

Connected

empowering teachers • inspiring students • elevating communities

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Educators look to adjust course with micro options

Bruce Hallihan, Internal Communications, EECD

A growing number of New Brunswick educators feel developing micro courses would be an ideal way to keep learners engaged. Judging by the response from students who formed a Shark Tank recently, they're right.

Eight savvy students – four each from Leo Hayes and Fredericton high schools – listened to ten pitches during a micro-course development day on December 8 at the Fredericton Inn.

"I really appreciate what just happened," Dom O'Donnell, a grade 11 student at FHS, said afterwards. "All of the people who presented have shown passion and effort to try to create new boundaries that school has been locked into for a long time. Just the classic English, history, math, whatever . . . the box that we've been stuck in."

O'Donnell was heartened by the desire for an innovative approach. He admits he's disenchanted with some of his current courses. "Why am I taking this has been my question for so long," he said. "I love the idea of changing the way classes are run, with students creating their own opportunities to learn. I felt stuck in a box, but seeing this, and seeing the opportunities that hopefully the next generation of students will have, is awesome."

Simonds High School teacher Matt Creamer and his tablemates came up with "So you want to be a . . ." as a potential all-encompassing micro course.

"I really liked getting evaluated by the students," Creamer said. "It's nice to get their feedback, and it was great meeting with colleagues to get their input. Working in schools, unfortunately sometimes you're in your own little bubble, so it's nice to have your colleagues throw ideas out that we can support and develop."

Experiential learning can be such a powerful tool for student achievement, said Creamer, who offered a hypothetical opinion on how his group's proposed micro course would work. "We would place students in the workforce observing and practising the skills taught in their classes," he said. "Imagine learning about biodiversity in environmental science, then completing a two-week work placement with Ducks Unlimited. Or, after completing AP physics, going to Grand Manan to watch NB Power fire up their emergency power station. Our experiential micro course will not only help students see processes in practise but also help guide their decision-making for post-secondary and career choices."

UNB classics professor Matthew Sears is also the founder of Guides Connected, a resource to help educators develop and implement micro courses. Sears and his team will do the legwork to help teachers find the right expert for their particular needs.

"It's really exciting to see so many people from around New Brunswick being innovative and looking to come up with new ways to approach learning," Sears said. "What's nice for me is students feeling they have some ownership and agency over what's being taught. Micro courses allow teachers and students to work together to explore areas of interest that might fall outside of the regular curriculum. Instead of just pursuing these interests on an extra-curricular basis, why not give students credit? Credit allows there to be more skin in the game from all sides."

By having Guides Connected experts consult on the development of these micro courses, Sears said, "we can ensure students can pursue interesting things in a way that also reflects the latest academic research, and as such makes the micro courses fully legitimate courses with as much rigor as regular courses have. Another exciting pros-



Shark Tank

pect is working together to combine several micro courses, perhaps ones that on the surface don't have much to do with each other, into a coherent four-credit course that can stand up to other courses already offered. The future of academic research and university programs really is interdisciplinary, and this micro-course approach will allow educators and students, even at the high school level, to tap into this important new direction in education."

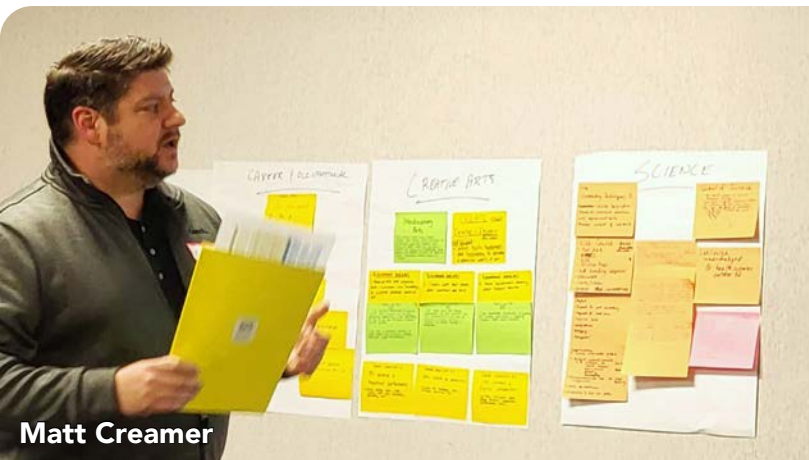
Robert Landau, the founder of Two Roads Education, taught for more than three decades, including twenty-two years in Switzerland, and is now an independent education consultant based in Hawaii. He was contracted by What School Could Be for this project.

Landau is a strong advocate that the key to preparing young minds for the future is by not tethering them to the past. "As a consultant, I ask clients to envision the idea of standing at a crossroads, ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead," Landau said. "Together, we'll forge a path that resonates with your values, aspirations, and goals, ensuring that the road you take will make all the difference. I work with schools around the world usually around mission/vision, governance, pedagogy, team building, strengths, and executive coaching."

Landau was impressed by what he saw in New Brunswick. "After visiting three high schools and one alternative learning centre, I understand the true essence of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for all learners," he said. "There are so many pathways provided by NB schools that keep young people in school. I saw auto repair, welding, fashion design, carpentry, social and emotional learning rooms, and so many other choices. As I go around the world, this is a happening place. My experience collaborating with teachers and staff was exceptional. In very little time we asked people to prepare a pitch for actual students. There was no push back or resistance. I was impressed with everyone's ability to demonstrate vulnerability and risk-taking.

"The students invited to the shark tank event were so dynamic, confident, articulate, engaging, and outspoken," Landau said. "They felt included and empowered."

Micro courses would be completed in five or six weeks. Rather than pass or fail, Landau says credit or no credit would be a more appropriate measuring stick for students "because it's not about an A, a B, or a C. The great thing about micro courses is they're performance, competency, and standards based."



Matt Creamer



Robert Landau and Matt Sears