Members of the Kunibídíji community are the traditional landowners of the land and seas around Maningrida, a community in Arnhem Land in Northern Australia. With very few exceptions, Ndjębbana is only spoken by the 150 Kunibídíji community members of Maningrida, although Maningrida is also home to indigenous Australians who speak other languages. Ndjębbana is the preferred language of communication between members of the Kunibídíji community. Ndjębbana is a minority indigenous Australian language.

The learning of Ndjębbana language and Kunibídíji social practice by Kunibídíji children is supported by Maningrida School in the teaching carried out in the Ndjębbana Two-Way Learning Program. When computers began to be used in the classrooms, Ndjębbana talking books were created to mediate Ndjębbana stories to Kunibídíji students. Ndjębbana talking books integrate texts, sound and pictures in a multimedia format. When a page from a talking book is opened, the sound plays and each word of the text on that page is highlighted as it is read. There are three buttons at the bottom of each page, two for turning the page and
one to stop the book. Ndjębbana talking books are designed to promote access to the Ndjębbana stories by Kunibídji children who have a variety of reading abilities.

With community participation, 96 Ndjębbana talking books were created. Some Kunibídji adults who could not read were able to participate in ways they could not with printed texts. For example, some adults were recorded speaking the names of animals that were consequently linked to the pictures and printed text to produce a talking book read by a respected community member. The Ndjębbana talking books were the first form of digital texts that represented Ndjębbana language and Kunibídji social practices. The production of the Ndjębbana talking books provided Kunibídji children with a contextual resource that supported their threatened language.

The talking books were distributed on touch screen computers in homes of Kunibídji children. Each time the computer screen was touched, it was as if the mouse had been clicked, making the computers an appropriate technology for the dusty conditions. Embedded in the multimedia program was the capacity for the computer to record the number of times the screen was touched. As the pages were turned or a book selected from the 96 available, the computer recorded the interaction. Three touch screen computers were made available to Kunibídji children in different homes, displaying only Ndjębbana talking books. After an average of 27 days access to each computer, members of the Kunibídji had tapped the screens over 110,000 times (Auld, 2002). Kunibídji children had previous access to the Ndjębbana talking books as part of a qualitative study and the touch screens had intermittently been in the community for over two years before this data was recorded. An important feature of the high frequency of the taps was the children who had problems with attendance and achievement at school and were independently choosing Ndjębbana talking books at home.

Gee’s (1996) concept of primary and secondary discourses is a good way of framing the transformations associated with the Ndjębbana talking books. Primary discourses are acquired by groups without formal teaching in contexts where everyday social practices occur. Secondary discourses, on the other hand, tend to be learned through overt instruction that involves explanation and analysis and some metaknowledge about the matter (Gee, 1996, p. 138). The Ndjębbana talking books were designed, produced and distributed to match the primary discourses of Kunibídji children. The technology that was commonly used to support the secondary discourses at the school was transformed. Computers connected to the Internet for individual student use were transformed to stand-alone touch screens that promoted collaborative readings of the Ndjębbana talking books amongst groups of Kunibídji children. The technological configuration of the touch screen computer in Kunibídji homes displaying talking books was not “led purely by the capabilities of the latest technical innovation” (Levy, 1997, p. xi).
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