract 4 DT\_V1\_V3



#fig4.1



#fig4.2



#fig4.3

- 01 S6: (trenger du- ) i totalrefleksjon så er de jo like store,  
**(do you need-) in total refraction then they are the same size,**
- 02 (0.3)
- 03 S7: jo med det er bare når det ( )  
**yeah but it's only when it ( )**
- 04 # (1.9)  
 tea: #looks for pen-->  
 fig: #fig4.1
- 05 S7: og så er de:t (.) (og så skal vi finne noen) ( )

**and then it i:s (.) (and then we must find some)**  
 tea -->+picks up pen and turns towards S6/S7-->  
 06 (0.2)  
 07 TEA: +Forstår [du ] det S6?  
**+Do you under[sta:nd] it S6**  
 tea: +moves towards S6/S7-->  
 08 S6: [Ja. ]  
**[Yeah ]**  
 09 (0.9)#(0.2)  
 tea: ---->#stops half-distance  
 fig: #fig4.2  
 10 S6: Ja men #eh- e-# \*når det er totalrefleksjon e'kke  
**Yeah but #eh- e-# \*when it is total refraction isn't**  
 tea \*walks towards S6--->  
 11 refleksjonsvinkelen like stor?  
**the angle of reflection the same**  
 12 (0.3)  
 13 TEA: .hhh j:o. #(0.2) Men fø:r: det blir totalrefleksjon, (...)  
**.hhh Yes:. #(0.2) but befo:re: there is total reflection(...)**  
 fig: ----->#fig4.3

In line 1, S7 are trying to explain to S6 how ‘total refraction’ works. The teacher does not visibly orienting themselves towards S6 and S7 (#fig 4.1), and the students are not oriented towards the teacher either. There is no emerging co-presence as in the previous examples, and the teacher’s back is turned towards the students. The teacher then turns around and initiates assistance by posing an understanding-check (Koole 2010): ‘Do you understand it, S6?’ (line 7). The teacher is not implicitly working up to problem-solving but is targeting the student’s potential problem, ‘it’, straight away and uses their gaze and an address term to identify the person they are talking to (see also Lerner 2003). At this point, the teacher makes themselves recruitable, which is displayed both by bodily orientation and by posing an understanding-check that addresses the need for assistance – that is, the teacher stopps at half-distance (line 9, #fig. 4.2) to check whether assistance is needed. The understanding-check here makes it possible for the student to decline the implicit assumption that the teacher’s assistance is needed. Only when the student explicitly displays trouble with a ‘Yes, but’ response (line 10), the teacher moves fully towards the student’s desk to assist.

Extract 4 shows that the teacher was recruitable even though her bodily position indicated otherwise. The lack of pre-recruitment potential (Step 1) showed a different recruitment process than the ones in Extracts 1–3. It looks like a deviant case because the teacher seems to join in abruptly, disturbing the ongoing interaction. However, under close scrutiny, we see that the teacher’s turn is not obtrusive; rather, it ‘fits’ perfectly in a pause in the talk between S6 and S7, when S7’s explanation is seemingly complete. S6 treats the teacher’s intervention as unproblematic and a coherent part of problem-solving efforts, as S6

does not reformulate the problem, but elaborates on the part of S7's explanation that is still unclear (lines 10–11). Also, the understanding check (line 7) showed that the teacher oriented themselves towards the missing Step 1 – that is, the student had not indicated that assistance was needed. However, S6 confirmed (lines 10–11) that they had a problem that needed to be solved. Thus, Extract 4 confirms our overall argument: initiation of assistance (Step 3) occurs after a clarification that assistance is needed, that is, the need for assistance is negotiated.

