



AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION ON TEACHING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WORKERS' HEALTH: PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES, CURRICULUM MAPPING, LEARNING COMPETENCIES

Uma reflexão autoetnográfica sobre o ensino da economia política da saúde dos trabalhadores: desafios pedagógicos, mapeamento curricular e competências de aprendizagem

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines pedagogical challenges in the university teaching of the political economy of workers' health and presents a curriculum to respond to these challenges. An autoethnographic method was used to reflect upon over a decade of design and development of one health and safety course at the *École de relations industrielles* (School of Industrial Relations) at the Université de Montréal in the francophone province of Québec in Canada. After a discussion of this unique North American context, observations are made about teaching the political economy of workers' health at the university level to students of health and safety and industrial relations. Five pedagogical challenges were identified: [1] no international consensus on the study of the political economy of workers' health, [2] the predominance of hegemonic occupational safety and health approaches, [3] the instrumentalization of higher education under neoliberalism and the precarity of the student population, [4] the marginalization of socio-critical and realist epistemologies, and [5] the need for a cadre of teachers in the political economy of workers' health. The paper then presents a curriculum map for the political economy of workers' health. Organized around the ideas of *genuine prevention* and *landscapes of risk*, it reframes hegemonic concepts of risk management around questions of political economy, including the role of multilateralism and geopolitics, development paradigms, industrial relations and socio-economic rights.

Keywords: Political economy. Workers' health. Pedagogy. University teaching.

RESUMO

Este artigo examina os desafios pedagógicos no ensino universitário da economia política da saúde dos trabalhadores e apresenta uma proposta curricular para responder a esses desafios. Foi utilizado um método autoetnográfico para refletir sobre mais de uma década de elaboração e desenvolvimento de uma disciplina de saúde e segurança na *École de relations industrielles* (Escola de Relações Industriais) da Université de Montréal, localizada na província francófona de Québec, no Canadá. Após uma discussão sobre esse contexto singular da América do Norte, são apresentadas reflexões acerca do ensino da economia política da saúde dos trabalhadores, em nível universitário, para estudantes das áreas de saúde e segurança e de relações industriais. Foram identificados cinco desafios pedagógicos: [1] a ausência de consenso internacional sobre o estudo da economia política da saúde dos trabalhadores; [2] a predominância de abordagens hegemônicas em saúde e segurança no trabalho; [3] a instrumentalização do ensino superior sob o neoliberalismo e a precariedade da população estudantil; [4] a marginalização das epistemologias sociocríticas e realistas; e [5] a necessidade de um corpo de docentes especializado na economia política da saúde dos trabalhadores. Em seguida, o artigo apresenta um mapa curricular para o ensino da economia política da saúde dos trabalhadores. Organizado em torno das ideias de prevenção genuína e paisagens de risco, o currículo reformula conceitos hegemônicos de gestão de riscos a partir de questões relacionadas à economia política, incluindo o papel do multilateralismo e da geopolítica, os paradigmas de desenvolvimento, as relações industriais e os direitos socioeconômicos.

Palavras-chave: Economia política. Saúde dos trabalhadores. Pedagogia. Ensino universitário.

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1970s, occupational health and industrial relations scholars turned their research focus to studies of the labour process and the political economy to explain workers' health problems. Researchers critiqued the exclusively technical, biomechanical or medical framing of occupational health and safety and focused on the importance of the social relations of production in the political economy as an essential dimension shaping risks to and the degradation of health and safety at work. These efforts were bolstered by new environmental labour activism (Henderson, 1973; Miller, 1980), labour process theory (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1978), critical viewpoints in occupational health (Laurel, 1978; Navarro, 1982), a reassessment of industrial relations theory (Cox, 1971a, 1971b), and a global period of détente in international relations that led to new strategies for national occupational safety and health policy (Hilgert, 2024). With the consolidation of power under neoliberal governance paradigms in the 1980s and 1990s and onward, these ideas were ultimately challenged and fragmented. As dramatic changes have unfolded in the world of work over the past few decades, this period of pre-neoliberal theorizing on the political economy of occupational safety and health holds important lessons for the study of the degradation and exploitation of labour today. This paper focuses on one line of reflection in this area, the teaching of the political economy of workers' health at the university level.

