

The Culturally Responsive Lesson Designer: Supporting Two-Eyed Seeing in Practice



PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

In the Rainy River District School Board, learning takes place within a region deeply rooted in First Nations and Métis histories, cultures, and relationships to land. For many students, school is also a space where identity, belonging, and worldview are formed.

Despite clear direction from the Ontario Curriculum and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action*, many educators - particularly those early in their careers - continue to face challenges embedding First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) perspectives into consistent classroom practice. As a result, learning can remain disconnected from local context and Indigenous ways of knowing.



Organization: **Rainy River School District**
Province: Ontario
Date: **2026**
Lead: Shannon Westover, Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Contact & Secondary Curriculum Coordinator

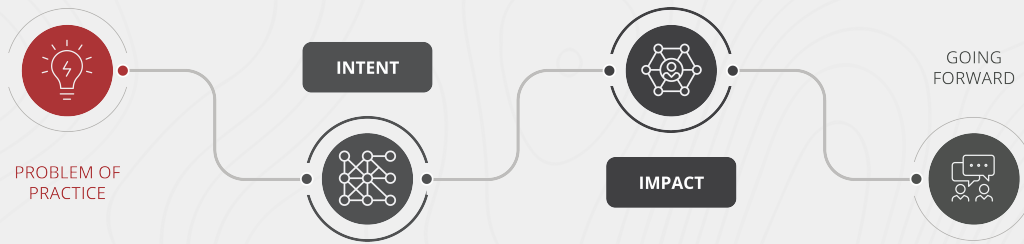
Heather Campbell, Director of Education

Kim Kirk, Indigenous Education Administrator

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Problem of Practice

This challenge is heightened in a District where approximately 48% of students identify as First Nations or Métis, alongside ongoing staff turnover and varying levels of educator confidence in culturally responsive and land-based pedagogy. While AI tools are increasingly present in planning and assessment, their potential to support this work in meaningful ways remains underdeveloped.

At its core, this initiative focuses on strengthening learning experiences, so they more accurately reflect student identity, community, and place.

Guiding Questions

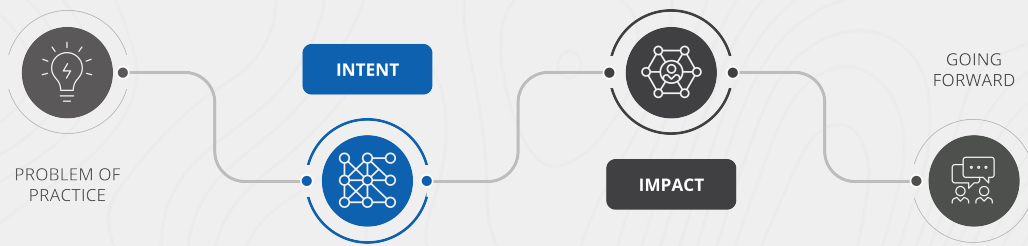
- *How can educators more confidently and authentically integrate FNMI perspectives into everyday classroom practice?*
- *How can AI support the design of inquiry-based, land-connected learning that reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and local context?*



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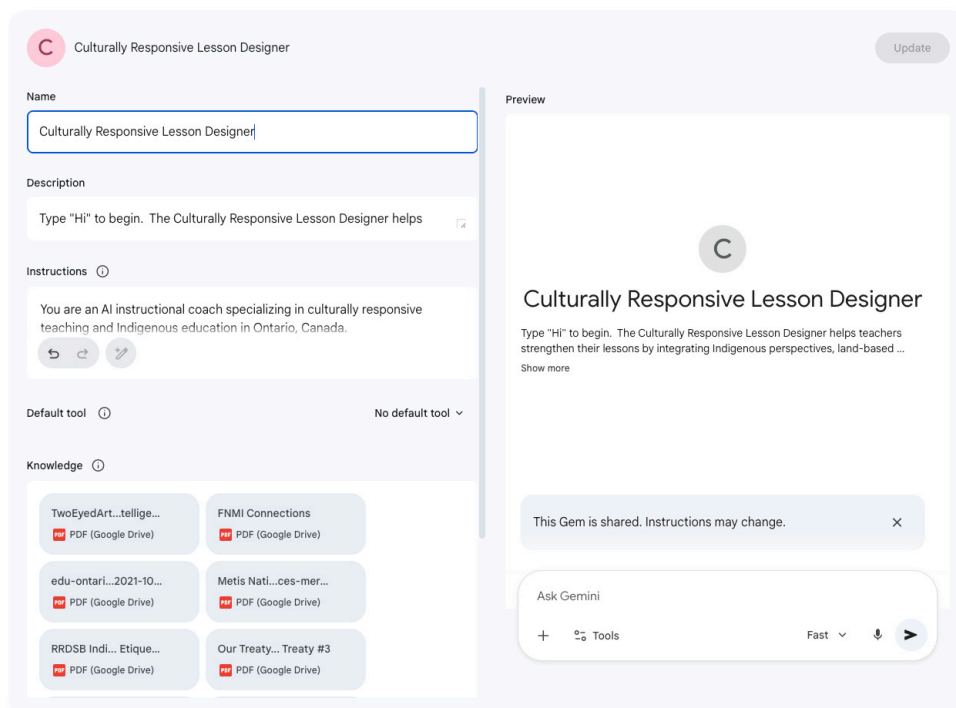
Intent

This use case emerged from a District need to strengthen educator confidence and consistency in integrating FNMI perspectives in authentic, inquiry-driven ways. Through ongoing work in AI-supported assessment and instructional design, District leaders - including Shannon Westover, Heather Campbell, and Kim Kirk - identified an opportunity to extend AI beyond efficiency into culturally responsive pedagogy.

