

minowe

A community connecting with American Indian culture through online language learning.

The Problem: There is a group of American Indians who feel disconnected from their cultural heritage. This group would like a stronger connection to the American Indian community they self-identify with, but don't know how to bridge this gap. One of the difficulties in bridging the gap is the multiple ways in which American Indian identity is defined. It is a complex, evolving and debated topic that is linked to the interests of individuals, organizations, and governments. How can technology increase the connection between American Indian cultural centers and American Indians who feel disconnected?

Design Features

Minowe is a unique language learning platform catering to Ojibwe users. The following images are a demonstration of the system from the perspective of a learner. The system includes:

- Historical/cultural context of Ojibwe
- Learning games for language beginners
- Ability to set language learning goals
- UI and peer feedback to gauge progress
- Social interaction and community building
- Situational based learning
- Crowdsourced content

UI Components

A Joining the Community

Minowe guides learners through three stages: play games, video chat with other novices, and converse with speakers.

B Exploring the Dashboard

Learners become familiar with Ojibwe by playing games and earning points. Enough points unlock video chat and a scheduling tool matches learners with speakers.

C Respecting the Speaker's Time

Notifications are an example of the UI establishing norms and prepares users to focus during video chats.

D Video Chat

Users leave English behind in exercises designed to prompt conversations related to culture.



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Design Process

User Research

Literature review of research papers, viewed American Indian (AI) documentaries, attended Native American Student Assoc. meeting, attended Frank Waln (AI musician) workshop/concert, five subject interviews, followed AI Tribal Facebook pages, and AI related social media trends.



Contextual Inquiry

Debriefed after field research to collect affinity wall notes. Our affinity wall process found that:

1. Self-identity and group membership is complicated.
2. Language is a top cultural marker in the AI community and is difficult to learn.
3. Social media is a popular communication tool for AIs and tribes.

Design Ideation

Personas, scenarios, sketching, wireframing, feedback from presentations, pivoting.



*Our first concept, an Ojibwe hashtag library had limited engagement and did not facilitate language learning.

Rapid Prototyping

Paper and digital lo-fi prototypes for usability testing. Interactions were built around our personas, a learner and a speaker.



User Testing

Developed testing script with tasks to test the concept and usability. Summarized findings and reacted to user feedback in final UI design.