

Courageous Learning

Nizoongide'e
Gikinoo'amaagooyaan



Courageous Learning

During this term, we will embark on a deep reflection on your unique learning process and discover how to enhance it. Through all of these activities and exercises we hope to support your well-being as a learner. In Ojibwemowin this is referred to as *Minobimaadizi*: one living well. One of the seven Ojibwe/Anishinaabe sacred teachings or ‘gifts of the seven grandfathers’ that help us to live well, is *zoongide’ewin*, courage, and is often represented by the Bear (American Indian Magnet School, 2023; Ojibwe.net, 2023, The Ojibwe People’s Dictionary, 2012-2021). We offer this gift of Brave *Learning* and invite you to consider how you can bring courage, persistence, and playfulness to your learning.

You will be invited to reflect on several aspects of your learning process as you make your way through a series of learning journal reflections. You will be learning in a community of peers and knowing how to ask for help, solicit feedback, and connect to your peers is part of sustaining your well-being and becoming an effective early childhood professional and lifelong learner. These can be completed on your own or with your peers. You may discover there are aspects to your learning that your peers see that you don’t see; who we are and how we work is deeply connected to the community we are in. At the end of Part One, you’ll have an opportunity to put your reflections together in a summary format and see what you’ve discovered about yourself and your learning preferences. You’ll then have a chance to put what you’ve learned about your learning into practice and create a new way, or find a deeper appreciation and strengthening of your learning in Part Two.

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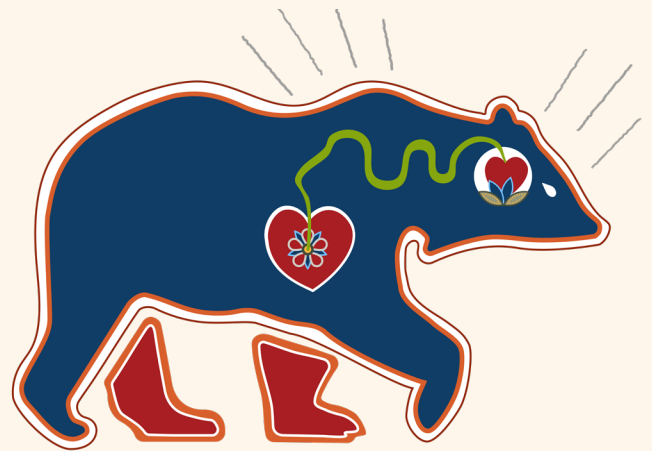
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Part One: Understanding How You Learn Best

This learning journal is broken up into two parts: *Understanding How You Learn Best* and *Becoming a Courageous Learner*. In this first part, you are invited to reflect through seven learning journal prompts that ask you to think about different aspects of your learning experience. At the end of Part One, you will have a chance to summarize all you've discovered about your learning preferences.

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1: Courageous Learning and Finding Purpose

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To increase self-awareness around the element of choice that we have in learning something and what influences those choices.

Anytime we must learn something new, there is an element of choice. Even if it feels learning is mandatory, even then, there is a choice. Choosing to learn is always connected to motivation. What motivates you to learn?

Many reasons can cause you to want to learn something new. They can be either extrinsic (like it was assigned to you by your instructor) ,or intrinsic (like you are curious) or both (your instructor assigned it, and you think it will help you in your work). Understanding what motivates you to learn something new is valuable self-knowledge. As you develop an understanding of what motivates you, you can often incorporate those aspects into your studies and life.

Reflective Prompts:

Consider a new task or reflection that was presented to you this week.

- Notice whether you have decided to learn it.
- What made you decide to learn it?
- How did you feel about learning it?
- Was there anyone else involved in your learning?
- If you didn't decide to learn it, do you know why not?
- Is there anything that could have made you more excited and more driven to engage in the learning?

2: How to Start

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To show how we prepare before we attempt to learn something new can create space for us to figure out what works best.

Once you've decided to learn something—and you know why you want to learn it—the next step is to prepare for learning. Planning, strategizing, or developing questions for learning can all be part of preparing. This step is about figuring out what you need in order to learn this new thing. Even if you don't know everything necessary to complete the task, understanding what you need to learn, and what you don't know yet, is a great beginning.

