

Prior to attending the **Role of the Tutor in Small Group Learning Workshop**, please complete the following as your responses will be used as a basis for discussion in the first small group session of the workshop. These situations can also be used as possible scenarios for the "role-play" practice sessions.

PROBLEM BASED LEARNING IN SMALL GROUPS
Tutorial Situations Questionnaire¹

Tutorial groups vary from one to another and it is difficult to develop standard approaches that can be applied to resolve problems arising in the functioning of a group. However, there are some basic principles that can be derived from the action taken by a tutor/facilitator when confronted with problems which, if not corrected, may result in a dysfunctional group.

From the experience of many tutors in various health professional educational programmes at McMaster and other institutions, a series of tutorial situations/scenarios have been developed illustrating problems that seem to be of common occurrence in tutorial groups and several approaches to the management of such.

Although the action(s) to be taken by the tutor/facilitator would vary from group to group, the described actions provide a reasonable basis for the discussion of their rationale, based on whether or not they assist the members of the group in their learning and their achievement of the programme objectives.

The **Tutorial Situations Questionnaire** is divided into three sections:

SECTION A	SECTION B	SECTION C
Situations related to the behaviour of tutorial group members	Situations related to evaluation/assessment of student performance	Situations related to tutor/facilitator performance

¹L.A. Branda 1991 (modified from L.A. Branda & H.S. Barrows 1976)
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SECTION A:

SITUATIONS RELATED TO THE BEHAVIOUR OF TUTORIAL GROUP MEMBERS

Confronted with the following situations during a tutorial session, indicate the choice of your possible actions by circling the appropriate letter. If the action you would take is not listed, please describe it under category e) Other.

Situation 1 The group members don't know where to start, what to do — may show some anxiety and quietness— no enthusiasm; you

- a) ask someone to go to the blackboard and list issues;
- b) ask the group who wants to go to the blackboard and list issues;
- c) select an area/topic of your expertise and give a small talk to start the group working;
- d) ask if someone has heard of a case similar to the one under discussion, and if so, to tell the group about it;
- e) other:.....

Situation 2 Two students in your group have expressed concerns about the value of the PBL Programme. They believe that coming to tutorials and preparing material for the sessions is not a good use of their time, particularly at examination time; you

- a) give them the option not to attend the tutorials;
- b) consult the group on what to do;
- c) make arrangements for field trips to see patients and use them as problems for PBL;
- d) attempt to make links between the issues being discussed by the group and the learning in the rest of the curriculum;
- e) other: _____

Situation 3 In spite of your efforts, the group is not functioning —silence, no one listens, no train of thought followed by the group, no enthusiasm; you

- a) stop the session and suggest meeting another time;
- b) ask someone to present findings or give opinions in relation to the problem;
- c) ask the group if they want to stop and reconvene later;
- d) raise a controversial point in relation to the case and/or do some role playing;
- e) other: _____

Situation 4 One of the students in the group makes a hypothesis to explain the problem which does not appear to be logical; you

- a) challenge the hypothesis by asking questions to the student who made it;
- b) ask the group to discuss the hypothesis proposed;
- c) arrange a meeting with the student who made the hypothesis to discuss the student's problem solving ability;
- d) ignore the hypothesis proposed and direct the group towards a more logical one;
- e) other: _____

Situation 5 After reading the first part of a problem and having a brief discussion, several members of the group say that they are unable to identify issues without more information; you

- a) suggest moving on to the next part of the problem;
- b) you ask the group to develop some hypotheses before going to the second part of the problem;
- c) ask the group what type of information they wish to have and to justify the request;
- d) tell the group the information needed to help the group arrive at an explanation of the problem;
- e) other: _____

Situation 6 After reading the first part of the problem, the students come up with what they believe is a plausible explanation and feel there is no point in continuing to work on the problem; you