This paper is an autoethnographic account of the author's experience developing in a university course in safety and health at work at two schools of labour and industrial relations in North America. It provides an accounting of some of the challenges in university course design related to integrating a political economy foundation for the study of occupational safety and health. After a brief background, a personal narrative is given to contextualize the author's experience. Obstacles are identified related to teaching safety and health in a political economy framework. Based on this experience, the paper turns to a sketch of a university curriculum for the political economy of workers' health.² It maps a 15-week (3 credit, 45 hours) semester course with 45 learning objectives. The course plan is based on case study research and is organized around the concepts of *genuine prevention* and *landscapes of risk*, both ideas developed as framing strategies for the teaching of the political economy of workers' health.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses autoethnography as discussed in Chang (2016). Autoethnography is a research method that is a genre of self-narrative but transcends "mere narration" in two ways. First, it engages in socio-cultural analysis and interpretation. Second, it identifies and is organized around a research focus, broad or narrow in scope, that is refined and made clear to the reader. The elements of autoethnography are a reflection on self-experience, socio-critical analysis, and a thematic subject of importance. It is a method debated as both objective and subjective. Anderson (2006) describes conditions for establishing objectivity in autoethnography. Authors must be "complete member[s] in the social world under study" and engage reflexivity, be active in the text, include other informants in similar situations, and aim for theoretical analysis. The essence of ethnography is combining narrative experience with socio-critical analysis and interpretation on a clearly defined research focus, theme, subject or area of interest. Chang (2016, p. 52) defends several benefits of autoethnography, including "a research method friendly to researchers and readers" that enhances cultural understanding with

² In this paper the use of the phrase "political economy" presumes a general critical standpoint that analyzes labour relations through studies of politics and the economy with a recognition of the role of power structures, labour exploitation, capital accumulation and international hegemony in the tradition of Marx, Gramsci, Polanyi, and Cox, among others.

“the potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building.” Among the pitfalls of this method is “self-indulgent introspection” with an overemphasis on narration without socio-criticism.

While originating from the field of anthropology, the underlying tenets of autoethnography are well understood historically in labour studies, labour history and labour relations. Interesting parallels can be drawn with E. P. Thompson’s (1978, p. 28-30) engagement of the historian with empirical facts. Thompson presumes the scholar is not a complete empiricist but has a kind of social “encounter” with the evidence while being engaged in disciplinary debates that may influence discrete historical facts. The construction of narratives are discrete historical facts that are viewed within a socio-critical lens which is a “prerequisite and premise of all historical knowledge” that also helps discern the structural organization of society through disciplined historical enquiry. Thus the “primitive sequential narration will itself undergo radical transformation” enabling a recovery or inference of broader relationships in society, including “relations of power, domination, kinship, servitude, market relations, and the rest.” These observations, understood in labour studies, are coherent with autoethnographic methods based in narrative, socio-critical analysis, and with a disciplinary relevance. The following section is historical background to this study, followed by a narrative account, a discussion of obstacles in course design, and then a presentation of a better framework for teaching of the political economy of workers’ health.

BACKGROUND

Quebec is geographically the largest province of Canada and is situated between the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and Hudson’s Bay. Most of the population lives on unceded indigenous territory. It is home to over nine million residents and the largest metropolis is Montreal, located on an island on the Saint Lawrence River, with an urban agglomeration population of over 4 million people. One of the most distinctive cultural features of Quebec is the French language. It is the only officially French-speaking province of Canada. The province is primarily francophone and among all French speakers in Canada – 22.0 % of the total population – the majority live in Quebec (Canadian Heritage, 2024). According to federal census data from 2021, 84.1 % of *Québécois* speak French (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2023). Quebec is home to a comprehensive higher education system established in the 1960s during the Quiet Revolution based on the values of “democratic access to education, autonomy of institutions, secularism and regional representation.” This system was vigorously defended in 2012 by a mass-based student social protest mobilization known as the “Maple Spring” where “between February and September 2012, 532 demonstrations were held in Montreal involving about 750,000 demonstrators and 34,260 police officers” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014).