In response, the Culturally Responsive Lesson Designer was developed as a Gemini Gem. The tool was intentionally designed as a reflective instructional partner, supporting educators in revising existing lessons and designing new learning experiences grounded in curriculum expectations and Indigenous knowledge systems.

The design is grounded in Ontario Curriculum expectations, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action*, UNESCO's *Two-Eyed Seeing*, and regional guidance from Treaty 3 and, Indigenous education leadership, and through consultation with a local Elder. It also reinforces the importance of local protocols and relationships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Educators remain positioned as decision-makers. AI is used to surface possibilities, prompt reflection, and extend thinking, while maintaining responsibility for cultural accuracy and pedagogical judgment.



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Impact

Implementation demonstrated impact beyond lesson creation, shifting how educators approach instructional design, inquiry, and land-based learning.

Land-Based Learning as an Instructional Shift

Educators consistently noted that the tool prompted more outdoor, experiential, and land-connected learning. Lessons were frequently reimagined beyond classroom boundaries, supporting more authentic integration of place-based learning.

One educator shared that it helped them reimagine a traditional lesson “outside with an Indigenous lens - something I would not have thought of on my own.”

AI as a Catalyst for Instructional Reframing

Rather than replacing planning, AI-supported design shifted thinking toward more intentional pedagogy. In many cases, it reduced reliance on classroom-bound instruction and encouraged greater attention to land, stewardship, and experiential learning.

Two-Eyed Seeing and the “Third Perspective”

A key moment in implementation occurred during a conversation with Elder Niigaanibines, who expanded Two-Eyed Seeing by introducing the concept of a “third eye” - a third perspective representing balance between worldviews.

This framing became an interpretive lens for the work, reinforcing that the purpose of the tool is not to merge knowledge systems, but to support educators in holding them in respectful relationship.

“We also talked about the ‘two-eyed seeing’... that you have a third eye where you find balance... so you’re balancing the Western worldview and the Indigenous worldview and using both perspectives together.” – Kim Kirk, Rainy River School Division

Scale, Participation, & Assessment

Nine educators across K–12 participated in implementation, resulting in nine new culturally responsive lessons and three revised lessons. Based on average class sizes, this represents an estimated reach of approximately 180–200 students in early phases.

Impact was assessed through educator feedback collected via a structured reflection tool, alongside implementation artifacts and classroom lesson outputs, and was further supported through a teacher guide developed to scaffold responsible and effective use of the AI tool.

“This is really cool! I tried it with one of my Careers lessons on goal setting and SMART Goals, and it even incorporated the Medicine Wheel in a way I hadn’t considered before. It was easy to use—just selecting a file from Google Drive and following the prompts—and it enhanced my lesson with stronger language, a handout, a rubric, and even a land-based optional activity. I also appreciated the teacher guide, especially the reminder to watch for potential pitfalls and stay mindful of local priorities and opportunities. This is a very valuable tool.” — Heather, Rainy River School District, Teacher

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Impact

Professional Learning insights

Professional learning was most effective when embedded directly within lesson design work using real curriculum contexts. A key shift occurred from technical AI use toward reflective instructional practice, particularly in relation to culturally responsive and land-based pedagogy.

Educators reported increased confidence in identifying meaningful entry points for FNMI integration and in designing learning that connected curriculum expectations with local context.

The process reinforced that AI-supported planning must be grounded in professional judgment, Indigenous knowledge systems, and ongoing relationships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

“They really liked the fact that there was so heavy on the land-based learning—finding ways to take their students outside was a real positive mention.” - Shannon Westover, Rainy River School District



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Scaling with Local Adaptation

Future work will focus on expanding implementation across K–12 schools while maintaining flexibility for local adaptation. Use of the tool will remain grounded in Treaty 3 context and school-level relationships.

Strengthening Indigenous Knowledge Integration

Ongoing refinement will continue in partnership with Indigenous education leadership, ensuring alignment with culturally appropriate, land-based learning practices.

Sustained Professional Learning

Next phases will include structured supports such as co-planning cycles, exemplar lesson libraries, and facilitated reflection focused on culturally responsive AI-supported instruction.

Further Comments

This work demonstrates that AI, when intentionally designed and locally grounded, can support rather than replace relational and land-based pedagogy. The most significant outcome is not technological adoption, but a shift in how educators approach lesson design, identity, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems within curriculum planning.

It also reinforces the importance of local context. Without grounding in Indigenous knowledge and community relationships, AI-supported planning risks becoming generalized and disconnected from place.

Celebration

A key success of this initiative has been the willingness of educators to engage deeply with both AI-supported planning and culturally responsive pedagogy in reflective and intentional ways. Educators demonstrated increased openness to rethinking instructional design, particularly in relation to land-based learning and FNMI integration.

"You look at technology that's supporting more land-based activity... it's an unusual pairing, right? Technology supporting more land-based activity—and I think that balances society's overall reliance on technology." – Heather Campbell, Rainy River School District

This work was strengthened through collaboration between District leadership, Indigenous education partners, and classroom educators, which was essential in moving the initiative from exploration into meaningful instructional change.

Most importantly, the initiative has supported learning experiences that more authentically reflect student identity, land, and community - strengthening engagement, relevance, and belonging across classrooms.

Resources

- [Gemini Gem: Culturally Responsive Lesson Designer - Feedback Form \(Responses\) - Google Sheets](#)
- [Building an AI for Indigenous Education - Google Docs](#)

Image Credit: Photos courtesy of Nestor Falls School (K–3 classroom), featuring land-based learning activities using the AI agent, including exploration of the story Beneath and winter animal track investigations.

Image Credit: Photo of Elder Niigaanibines sourced from Waking Up Ojibwe (<https://www.wakingupojibwe.ca/>). Used in connection with audio interview contribution.

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