- a) agree with the explanation and help the group select another problem;
- b) encourage the group to discuss alternative explanations before abandoning the problem;
- c) explain to the group why the explanation for this problem is not plausible;
- d) ask the group to ignore the explanation given and move ahead exploring the problem;
- e) other: _____

Situation 7 *The students have researched issues at a previous tutorial. After the discussion, they are ready to move on to the next problem, however, they have not related the issues discussed to the problem at hand; you*

- a) ask the group to go back to the problem to see which of the material previously discussed is applicable to it;
- b) list the issues discussed which relate to the problem;
- c) agree to move ahead to the next problem;
- d) ask the group to provide an explanation to the problem at hand and then move ahead to the next problem;
- e) other: _____

Situation 8 *The students in the group listed several issues relevant to the problem. No discussion took place and assignments for research were made. Since they finished early, the group decided to go to the library to start researching the issues identified; you*

- a) suggest that the group discuss some of the issues;
- b) ask the group if they would like you to make a presentation about one of the issues which is the area of your expertise;
- c) agree with the group's decision;
- d) tell the group of a similar problem you saw and of how it was resolved;
- e) other: _____

Situation 9 *Students from different academic backgrounds feel they have different learning needs; you*

- a) suggest that responsibilities be divided according to backgrounds;
- b) suggest students with similar backgrounds work together in preparing themselves for tutorials;
- c) suggest students with different backgrounds work together in preparing themselves for tutorials;
- d) encourage participation of students with different backgrounds by asking questions in their areas of expertise;
- e) other: _____

Situation 10 A student in the group selects an issue for research which doesn't appear relevant to the problem under discussion; you

- a) discourage the student to select the issue because of its lack of relevance;
- b) encourage the group to select other topics which you consider relevant to maintain a balance in the work of the group;
- c) ask the student to justify the selection of the apparently irrelevant issue;
- d) ask the student to select an additional issue which is relevant to the problem;
- e) other: _____

Situation 11 Two members of your group get isolated by a vigorous but relevant and stimulating discussion being carried out by the others; you

- a) point out to the group what is going on;
- b) ask questions to the "minority" encouraging their participation in the discussion;
- c) get involved in the discussion with the vocal group;
- d) stop the tutorial and suggest starting another time;
- e) other: _____

Situation 12 A conflict arises in the group due to their diverse opinions on the importance of issues in a broad variety of areas; you

- a) remind the group of the kinds of issues they have already dealt with so they can make a decision on the present situation;
- b) suggest looking at the Programme learning objectives to decide where the emphasis should be;
- c) ask the group to decide (by vote) what kind of issues they will be dealing with;
- d) make a decision on behalf of the group;
- e) other: _____

Situation 13 For the last hour, there has been a great deal of confrontation and conflicts between members of the tutorial group about a specific topic. This has disrupted the functioning of the group; you

- a) stop the tutorial and tell the group to meet at another time;
- b) stop the tutorial and raise concerns about what is going on;
- c) decide who is right and based on this help them with their problem;
- d) direct the group to another subject;
- e) other: _____

Situation 14 *The group expressed frustration about the efficiency of their learning, particularly on how to use the problem to identify new areas for exploration; you*

- a) offer to make a demonstration on how to use a problem in the PBL Programme;
- b) help the students to identify how much they have learned, both in knowledge and skills;
- c) tell the group that this is how it is supposed to be and to be patient;
- d) agree with the group and quicken the pace at which the problem is handled by providing information/knowledge when you feel the group is slowing down;
- e) other: _____

SECTION B:

SITUATIONS RELATED TO THE EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Confronted with the following situations during a tutorial session, indicate the choice of your possible actions by circling the appropriate letter. If the action you would take is not listed, please describe it under category e) Other.