Quebec is known as a leading centre for research on occupational safety and health across the Francophonie. Quebec researchers have made significant contributions to workers’ health research at the nexus of critical social issues and workers’ health. These include critiques of occupational health science with a gender-based analysis (Messing, 1998), advocating international standards on violence and harassment at work (Cox, 2024; Lippel, 2016), and sustained recognition of the political economy lens in workers’ health (Baril-Gingras, 2013). New scholars continue this tradition, studying precarious work engaged with socially marginalized immigrant communities (Hamel-Roy et al., 2024). The result is a rich francophone environment with a significant commitment to college and university teaching of workers’ health topics that parallels more dominating trends in English-language academic scholarship.

L’Université de Montréal, recognized by the Legislative Assembly of Quebec by civil charter in 1920, became a public institution of higher education in 1967. It is Canada’s largest single

francophone institution of higher education. Roughly 45,000 students, including 12,000 graduate students, attend the university (Plamondon & Lambert, 2012; Cambron & Poitras, 2023). *L'École de relations industrielles* [The School of Industrial Relations] has been an important center for labour research in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, a large faculty with 40% of the student population. It is not housed in the business school of the university, HEC Montréal. The school has 25 professors and graduates about 200 students per year in industrial relations at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral level. Students that graduate with a bachelor's degree receive a direct admission to the professional order for labour relations in Quebec, *l'Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agréés / conseillers en relations industrielles agréés*.

The School of Industrial Relations started in the 1940s, as did other IR programs in North America, like at Cornell and Princeton. Its curriculum had an emphasis on workers' health from the start, receiving a \$15,000 annual grant in the early years from *la Commission des accidents du travail*, the workplace injury compensation authority (Lacoste, 1985). The school's faculty are grouped in five themes: labour relations, labour law, safety and health, the public policy of work, and human resources management. Similar programs in Quebec are found at the *Université de Laval* in Québec City and at *Université du Québec en Outaouais* near the city of Ottawa, Canada's capital. The trend across North America over the last forty years has been to rebrand labour programs as business-oriented programs in HR (Kaufman, 2004). Relative stability in union density and the institutional mosaic of the Quebec political economy (Laroche & Barré, 2012) have helped to partially safeguard the school from such neo-liberalization. The academic orientation in terms of a labour philosophy could be characterized as institutionalist in nature. Labour law is an important subject. Students pursue professional careers with management or unions. There is no School for Workers as at the University of Wisconsin, but regulated tuition for domestic students (CAD 1,484 plus fees per semester for 2024-2025) makes the university comparatively accessible to the public and union members. Technical programs in occupational health are offered through the university's School of Public Health, leaving a labour-oriented social science niche for the teaching of occupational safety and health in the School of Industrial Relations curriculum that is likewise distinct from the business administration-oriented curriculum offered at HEC Montréal.

NARRATIVE AND PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES

Given the persistent degradation of working conditions and the environment of uncertainty in the contemporary world, teaching workers' health has become an important subject in labour studies and industrial relations. At the same time, it is a subdiscipline of public health, of corporate safety science, and of human resources management under different banners, leaving room for confusion. This section presents the author's autoethnographic narrative and socio-criticism. It is a reflection on teaching a workers' health course at the School of Industrial Relations at the Université de Montréal. The author has taught in French the course *REI 6627 Aspects internationaux de la santé et de la sécurité au travail* [International Perspectives in Occupational Safety and Health], offered to M.Sc. students in industrial relations with a multidisciplinary profile or an occupational safety and health profile, and for students seeking a graduate diploma program in safety and health [*Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées*]. The course has been offered every year for the past fourteen years, and the following paragraphs discuss the philosophy of the course and its engagement with political economy.

