

Professor Yalmai Yunupingu is a Rirratjingu woman from Yirrkala. Gentle, generous and funny – Yalmai touches many lives in north-east Arnhem Land. As a teacher and linguist, she guided teaching at Yirrkala Bilingual School for four decades, retiring in March 2023. Often called the mother of the school, Yalmai has a long history as an educationalist, and is a strong advocate of the bilingual ‘Two Way Learning’ philosophy and very passionate about Yolŋu people achieving higher levels in education. Supporting young people to be strong in their Yolŋu language and culture is at the heart of Yalmai’s drive.

Although retired, Yalmai still leads the way in education, healing and research. She is passionate about research that supports Yolŋu to be healthy, educated and to build better lives for themselves. Yalmai has guided and led numerous research and evaluation projects to ensure culturally appropriate engagement and practices so that the community’s vision can be realised. She continues to guide and mentor researchers today working part time with Miwatj Health.

A respected elder, Yalmai has been the recipient of over 10 major awards including ‘Teacher of Excellence’ by the Northern Territory Department of Education, Honorary University Fellow at the Charles Darwin University and Senior Australian of the Year in 2024. Yalmai is also a Professor with University of Melbourne – as a cultural leader guiding non-Indigenous student teachers through the Yolŋu system.