Situation 15 *At the end of a tutorial, during the evaluation of the group's performance, a student remarks that the format, in which the students take turns presenting, is boring. Another student agrees with this concern; you*

- a) ask the group to discuss the matter;
- b) agree and present to the group alternative approaches to the presentations;
- c) disagree and tell the group that one of the objectives of the PBL Programme is to develop communication and teaching skills;
- d) tell the group you will be asking other tutors/facilitators about alternative approaches to presentations;
- e) other: _____

Situation 16 *From the beginning of the semester there is a student in your group who appears to dominate the discussion. However, this student shares responsibilities with other members of the group and always comes well prepared;* you

- a) interrupt the student on occasions when you believe that more than a reasonable amount of discussion time is taken;
- b) ask others members of the group whether they are satisfied with the time they have for their participation;
- c) ignore the student's behaviour until the others complain;
- d) raise the issue at the end-of-tutorial evaluation;
- e) other: _____

Situation 17 *A student has participated very little since the beginning of the semester. After six weeks, suspecting that the quietness is due to a lack of knowledge;* you

- a) ask the student to give a talk on a specific topic for the next tutorial;
- b) ask the student direct questions during tutorials;
- c) mention, in the context of the discussion, the student's academic background and/or experience;
- d) take no action hoping that the student will become more comfortable and begin to participate;
- e) other: _____

Situation 18 *One of the students in your group was absent from a session and has not let anyone in the group, including yourself know why. In the next tutorial session the student's absence is not mentioned by anyone;* you

- a) ignore it and carry on with the tutorial;
- b) ask the student about not making it to the tutorial;
- c) make a general reference about compliance and absenteeism;
- d) call the student to your office to discuss the problem;
- e) other: _____

SECTION C:

SITUATIONS RELATED TO TUTOR/FACILITATOR PERFORMANCE

Confronted with the following situations during a tutorial session, indicate the choice of your possible actions by circling the appropriate letter. If the action you would take is not listed, please describe it under category e) Other.

Situation 19 The group is discussing an area/topic in which you have expertise;

you

- a) suggest you can deal with this area/topic as a resource person;
- b) answer specific questions posed by the tutorial group;
- c) suggest that before going any further they should get some reference material and do some reading for the next tutorial;
- d) identify the reading they should do and suggest discussing it at the next tutorial;
- e) other: _____

Situation 20 You have been told by some of the members in your tutorial group that you are too directive and unwilling to let them make their own decisions; you

- a) acknowledge their comments and agree to change your behavior for the future;
- b) ask for the basis of their criticisms;
- c) ask the other members of the group if they agree with their peers;
- d) disagree with their assessment of your behavior and ask the other students whether they agree with you or not;
- e) other: _____

Situation 21 *In the middle of the semester you find it impossible to reschedule a prior commitment and tell the group that you will be absent the following week; you*

- a) ask the group whether they prefer to work on their own or to have a facilitator assigned for that session;
- b) refer this problem to the PBL programme for resolution;
- c) recruit a facilitator to take your place and let the group know about it;
- d) cancel the following tutorial session;
- e) other: _____

Situation 22 *In the first tutorial session, the students ask how they will be evaluated; you*

- a) discuss the Programme evaluation guidelines with them;
- b) explain your own approach to evaluation;
- c) ask the group how they want to be evaluated;
- d) speak about your concerns in reference to the use of problem solving exercises for evaluation and suggest using some “objective” tests, instead;
- e) other: _____

Situation 23 *One of the students in your group wants to have only private sessions with you for evaluation; you*

- a) arrange for private meetings with each student;
- b) arrange for private meetings as well as group evaluation;
- c) discuss the pros and cons of group evaluation and let the group decide;
- d) state that the only evaluation that will be done is in the group setting;
- e) other: _____

Situation 24 *The members of the group express concerns about evaluating you in the open; you*

- a) ask them to send you unsigned forms at the end of the semester;
- b) tell them not to worry, that they don't need to evaluate you, just to tell you if there is any problem;
- c) demonstrate how to do evaluation of the group members by starting with a self-evaluation;
- d) set up a time at the end of each tutorial for evaluation and begin with a self-evaluation;
- e) other: _____