To begin, I was a doctoral student and graduate teaching assistant at the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University from 2005 to 2011. My dissertation advisor was James A. Gross, a leading scholar of the U.S. National Labour Relations Act (Gross, 1974, 1981, 1995, 2017) and a graduate of "Wisconsin School" industrial relations at

the University of Wisconsin. With a 56-year career from 1966 to 2022, my supervisor worked as a labour arbitrator and had an expertise on occupational safety and health grievances (Gross, 1967; Gross & Greenfield, 1985). His work turned to human rights including the critique of labour rights violations by U.S. corporations (Gross, 1999, 2003, 2010). I consider his work to be in the academic tradition of early U.S. industrial relations research. In this tradition I place Hoxie (1920; McCann Jr. & Kapuria-Foreman, 2016), Commons (1893), DuBois (1925), and Adams (1879, 1886b, 1886a), where a human rights view was accepted but conceptualized in a social distribution of property rights in the political economy, making a grasp of labour institutions in the political economy essential. I contrast this IR tradition to the work of the Webbs (1897), Perlman (1928), and Clegg (1960, 1975), who studied labour through an “industrial democracy” lens divorced from the political economy in a way that safeguarded the liberal assumptions of employment relations as out-of-bounds questions and marginalizing the study of political economy, state-industry relations, and imperialism. These key distinctions were below-the-surface tensions more than openly debated, but on teaching the political economy of workers’ health, they emerge as important philosophical divisions.

During my Ph.D. studies, we designed a three-credit undergraduate course in 2009 *ILRIC 3342 Workplace Health and Safety as a Human Right*. When I started working at the Université de Montréal in 2011, the School of Industrial Relations was interested in internationalizing its labour curriculum and reinforcing course offering on occupational safety and health. The faculty was also negotiating student exchange agreements with three universities in China with programs in labour and human resources. This further encouraged the need for the internationalization of the safety and health curriculum. These factors and a broad increase in international student enrollment in Quebec from the Francophonie provided openings for new courses that resulted in the decision to offer a course about international perspectives on safety and health at work. Started in 2011, the aim was to introduce human rights and international perspectives in the study of occupational safety and health and to compliment traditional courses in labour, safety and health, and human resources. It focused on international issues in workers’ health and covered OSH international labour standards, ethics in workers’ health and case studies of global OSH problems. After 14 years, teaching this course provides an opportunity for reflection about some of the challenges associated with the political economy of workers’ health in the social context of a multidisciplinary social science graduate program with a focus on safety and health but offered in a curriculum not exclusively technical occupational health nor with a business school type orientation.

The following paragraphs present some of the obstacles experienced in integrating a pedagogy of the political economy of workers’ health in this context. Among the first obstacles is the ambivalent political economy lens within industrial relations scholarship, a challenge referenced earlier as a long-standing problem. Integrating this problem, my reflection and experience identifies about five notable obstacles. These obstacles include [1] there is no international consensus on a general curriculum for the study of the political economy of workers’ health, [2] there is a predominance given to hegemonic occupational safety and health approaches, and [3] the instrumentalization of higher education under neoliberalism and the ongoing precarity of the student population. Other obstacles I observe are [4] the marginalization of more socio-critical and realist epistemologies and [5] the absence of and need for a collective of teachers in the teaching of the political economy of workers’ health in higher education.

No international consensus on the curriculum. There is no clear international consensus on a curriculum structure for the study of the political economy of workers’ health. In industrial relations the century’s old schism with political economy mentioned earlier contributes to this, however the problem is not isolated to labour scholarship. There are curriculum materials and research that is very helpful in the fields of global health (Birn et al., 2018), in global occupational

health (Guidotti et al., 2011), in international occupational health and safety (Randall et al., 2022), and at the intersection of worker health and safety and industrial relations (Quinlan, 2023; Levenstein, 2017). Each one is a valuable contribution to the study of workers' health and safety and is very useful as teaching material. Each is also incomplete, however, as a curriculum for a course on the political economy of workers' health. The following points are a summary of some of the material gaps in each of these four areas of research in workers' health and safety from the standpoint of teaching the political economy of workers' health.