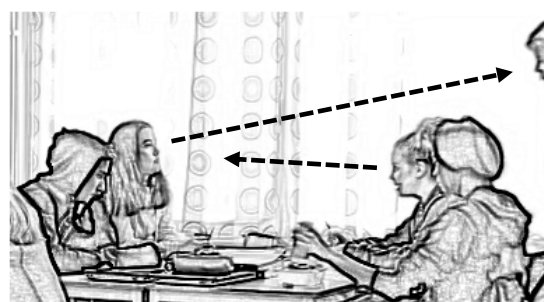
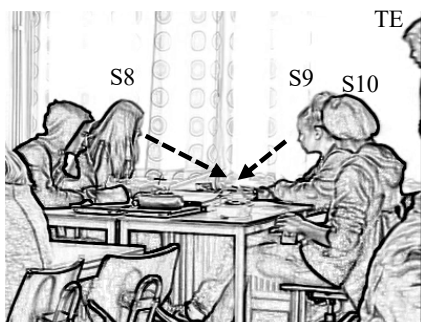
In a pedagogical context, Extract 4 is interesting because it shows that both teachers and students see teachers' disruptions as something regular. They orient themselves to the institutionality of the situation and that the teacher's assistance is something that happens in classrooms on a regular basis, as part of the ordinary procedure of classroom interaction. Teachers make themselves available using explicit and implicit means. Extract 4 demonstrates that direct gaze contact is not a prerequisite for the possibility of acquiring assistance. In addition, Extract 4 also shows that even teachers' explicit offers of assistance are negotiated. Teachers do not 'barge in' with predesigned solutions to potential problems; instead, they can act on potential student problems in solving specific tasks and establish assistance in a stepwise fashion.

Extracts 1–4 all reveal that students and teachers negotiate the need for assistance. Recruitment is contingent on another's attention and availability, but persistent proximity and already displayed attention to a student/group is not a necessary precondition of recruitment (most clearly shown in Extract 4). The recruitment process is not completed until there is a common understanding that assistance was needed, and the teachers move over to the students' desks, thus creating a participation framework in which the participants ratify the assistance offered as truly needed.

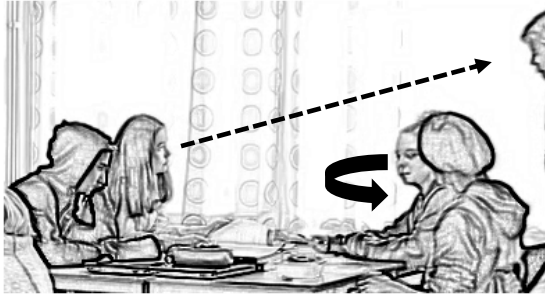
#### No Recruitment (Extract 5)

Extracts 1–4 have shown that negotiations between teachers and students can result in an agreement that assistance is called for – that is, the outcome of such negotiation is problem-solving. The last example, Extract 5, details a situation in which the teacher was present but the outcome did not involve an assistance sequence. However, as we will argue, this extract supports the argument that recruitment is a *potential* condition in small group work and does not necessarily follow a teacher's close physical proximity to a group. Extract 5 is from the same lesson as Extract 1 (verb conjugation in Norwegian Nynorsk). The extract starts with the teacher approaching the group while the students are talking among themselves.

Extract 5 DT\_Ø1\_V1

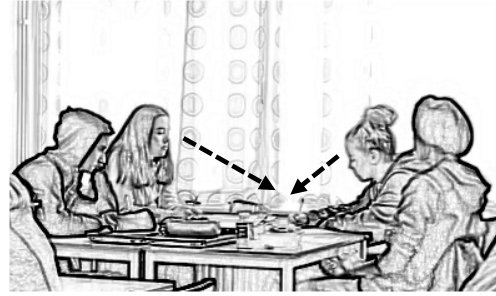


#fig5.1



#fig5.3

#fig5.2



#fig5.4

01 S9: sterke verb.  
irregular verbs.

02 S8: ja  
**yeah**

03 S9: +ja  
**+yeah**  
s9 +starts writing --->

04 (.) # (.)  
tea #leans slightly in over S9's back,  
#fig5.1

05 S9: (de to er) sva:ke liksom # ( )  
**(those two are) like re:gular# ( )**  
s8 #gaze to TEA  
s9 #gaze to S8  
#fig5.2

06 s9 gaze to TEA, #turns head  
s8 #gaze to TEA --->  
#fig5.3

07 tea ----> #leaves the group  
s8 ----> #gaze to work sheet ---->>  
s9 #gaze to work sheet, starts writing ---->>  
#fig5.4