Reflective Prompts:

The next time you have a learning task in front of you, try two things: reflect on past learning and notice what you think you need to start this new learning. Making a to-do list of reminders from these reflections may help you get started.

1) Past learning

- What did you think you needed to know?
- Were there any surprises in your learning process?
- What helped you feel ready to start?
- What did you do before starting —either mentally (mind), physically (body), spiritually (spirit), or environmentally (surroundings)?

2) Present learning

- Do you have everything you need? Are there other things that need to be in place such as due dates, having the right materials, or taking time with others?
- What don't you know?
- How do you feel about approaching this learning? Is there anything you need to do before beginning? Who or what can help you?

3: Context is Key, Part 1: Your Learning Environment

(Recommend two weeks to complete)

Objective: To increase awareness around the ever-present role that the environment plays in learning, and to explore the potential that increased awareness can positively affect learning and the potentially positive impact of making small adjustments.

When thinking about how you learn, also look at the context in which you are learning. As the Miskwaadesi, painted turtle reminds us, the environment is critical to our well-being and nourishment. Your learning context can be a lot of things, and the effect it has on learning is important. The context can be both the physical environment in which you're learning (for example, a coffee shop, your home, or your school) and your situation for learning (online, in person, verbal, written, or visual instruction, etc.). It also includes things like who you're with or if you're alone, your background, your previous experiences, your prior knowledge, your sense of belonging, and your beliefs and values. All of these contextual factors influence how you learn best. Figuring out how to adjust them to positively affect your learning is very valuable.

While some of your context for learning is outside your control, understanding your learning preferences and doing the learning journal reflections can help you adjust things **in your control** to help you learn.

Reflective prompts:

This prompt is all about the learning environment. The first thing we would like you to reflect on is what it is that is working for you in your current learning environment. If you think there might be ways to improve your learning environment, then try making a small adjustment to your environment the next time you start something new or engage in ongoing work. Consider the reflective prompts below.

- When you engage in learning, studying, or completing reflections for your classes, what is your usual learning environment?
- What about your learning environment do you find particularly helpful to your success in learning or studying?
- Does your motivation for the task make a difference in how the environment affects your learning? (e.g., when doing something you're super curious about, the time flies and it doesn't matter who is around.)
- Are there things that distract you from learning? (e.g., checking email or social media) Are there ways you can use those distractions as a reward? (e.g., check social media for 5 minutes after 25 minutes of focused work)
- Is there anything about your learning environment that you wonder could be adjusted to help you be even more successful in learning?
- Do you find thinking about the tasks in front of you to be overwhelming? Have you tried thinking in terms of time? For example, 'I am going to pay attention to this assignment for 2 30-minute blocks with a 5-minute break in between and see how much I get done?'
- If you decided to adjust something in your learning environment the next time you completed a reflection or studied, what did you change, and how did that change go for you?
- Going forward, how would you like to keep adjusting your learning environment?
- Is there anything else you would like to change?

4: Context is Key, Part 2: Feeling a Sense of Belonging

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To recognize what belonging feels like and how to contribute to a feeling of belonging.

While some of your context for learning is outside your control, understanding your learning preferences and doing the learning journal reflections can help you adjust things **in your control** to help you learn. This is particularly relevant to the contextual factor of belonging. Belonging is something we feel, and while many factors that are out of your control affect whether you feel a sense of belonging, your actions, thoughts, and self-advocacy can affect this feeling too. Being in a higher-education classroom can take a lot of courage, especially for learners who have been marginalized and whose ways of knowing and being are rarely reflected or have been actively erased in that space, and many may not feel like it is a place where they belong. Hopefully, gaining a deeper understanding of the way you can affect your feelings of belonging will empower you.

Option A: Respond individually in writing, or verbally in a recording, or through a collection of media (e.g., pictures, sounds, colors) to the reflective prompts below.

Option B: The instructor will provide a link to an online whiteboard (Jamboard, Miro Board, etc) and you can respond to the reflective prompts on the whiteboard. The instructor will then facilitate a class discussion around this topic and the responses provided anonymously to the whiteboard.