In the field of global health, an excellent university textbook, *Textbook of Global Health*, is found in Birm et al. (2018). As a curriculum it takes a critical political economy framework and locates health in the world order with attention to power, the control of resources, and the rules of the game. The textbook begins with a discussion of European imperialism and health in the colonial system. The attention to history is a strength. It presents a chapter on the political economy of development and other insightful chapters on globalization, trade, work and health. The chapters are comprehensive and informative, but focus on health services, health financing, health humanitarianism, epidemiology, and global health actors, and similar topics. University teachers who are building a curriculum on the political economy of workers' health will find helpful sections in this textbook. At the same time, the topic is global health. Political economy questions are raised, but many chapters are on topics more specific to health services in global contexts rather than on forms or debates about the social dynamics of capital-labour relations or the labour process. Similar recent work has reflected on the weaknesses of the social determinants of health approach (Bryant, 2025) including a recent turn to a political economy of health perspective (McNamara, 2025) as a part of this introspection. This is a welcome move, yet the priority of health services versus debating labour studies remains a clear distinguishing characteristic.

In the field of global occupational health, another valuable university textbook is Guidotti et al. (2011) with the title, *Global Occupational Health*. Thirty-one chapters are dedicated to thematic topics in occupational medicine and occupational health with an international perspective. Among these are chapters on basic principles of occupational health, the clinical evaluation of occupational disorders, surveillance and monitoring of hazards, and a number of chapters on different groups of hazards, such as chemical, ergonomic and physical hazards. The book adopts an international lens, which is helpful in generalizing concepts and ideas beyond national practices. The overall orientation, however, falls under occupational medicine. One chapter is called "The Worker" exploring the employee as a social actor in the worker health field and another is "Industries and Workplaces" that captures some of the political economic dynamics at play in shaping workers' health. Overall, the textbook is helpful as a basic global introduction to key concepts in occupational health services or occupational medicine topics. It is less appropriate as a curriculum about the dynamics of the political economy shaping workers' health today.

In the field of management and corporate safety science, an international lens is also used. The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) in the U.K. offers a professional certificate in international occupational health and safety. The curriculum uses the textbook *International Health and Safety* (Randall et al., 2022) organized into eleven units. The introductory chapter discusses morality and money and the role of the employer's profit motive in occupational safety and health. The textbook focuses the remainder of the ten units on a basic management systems approach to occupational safety and health. A culture of safety and health at the organizational level is discussed, as are the obligations for monitoring and the investigation of incidents. The remainder of the book is focused on specific categories of work hazards. These include both physical and psychological health, musculoskeletal health, chemical and biological agents, machinery hazards, fire hazards, and electricity hazards. The

material in this book does a good job introducing each of these work-related hazards with a clear international lens. The main objective and focus of the textbook, however, is the management system in occupational safety and health. It is a useful curriculum for students interested in management. While the curriculum is framed with an opening discussion of the conflict between money and morality in the protection of workers' health, it does not aim to be a textbook for the teaching of the political economy of workers' health, so there are obvious limitations to these ends.

