



Workforce development educators need to use ‘tools of the times’ to teach in today’s contexts

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The future of jobs and work was the main topic of Jordan Shapiro’s keynote interview at the 29th Annual Technology & Adult Education Conference.

Before Jordan Shapiro became the [thought leader in education](#) he is today, now teaching liberal arts at Temple University, he was a chef with experience working in and running his own restaurants.

During an interactive keynote interview with Generocity’s own Tony Abraham at the [Office of Adult Education’s 29th Annual Technology & Adult Education Conference](#) last week, Shapiro shared an encounter he had with an intern in one of his kitchens as an example of the changing world of work for adults entering the workforce today.

The intern, who was fresh out of cooking school, one day saw Shapiro making his version of hollandaise sauce and told Shapiro he was doing it wrong. Using this opportunity as a teaching moment, Shapiro challenged the intern to see which one of them would be able to complete their own version of sauce first — and what took Shapiro around 10 minutes ended up taking the intern up to an hour.

The message Shapiro was communicating to the audience of educators and administrators was that innovation and new ways of thinking are needed in our vocations. In the kitchens Shapiro has seen, he said there’s almost always a lack of resources, materials and time, yet chefs are still expected to come out with a quality product every time.

“That involves critical thinking, but in the kitchen,” Shapiro said. “You need to know the recipe, but we tend to forget that the recipe is taught so that people understand the system and the design of things well enough so that they can then break that system.”

This kind of contextual critical thinking, different for every job, is what Shapiro said needs to be taught to adults who are in a world now where 65 percent of children entering primary school today are expected to work in job types that don’t exist yet, [according to the World Economic Forum](#). To add to the narrative, Shapiro also brought up how [services like Uber and Lyft are “making people hustle and work for less \[money\],”](#) not to mention how the topic of [automation taking our jobs is something mainstream media is particularly pushing](#).

But in terms of automation, Shapiro has a brighter outlook. For one, he said the reality is that only [five percent of entire jobs will disappear](#); instead, he said 60 percent of the activities that make up a job is what will end up being automated. And it’s not just low-wage jobs — Shapiro said 20 percent of what CEOs of major corporations do will end up getting replaced, which speaks to how anything “predictable and repetitive” will most likely get replaced.

“If it’s an algorithm you’re teaching a person or a skill set that is basically a set of directions they’re going to repeat over and over again, a computer will take that job, absolutely,” Shapiro said.

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So what can educators, especially those who work in workforce development for adults, do? Shapiro said the broad solution is to remember, again, that teachers are responsible for instructing people, in particular refugees or immigrants, “how to live in the contexts” and culture of today’s workplaces. That requires that the tools used to teach, whether it be an iPad or software program, match today’s context.

“We need to teach people critical thinking for particular vocations using the tools of the times, and often what we do is teach people algorithmic skills for a vocation using the tools from 20 years ago,” he said.

Also, as much as tech is being pushed as a solution, even during many of the sessions taking place at the conference Shapiro was speaking at, he reiterated that it’s not necessarily about teaching everyone how to do something like coding, rather it being more important to make sure people understand how coding works in order to “make informed decisions.”

“How do we prepare people to be able to use what they have within them in ways they feel fulfilled, they get dignity and where the economy grows and thrives because of it?” Shapiro said. ■