Reflective Prompts:

Notice where or with whom you spend time (at home, at work, at school, on the land, with friends, with family, in ceremony, etc.).

- Where do you feel the strongest sense of belonging?
- If you had to describe what it feels like to belong, what would you say?
- Where do you feel you least belong?
- If you had to describe what it feels like to not belong, what would you say?
- When you consider your learning, what helps you feel like you belong in the learning space?
- What might your instructor offer, or you could ask for, that would help you feel connected to the learning environment, tasks, and your peers?
- What do **you** think you could do to create a stronger sense of belonging when you start something new?

5: Persistence in Learning

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To explore how preparation at the beginning and self-talk throughout can affect persistence in learning something new.

Learning something new can be as simple as following the plan you created in “How to Start.” If you created a to-do list in the initiation phase, that could make learning easier. All your preparation can ease your way when learning. However, in addition to understanding your motivation to choose to learn, we often need another boost of motivation to follow through. In other words, we need to recommit to our learning, which is also known as persistence. Understanding what causes you to persist, and identifying successful strategies you have used to persist, is as valuable as understanding why you decided to start. By thinking about what has caused you to “hang in there” in the past, you might learn what helps you to persist. One example of a persistence strategy is setting a timer to work in short bursts when you feel procrastination or less-focused attention settling in or taking a short break to get outside and freshen your perspective and ground yourself before continuing.

Reflective Prompts:

Remember a time when you were learning something new, and it was hard for you?

- Did you continue, even though it was hard?
 1. If yes, do you remember what kept you committed?
 - a. What could you have done differently in either your learning environment or while you were getting started with the project that would have helped you?
 2. If no, at what point did you decide to stop trying?
 - b. What could you have done differently in either your learning environment or while you were getting started with the project that would have helped you?
- What other persistence strategies have you tried? For instance, making to-do lists, collaborating with others, restricting internet connectivity for short time periods to facilitate your focus. What works for you?
- What messages do you give yourself when you are learning something new and it is hard, or when you are working on something you are not super motivated to complete? Do you help yourself through encouragement (e.g., “This is hard, but I can do it. I will try my best and ask my friends or instructors for help if I get stuck?”) or are you harder on yourself and find yourself thinking “Just get it done. This is never going to end. I have too much to do. I’ll never get it done. I don’t think I can.”? What difference does this self-talk make in how well you persist?

6: The Role of Reflection in Learning

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To explore the unique role that reflection plays in the learning process for each person and how it can motivate them to keep learning.

Reflection is a very important step in the learning process because it deepens understanding and integrates content in ways that enhance meaning. Reflecting on our experience is how we understand what we learned and can connect it to other knowledge and consider how it affects other aspects of the world. This is when we put what we learned, and how we learned, into a larger context. For instance, let's say you are learning about why it is important to teach children about emotions and how to help them identify and articulate what they are feeling. As you learn about this topic, you might remember how beneficial it is to share how you feel when trying to move past a feeling of frustration. Another example might be connecting what you just learned with some other concept. For instance, you might take this new understanding about **why** it is important to teach children about emotions and how to identify and articulate their feelings and relate it to trying to help children problem-solve a conflict they are having during outdoor play.

Reflection is also about self-assessment, and another word for this self-assessment could be “attribution.” Attribution is the part of the learning process where you start to draw conclusions about what caused your successes or failures and what attributes you or others might possess. It can be about any aspect of your learning experience—what you are learning, how you learned it, who you learned it with, etc. Attribution is a particularly important step in the learning process, though often we are not aware of them. The conclusions we make about our learning processes can help us feel a sense of completion, like we are ready to move forward and apply what we learned or learn something else (e.g., “I worked hard on this and asked as many questions as I could think of. I think next time I’ll ask for help sooner”) or they can disrupt and derail our learning if they tend to be negative (e.g., “I am never good at this sort of thing, I won’t get it” versus “I struggle to understand what I read, maybe it would help to discuss it with others”).

Making our attributions explicit also allows us to get feedback, or become aware of them on our own to then be able to modify them if they are not helping us learn. Another example of attribution related to the other examples we have provided could be when learning about why it is important to teach children about emotions and how to identify and articulate what they are feeling, you might conclude that you didn’t like learning about it through reading a textbook and research articles. Or you might realize you liked reading the research articles but having an accompanying video on the topic helped enhance your experience. These are just a few examples, and possible reflections are infinite.