A fourth stream of research work that approximates a university curriculum for the political economy of workers' health is found at the nexus of health and safety and industrial relations (Quinlan, 2023; Levenstein, 2017). This body of research highlights the importance of trade unions, collective bargaining, regulation, the role of job insecurity, precarious work, payment by results, the role of piecework, downsizing, and occupational disparities based on gender as influences upon occupational hazards, each as "underlying causes" of occupational safety and health risks. One valuable contribution to this line of research is its frequent focus upon industrial sectors as the unit of analysis and case study, for example in mining or seafaring. These provide insights into each sector's unique power structure and hazard profile. This work has "sought to locate workers' health and safety problems in the broad political economy" as "without a deep understanding of the social / political / economic context of particular industries and / or workplaces, we would not understand the process of recognition and control of industrial hazards" (Levenstein, 2017, p. 1). At the same time, this "work environment policy" research has used Dunlop's (1993) IR framework for understanding labour relations. Dunlop has been critiqued for methodological nationalism, inadequate study of political economy, and a post-war IR theory with a Cold War bias toward Parsonian functionalism, limiting the study of capitalism. The ongoing failure of industrial relations to come to terms with its twentieth century schism with the study of political economy is repeated in this line of research, even as it makes important contributions. The focus on labour process is a clear strength. At the same time, there are critiques of labour process theory that might also be relevant here where labour research remains exclusively micro-ethnographic. Foundational weaknesses thus continue for the teaching of the political economy of workers' health.

Hegemonic approaches in occupational safety and health. With no international curriculum of its own, a second challenge arises. The second challenge in developing a university curriculum for the political economy of workers' health comes from hegemonic approaches to occupational safety and health. Be it from either corporate safety science or from corporate social responsibility, there are dominant viewpoints in the field that either individualize occupational safety and health problems or attribute problems exclusively to individual management decisions. Examples are behaviour-based safety, financial cost-benefit analysis applied to safety and health, and management culture theories (Geller, 2005; McSween, 2003). These approaches individualize OSH with behavioural psychology or use management theory in the analysis of workplaces and hazards. Without commenting on the internal validity of these approaches, their frames of reference remain at the level of individual psychology or of business administration, etc., paradigms that marginalize the political economy of workers' health. At the same time, they are very popular theories in university across courses on occupational safety and health, as they are easy to grasp with explanations that fit well with compelling case studies. They also satisfy instrumentalist desires for marketable skills, making them compatible with the neo liberalization of higher education. The ongoing need arises to justify and defend understanding the political economy of workers' health in part because of these hegemonic approaches. Lateral defenses are required versus OSH approaches that individualize the social problem or boost only small technical managerialist fixes.

Instrumentalization of higher education under neoliberalism. Another challenge in developing university teaching in the political economy of workers' health is from the instrumentalization of higher education under neoliberal capitalism. Schools and departments of industrial relations have experienced this in a particular way over the years. They are rebranded as human resources management programs. The social model of labour studies and industrial relations requires attention to new curriculum design, as managerial and business-oriented conceptual paradigms ascend in importance. While this evidently complicates the study and teaching of the political economy of occupational health and safety, another dimension also plays an important role in this instrumentalization. Student precarity is ongoing with the rising cost of living and student debt. Out of material necessity, education is viewed as a labour market credential versus a slow human development process where students can study for their full human development. As mentioned, curricula with immediate marketable technical competencies of relevance to the corporate world and labour market are prioritized, adding yet another layer of complexity in the creation and defence of studying and teaching political economy of workers' health and safety in the classroom and in faculty and university course, curriculum, and academic program planning efforts.

Other obstacles. A few other obstacles are also worthy of reflection. These include what could be called the marginalization of socio-critical and realist epistemologies, and the importance of teacher education. Socio-critical and realist epistemologies are important to the study of the political economy of workers' health. Socio-critical perspectives recognize the importance of both structural and historical thinking, and how our social, political, and economic structures act to reinforce power relationships and class inequalities. It prioritizes marginalized groups, listens to their interpretations of knowledge, and examines how scientific knowledge is shaped by power relations. It is a sophisticated form of realist epistemology that can conflict with more positivistic forms of hard science that are more dominant in occupational safety and health research, such as with the biomedical sciences. Critical reflection about epistemologies is required as a result. Finally, an important hurdle worth mentioning is the need for a collective teaching cadre for the sustainability of any curriculum on the political economy of workers' health. Ideally, this would be resolved with the development of an international curriculum that better bounds the fields of study related to the political economy of workers' health, providing recognition of the subject as an important area of study and securing long-term institutional support by universities.