Extract 5 is one of the 13 extracts in our data in which the teacher approaches a student group but no recruitment happens. When the teacher approaches the group, the students continue their ongoing talk. S8 briefly looks up at the teacher, and the teacher looks down at the students' worksheet (line 5). Pre-recruitment potential is established, but the only visible communication is the exchange of gazes between two of the students and the teacher. In line 6, S9 turns their head slightly and looks very briefly at the teacher, but the shared gaze between the teacher and the student is cut off rapidly and redirected at S10. No key move is performed, and the teacher leaves the group. The outcome is no recruitment.

In this extract, the students do not invite the teacher to join the group talk; therefore, they do not establish a participation framework that includes the teacher. The gazes of the students indicate that 'no assistance is needed'. However, the teacher is not merely a spectator: the teacher's gaze at the worksheet monitors the group's work, and when the teacher leaves without any explicit statement about the students' work, this signals that what the teacher has seen is 'good enough' to proceed with the ongoing task (Macbeth 2003).

There is no orientation, whether implicit or explicit, towards a problem that needs to be dealt with. Here, their mutual gaze does other work than pre-beginnings (as shown by Mortensen and Hazel 2014: 51), as the mutual gaze does not result in further engagement. Nonetheless, the mutual gaze is not ‘just looking’. Non-instruction is also instruction, as the teacher’s quick glance at the students’ work does, at least implicitly, do assessment. Jakonen (2020: 168) analysed an extract similar to Extract 5 and characterised it as a ‘sneak peak’, in which teachers signal access to and assessment of students’ work as well as displaying availability for queries (Jakonen 2020: 168). Jakonen’s example involves teachers’ verbal positive assessments. Although there was no word exchange between the students and the teacher in our extract, we claim that the same type of assessment can be achieved through the exchange of gaze between teachers and students.

Extract 5 and similar extracts show that a teacher’s presence creates potential for recruitment, but recruitment and the subsequent teacher’s assistance require that there is a problem of some sort, big or small, that would need solving. The quick exchange of gaze showed that sometimes, a teacher’s presence is noted but not attended to by students and is, therefore, not pursued by the teacher either. However, teachers do monitor student interactions through their presence, thus communicating to the students that everything is going according to plan. In other words, also ‘no problem formulations’ are the results of negotiation processes.

‘Sneak peaks’ are an effective way of negotiating the need for assistance, as the ‘no-problem signalling’ does not halt the progression of the ongoing student–student interaction (see also Jakonen 2020: 168). Extract 5 and similar extracts were all relatively brief and, as the term ‘sneak peak’ indicates, the teachers do not need to orient themselves towards student groups for a long time. A potential factor in terms of recruitment, may be the time spent by the teacher at the students’ desk, as continued teacher presence may lead the students to extend their participation framework and include the teacher, even when no explicit problem is indicated (see Extract 1).

## Discussion and conclusion

This article has shown that teachers are available and recruitable as learning resources in classrooms. Overall, the analysed extracts revealed that seeking and offering assistance is an interactionally managed process, a *pre* to solving potential problems in group work. We have shown how the process whereby ‘someone lets it be known, somehow, that they might need assistance; and someone else comes to anticipate that need before the other has let it be known, or to discern that need’ (Kendrick and Drew 2014: 112) is achieved in classroom contexts, thus contributing to knowledge of how assistance is provided. More specifically, we have shown that there is not always an explicit offer of or request for assistance; both teachers and students use subtle means, such as gestures, bodily movement, gazing and words, to engage in recruitment practices.