Reflective Prompts:

Remember the last time you had a moment of insight or became aware of what you were telling yourself about doing or learning something new? Once you have that memory or self-talk in mind, answer the reflective prompts below.

- What was your insight? What do you tell yourself about learning?
- Did it affect what you were doing at the moment? If so, how?
- Did you notice a change the next time you tried to do or learn something new?
- Did that reflection affect your motivation for trying to repeat the new activity, or your choice to learn more?
- What value do you see in reflection?
- What do you think someone close to you or a peer in class would say about your attributions?
- Do you think there is an ideal time or way for you to reflect?

7: Looking Back to Move Forward

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: Identify what you've realized about how you learn and start to draw some conclusions. You'll have a chance to test these conclusions in Part II.

Reflective Prompts:

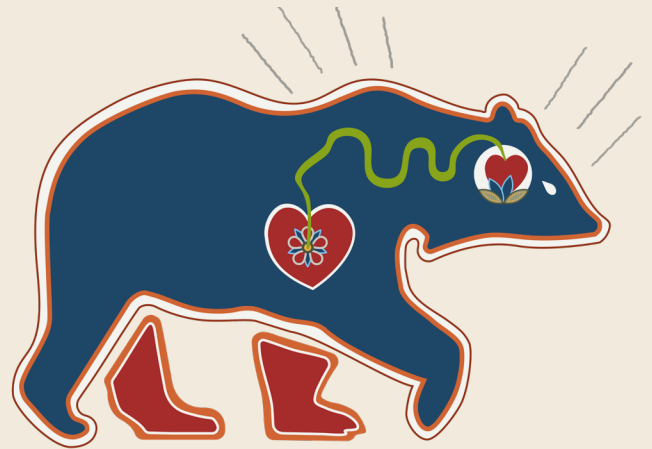
- Looking back at each of your journal entries for this course, what do you now know about how you learn best?
- If you shared these reflections with others, what do you think they might say about your learning?
- What do you think now that you can do to optimize your educational experience?

Part Two: Becoming a Courageous Learner

Welcome to Part Two, *Becoming a Courageous Learner*. In this second part of the learning journal, you will pick one change you would like to make in your approach to learning. As you start to implement that change over weeks, you will work through seven (7) more learning journal reflections that ask you to develop a strategy to support and reflect on your change process.

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8: Creating a New Way

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: Create a personal learning goal that helps you apply what you've learned through all of your self-reflection.

In this reflection you will take what you did in *Putting it All Together* and pick one adjustment you can make to optimize your learning when completing reflections. This adjustment will be the specific focus of your personal goal. Again, we invite you to share this work with your peers if comfortable and discuss planning with them if appropriate. You may even decide to have a shared goal where you are working with your peers to improve persistence or helping each other through checking in on progress and strategies.

When creating a goal that we hope will lead to creating a new way, it is important to make sure it is SMART. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Action Steps, Realistic, and Timebound.

In creating your personal learning goal, the specific focus will be one adjustment you've decided to work on from Reflection 7. For example, let's say you've decided that you learn best in noisy environments as the noise helps you focus, so you've decided to try to always make time to go somewhere noisy when completing your homework. The measurable part of this personal learning goal will be how to know you've completed the goal. You might decide to keep track of how often you go somewhere noisy to do your homework. You might also note how easy or hard it was to complete your reflection, even if you didn't always make it somewhere noisy to do your homework.

The action steps will be your plan for this adjustment. For this goal, the action steps could be deciding what noisy place(s) you would like to visit to do your homework. You might research different locations' open hours, allocate time in your schedule to go there, and look at the due dates of your homework to make sure you build in time to go somewhere noisy before you must turn in the reflection. Often the realistic component of your goal is tied to whether it can be reasonably achieved within the timeframe you have for reaching the goal. For our example, you might look at the number of reflections you must complete each week, realize that you might not be able to make it to a noisy destination for every homework reflection, and decide you will limit your goal to just one class's homework reflections.