CURRICULUM MAPPING, LEARNING COMPETENCIES

As a field of study, the political economy of workers' health is justified in having a dedicated curriculum that recognizes its importance and is based on labour studies that are informed by a broad depth of knowledge in political economy. This includes a deeper understanding of prevention than is often used in health research, the study of labour commodification, a foundation on the social dynamics of capital-labour relations, the acknowledgement of international hegemony and imperialism, attention to historically informed case study research skills, and a commitment to socio-critical orientations in its epistemological outlook. This section maps a curriculum with learning competencies for a university course on the political economy of workers' health. It is organized in four units of fifteen weeks of three hours each with 45 learning competencies that correspond to a 45 credit-hour semester course.

Four units organize the course curriculum. The units are [1] *Foundations*, [2] *Landscapes of Risk*, [3] *The Production of Risk*, and [4] *Legacies of Risk*. The object of the unit *Foundations* is to introduce the political economy of workers' health and to coopt and redefine the concept of prevention within a social lens that is in service to the analysis of the political economy. The objective of the unit *Landscapes of Risk* is to study the transnational and multilateral structures,

systems, actors, processes, discourses and viewpoints that constitute workers' health. The objective of the unit *The Production of Risk* is to study essential occupational health and safety concepts and work interventions through a lens of the political economy of workers' health. The objective of the fourth unit *Legacies of Risk* is to raise the profile of injured workers past and future as an essential part of the study of workers' health from a political economy perspective, prioritizing political debates, policy obstacles and social struggles of the most importance to people and communities who have suffered work-related injuries and illnesses. The framework follows the interconnected processes of commodification-exploitation-dispossession in the study of capitalism and working-class formation described by Soul and Santella (2022, p. 290-295). Four tables (see Tables 1 to 4) outline the seminars and propose weekly learning competencies.³

Foundations. Unit 1 is organized into two seminars. The first week introduces health as a social relation to the political economy and the idea that labour is not a commodity. It also introduces the idea of *genuine prevention*. Genuine prevention is used to challenge the dominant typologies of prevention used in health surveillance and to reclaim the concept for the study of political economy. Students can define genuine prevention in discussion, while reflecting on what type of society and political economy would permit the authentic prevention of illness and injury, where, for example, economic foundations might lead to altogether different frameworks of prevention versus limited prevention frameworks.

The notion of *genuine prevention* reflects the pedagogy of the Nicaraguan educator Van de Velde (2010) and the idea of *cooperación genuina*. The adjective *genuine* is an invitation to analyze and describe the essential components of "prevention" in workers' health. Applying the pedagogy to the political economy of workers' health, it is [1] a classroom educational strategy, [2] an expression of economic solidarity, and [3] a process of constructing mutual support relationship at the local, national and international levels. The exercise requires a pedagogy of listening, interpreting, a willingness to share, and the decision to make a commitment, respect social contexts and have a vision to integrate ideas and action. *Genuine prevention* as an opening frame is thus a useful pedagogy idea rooted in a socio-critical epistemology that contrasts well with the more technical definitions of health prevention.

The second seminar focuses on the social dynamics of the capital-labour relationship. This week introduces the dynamics of a capitalist political economy and introduces these dynamics in their social context as paramount to the protection of workers' health. Among the topics are ownership and alienation, the available supply of labour, the mix of human and machine, cost-cutting down supply chains, the competition for returns on investment, profit taking and reinvestment, speedup and the turnover time of capital, and capital flight and disinvestment. Each of these are elements that relate to the labour theory of value.⁴ These classic dynamics of capital-labour relations also require discussion of debates in labour process theory such as labour and monopoly capitalism and primitive accumulation or the accumulation by dispossession. This week would also introduce the international nature of capital-labour dynamics. This includes a range of social problems, such as unequal and combined exchange

³ Learning objectives are defined here as a simple way to organize active cognitive behaviors and to limit and determine congruent activities in a particular educational curriculum (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Krathwohl, 2002).