Extracts 1–5 demonstrate how recruitment plays out during small group work. Both students (Extracts 1 and 2) and teachers (Extracts 3 and 4) can make the (first) move to turn teachers’ co-presence into assistance. Teachers act on students’ ‘cues’ indicating that some sort of trouble is present and then evaluate whether assistance is needed (Extracts 1–5). In some cases, it may, at first glance, seem as if the teacher barges in. However, upon closer

inspection, we find that teachers' 'interferences' are fitted into ongoing interactions and that both the students and the teachers treat such 'interferences' as unnoticeable (Extract 4) – that is, none of the participants commented on or reacted to the teacher's contribution as something out of the ordinary. The teacher's physical proximity (Extracts 1 and 2) may enhance the recruitment opportunities but is not a necessary prerequisite (Extracts 3 and 4); however, the teacher needs to be visible and within hearing distance. Therefore, we argue that recruitment is a *potential* condition rather than a direct consequence of teachers' physical proximity (Extract 5), which expands the concept of 'availability'. Previous research has highlighted the teachers' movement as a resource for assistance (see Tanner 2014; Greiffenhagen 2012; Jakonen 2020). In this article, we have shown that 'being available' is jointly constructed as part of the recruitment process.

Soliciting and providing assistance are mundane occurrences in classrooms and mostly go unnoticed. The acts of soliciting and providing assistance have specific structures, for instance, formalised by students' hand raising or other forms of summoning (Sahlström 2002; Cekaite 2009; Gardner 2015). But, as we have shown, there are also more implicit ways of handling assistance, and recruitment offers an alternative to instances in which a teacher approaches a student group with a predetermined goal or students summons teachers. For students, teacher availability and movement may lower the bar for requesting assistance, and thereby securing them assistance for issues which they not necessarily would summon the teachers (as the student initiated entries require). For teachers, movement in the classroom creates opportunities for short, in-the-moment instructions, that does not require them to disturb students' progress (in contrast to the teacher initiated entries). Although movement in itself is highly asymmetrical, as the teachers are the only ones that move around (Jakonen 2020: 166), we have shown that when teachers make rounds, assistance is handled collaboratively. Teachers monitor students' embodied and verbal trouble displays. Meanwhile, students monitor teachers' movements as grounds for recruiting them. The actual problem-solving activities occur after teachers and students have collaboratively negotiated the fact that assistance is needed.

Students' publicly displayed troubles do not necessarily require *teachers'* assistance. In many cases, assistance in desk talk is provided by other students (see Jakonen 2020), and recruitment may also be directed at co-students first (Extracts 3 and 4). By addressing other students with their problems, students implicitly leave cues for teachers, which teachers can act on or not.

This article has shown how experienced teachers and students rely on implicit ways of handling assistance, which they have achieved through years of daily classroom work. For both parties, assistance involves deciding whether they should be 'moving into interaction' (Mortensen and Hazel 2014), thus establishing a participation framework that suspends the ongoing group work. The students consider whether they need the teacher's assistance and whether the assistance is important enough at that particular point in their work process. The teachers are faced with a similar issue: Is giving assistance required, and is it important enough to halt the ongoing group work? As our analysis has shown, teachers seize contingent opportunities to assist students while walking through the classroom. Experienced teachers manage to accomplish multiple teacher tasks at once – they assist students while exerting control at the same time (see Greiffenhagen 2012; Jakonen 2020).



Noticing potential learning situations represent a challenge for preservice teachers, especially in early stages of their teacher education (Stahnke and Blömeke 2020; 2021; van Driel *et al.* 2021), with additional challenges when students are engaged in small group work (Doyle 2006; Wolff *et al.* 2020; Stahnke and Blömeke 2021). For preservice teachers, our research shows how embodied micro features of interaction are crucial in teacher–student communication in general and more specifically in instant problem-solving in small group work. Being able to monitor students’ potential troubles with tasks and deciding whether to intervene is a tacit interactional competence that is not easy to teach or to transmit in teacher training. Applying authentic classroom videos in teacher training, similar to the extracts analysed in this article, can provide further insights into everyday classroom practices and be used for reflection-based teacher education (see also Seidel *et al.* 2011; van Driel *et al.* 2021). This article contributes to a growing body of research that uses conversation analysis of authentic encounters as a starting point for teacher training, based on the structured use of video data (e.g. Skovholt *et al.* 2021 ; Sikveland *et al.* 2023). Overall, reflection-based instruction based on authentic video recordings of classrooms are needed and provide an essential but, in our opinion, underexploited learning resource in teacher training. Embodied instructional practices and the impact of reflection-based video instruction in teacher education deserve attention in future research.

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