In this course, as you complete your learning journal entries, you will want to set a time frame that allows you to achieve your goal by the end of the term. However, in our example, you might decide to make it an easily achievable shorter-term goal to build motivation ("I will go two times and keep track of how focused I was and what distracted me or kept me going") and then decide if it's working and whether you want to continue your new behavior or make more adjustments.

Here is our final SMART personal learning goal example:

"For the fall semester I am going to go to my favorite café every week to complete the homework from my Positive Child Guidance course until midterms. I will keep a log that notes whether I completed my reflections somewhere quiet or loud, how long it took me to complete those reflections, and the grade I earned on each reflection."

Create a personal learning goal:

Reflective prompts:

- Is it **S**pecific?
- Is it **M**easurable? How will you know you have reached your goal?
- What are the **A**ction steps for achieving this goal?
- Is it **R**ealistic?
- Is it **T**imebound?

9: Enhancing Your Motivation to Learn

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To apply what you've discovered about your motivation for learning.

Reflective prompts:

- In Reflection 1, *Finding Purpose*, what did you realize about what motivates you to start learning something new?
- What can you do now to enhance your motivation for your personal learning goal?

10: Getting Ready to Start Making Progress on Your Goal

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To apply what you've discovered about what works for you in preparing to learn or do something new.

Reflective prompts:

- When looking at the action steps you created when developing your personal learning goal, are you ready to start, or do you need to either know something or do something before you are ready to start?
- When and how would you like to prepare for starting to achieve your personal learning goal?
- If after reflection 9, *Enhancing your Motivation to Learn*, you changed something to enhance your motivation, how did that go?
- How can you incorporate that change whenever you're learning something new?

11: Adjusting Your Environment

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To apply what you've learned about your preferences in the learning environment.

Reflective prompts:

- Is there anything in your environment that you would like to change to assist you in completing your personal learning goal?
- If you would like to make a change to the learning environment, can you set aside time this week to make that adjustment?
- If you decided you needed to either learn something or do something before you initiated your personal learning goal, how did that go?
- Do you think you would adjust your action steps the next time you write a personal learning goal?

12: Creating a Sense of Belonging

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To identify how your feelings about belonging relate to your learning environment and to see how you could enhance your feelings of belonging regarding school.

Reflective prompts:

When we feel a sense of belonging, we really do better at whatever task we're focused on, and it can have a positive impact on our motivation to learn, too.

- How are you feeling about your class, program, and school?
- Do you feel like you belong?
- Based on what you wrote for Reflection 4, *Context is Key, Part 2*, is there anything you can do that might enhance your sense of belonging? Is there anything your instructor can provide that would help you?
- If you'd like to do something to help enhance your sense of belonging, do you have what you need to do it? Is there anyone you need to ask for help?
- If you made an adjustment to your learning environment after reflection on your environment (#11), how did that go?
- How can you set up your learning environment to always match your learning preferences?

13: Enhancing Your Persistence to Learn

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To apply what you have learned about persistence to complete your personal learning goal.

Reflective prompts:

In prompt 5, *Renewing Your Commitment Midway Through*, what did you learn about what motivates you to be persistent?

- Are you still feeling committed to achieving your personal learning goal?
- If you are starting to feel your commitment lag, is there anything you can do to help yourself stay committed to achieving your personal learning goal?
- What is helping you persist? What are you telling yourself about your persistence? What else might help you or what could you share with others that helps you?
- If you made any adjustments to enhance your sense of belonging after Reflection 12, how did that go?

14: Making Meaning and Improving

(Recommend one week to complete)

Objective: To reflect on the entire learning journal experience and draw conclusions that enrich your learning going forward.

Reflective prompts:

- What have you noticed about the way you learn, now that you've had these weeks to incorporate your personal learning goal when you start a reflection?
- What have you gained by keeping a learning journal?
- If you made an adjustment to your personal learning goal to enhance your persistence, what was that change, and how did it go?
- What worked well in implementing your personal learning goal?
- What was challenging in implementing your personal learning goal?
- Is there anything you will now consistently try to do before or during a learning experience or assignment?
- What have you learned about your learning that you think others might find useful to support their learning?

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