



*Reflections*

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## **Interview with Dr. Talmadge C. Guy**

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The following is an interview with Dr. Talmadge C. Guy, to his friends and colleagues in adult education; he is Tal. Tal is recently retired from the University of Georgia, Athens, following a 40 year career in adult education, the last 23 of which he spent at the University of Georgia (UGA). He received his doctorate in adult education from Northern Illinois University, a master of arts in social ethics from Northwestern University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from Fisk University. At UGA, Tal worked with masters and doctoral level students in graduate research. Through his career he has conducted research on diversity and inclusion in adult education and learning settings with special expertise in multicultural adult education, history of adult education, and socio-historical analysis of the African American experience with a focus on the early 20th century. A particular focus has been the representation of race and gender through media and pop culture and the critical educational responses to those representations.



Talmadge C. Guy

Among his awards, Tal was co-recipient of the Ian Fleming Social Justice Award (2011), UGA President's Fulfilling the Dream Award (2005), Cyril O. Houle Scholar (2001), and Outstanding Service Award (1992) from the Illinois Adult & Continuing Education Association. He has published in the Journal of Lifelong Learning, Adult Education Quarterly, Journal of Educational Telecommunications and his most recent work is as co-editor of volumes 1 & 2 *Swimming upstream: Black Males in Adult Education*, New Directions publications.

***Why did you enter the field of adult education? When and where did you study?***

Choosing to enter the field of Adult Education was not a conscious decision. I was doing adult education before I knew there was a field of study. While doing seminary work toward my master's degree in social ethics at Northwestern University in Illinois a fellow student and

minister asked me to come to work at a program in his church. This program was part of the community outreach of his ministry and a nonprofit community organization that offered job skills, pre-vocational, GED/literacy programs to people in the community. This is a form of adult education that was both personal development and community action social change. Later, I took a position with the community colleges of Chicago at their adult education center in the heart of the Southside. It was there that I began to understand that adult education in fact was a broad field of educational theory and practice. I worked in an administrative support role and then served as the chief adult education officer for the city of Chicago which was responsible for adult education throughout Chicago from 1983-1990. From there I entered a doctoral program in adult education at Northern Illinois University and received my doctorate in Adult Education in 1993. And following that I was fortunate to be offered a faculty position at the University of Georgia.

***Tell us about the scholars and writings that have influenced your thinking.***

As I mentioned, I studied at Northern Illinois University with noted scholars such as Phyllis Cunningham, John Niemi, Ed Simpson, Tom Heaney, and Sherman Stange. Of course there are so many others that have impacted the way in which I see adult education, social justice and life in general. A few of those scholars include W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter Woodson, Alain Locke, Herbert Marcuse, Cornell West, and bell hooks; and specifically in adult education, Eduard Lindeman, Phyllis Cunningham, and Paulo Freire. Then, of course, there are my colleagues at the University of Georgia in particular, Ron Cervero and Juanita Johnson-Bailey. The sociologists Peter Berger and Alfred Schutz are important to mention as well.

***Speak to the intersection of social justice and adult education, if you will.***

From my perspective, there is a direct relationship between and intersection of social justice and adult education. Historically, the idea of education as an opportunity to transform individuals and society was wrapped up in civil rights, the women's movement, labor movement, etc. This is why the field attracted me. As a matter of fact, it is hard for me to see social justice and adult education disconnected.

***In our current social and political situation, what do you see adult educators' and educators' role?***

In our current political and social climate, it seems to me that adult educators and adult education has an important role to play in "speaking to the distortions and partial truths" that are so prevalent in our collective dialogue. Adult education's role is to "shed light" on the challenges that face us in America and promote "learning together" that is so sorely needed in our polarized environment.

***Now that you have retired, what are your plans?***

I plan to stay active professionally and will travel and perhaps teach part-time. Also, I intend to write.



**Joni Schwartz** is an Associate Professor and Social Activist Scholar in the Department of Humanities, City University of New York - LaGuardia Community College, New York City. Her new co-edited book, “Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens” will be published this summer by Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers.