The Future of Work

LABOUR IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES 12 CURRICULUM

Dr. Kendra Strauss, Director of the Labour Studies Program
The future of work?

- Many students are already workers
- There is a lot of negativity – and hype – about the future of work
- What are our starting points for teaching about work and labour in Social Studies 12?
- What kinds of resources are out there for creative ways of connecting students with labour issues?
Talking work in the classroom

→ Why incorporate Labour Studies and Labour History into the curriculum?

→ What issues or topics do you think your students connect with?

→ How does the future of work fit with what you are already teaching?
Is technology – especially automation and AI - going to replace workers? Is the future a future without jobs?
How do we think about the future of work?

• Technology, AI, automation
• Techno-pessimism and techno-optimism
• Inequality
• Education and skills
• Climate change
• Urbanization
• Colonialism and reconciliation
• Migration and immigration
Labour Studies... 

• ...is a discipline dedicated to understanding work, employment and labour markets

• It starts from the perspective of working people and their organizations

• It is multi-disciplinary: students learn about perspectives on work from History, Sociology, Geography, Law, English, Environmental Studies, Communications, and Gender Studies (to name a few!)

Labour Studies is fundamental to how we understand the role of workers and unions in society.
Colonialism & the settler economy
Colonialism today

Indigenous workers are often invisible when we talk about labour politics and the labour market – except as statistics (e.g. unemployment, education).

Labour Studies can link questions of social justice, work and First Nations issues.


http://graphichistorycollective.com/
Technological change is as old as capitalism

- Capitalism is the name we give to a social, political and economic system in which production is privately controlled and operated for profit.

- Working people do not generally own or control systems of production.

- The drive for higher productivity leads to technological change.

- The drive for raw materials and lower labour costs leads to colonization and the first era of globalization.

- Workers fight back as technological change makes some jobs obsolete and creates new ones.
What is the future of work?

**TECHNO OPTIMISM**

"IN THE LAST 60 YEARS AUTOMATION HAS ONLY ELIMINATED ONE OCCUPATION: ELEVATOR OPERATORS." (HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y8GJ96PC)

**TECHNO PESSIMISM**

"ACCORDING TO OUR ESTIMATES, ABOUT 47% OF US EMPLOYMENT IS AT RISK" (FREY AND OSBORNE, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The least safe jobs</th>
<th>Chance of automation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telemarketer</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan officer</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paralegal and legal assistant</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi driver</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food cook</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Future of Employment
How does it link to the future of cities?

- Technology and urban growth
- Urbanization and employment
- Urban inequality
- Cities as drivers of political change
How does it link to social justice in the future?

**Turns Out Algorithms Are Racist**

Artificial intelligence is becoming a greater part of our daily lives, but the technologies can contain dangerous biases and assumptions—and we're only beginning to understand the consequences.

By NAVNEET ALANG  |  August 31, 2017

Source: https://newrepublic.com/article/144644/turns-algorithms-racist
Social justice and technological change

Much technological change is not itself inherently positive or negative. The question is: how does it affect the distribution of wealth and power in society, and what does this changing distribution mean for working people?

The Gini Coefficient

The Gini coefficient measures income inequality by calculating the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals within a country deviates from a perfectly equal distribution.

Source: OECD (Canada and US) and Institute for Fiscal Studies (UK).
How do we link these different themes?

- Themes are relevant across different Areas of Learning and can connect them.
- Contemporary examples enable students to link past and present, compare and contrast outcomes for different groups.
- Themes link to critical thinking and ethical judgements (identifying and debating social norms).
- Examples: Technological change and inequality; Labour geographies; Workers in global cities.

Examples:
- "Algorithmic Justice"
- "Robot Tax"
- union organizing
- new social movements