⁴ Each of these points are in essence introductions to the six basic variables in the capitalist mode of production as described in Late Capitalism (Mandel, 2024). The proportions "are defined by six key variables: 1) the organic composition of capital (ratio of constant to variable capital, that is, fixed and circulating capital to wages); 2) the distribution of constant capital between fixed and circulating capital; 3) the rate of surplus value (rate of exploitation, that is, ratio of surplus value to wages); 4) the rate of accumulation (ratio of the invested surplus value to the stock of capital); 5) the turnover time of capital; and 6) the development of relations between department I (means of production) and II (consumption goods)."

and development, global wages below physiological sustenance, captured resource extraction industries, migration and secondary labour pools, rapid technological disruptions, the unregulated movement of hazardous materials, the consequences of ecological collapse, the politics of social security, systems of debt, credit and finance, and militarism, warfare and imperialism. Discussion can develop based on student interest and workers' health issues can be operationalized around these ideas.

Table 1. Unit 1 – *Foundations* – Curriculum Map

Seminar / week 1 – Political economy, workers' health, genuine prevention (3 hours)
1.1. Define health as a social relation and compare this viewpoint with other definitions of health.
1.2. Recognize the concept of commodification and how labour is not a commodity.
1.3. Illustrate the study of genuine prevention in the political economy of worker health protection.
Seminar / week 2 – Social dynamics of the capital-labour relationship (3 hours)
2.1 Explain the social dynamics of capital-labour relations and how they impact workers' health.
2.2 Critique methodological nationalism and formulate a global analysis of labour.
2.3. Operationalize ideas about capitalism with issues of equity, discrimination, imperialism, etc.

Landscapes of Risk. The second unit is organized into four seminars. The objective is to discuss landscapes of risk. Landscapes of risk are defined as places, situations or conditions within a political economy that shape the protection or violation of workers' health. The first week is dedicated to the topic of multilateral action and geopolitics. The second week is focused on the role of paradigms and models of development. The third week is dedicated to an examination of the diversity of labour and industrial relations systems. The fourth week is focused on studying workers' health as one category of ten socio-economic rights, the impact of the interdependency of socio-economic human rights on the protection of workers' health, and how economic policies degrade these rights, requiring restoration.

Seminar 3 on multilateral action and geopolitics discusses the world of multilateral action for workers' health. This includes questions of sovereignty, self-determination and national security, from cases of colonial working conditions to the principles of the U.N. Charter and modern-day violations of sovereignty and their impact on workers' health. Multilateralism includes the institutions of economic exchange and coordination, technical work and specialized U.N. agencies, including international standards on occupational safety and health, treaty-based mechanisms and their supervisory bodies, as well as private sector groups and non-governmental organizations. Multilateral actors are defined with reflection on their geopolitical interests, and students are invited to investigate how geopolitical interests shape multilateral actions and strategies that are of importance to the protection of workers' health.

Seminar 4 explores development models and paradigms and considers their consequences for workers' health. Development paradigms should be presented as being expressions of geopolitical interests. Helpful typologies of development paradigms can be used, such as that of the Nicaraguan feminist political economist Alicia Sáenz (2023) where development models either seek to strengthen capital, reform or moderate capital, or aim to transform or transcend overall capital-labour relations. Students can discuss and explore the real-world impact of development paradigms placed into action using case studies and considering the workers' health implications of different development models.

The fifth seminar or week places the focus on how industrial relations systems help to resolve problems of exploitation in the capital labour relationship, including the distribution and nature of workers' health and well-being. Students are invited to consider labour relations systems and their role in production, how these systems integrate and exclude groups in society, and options for any form of participation and decision-making in the economy, as well as how each labour system produces its own ideological justification and procedural legitimacy. Diverse models of labour relations systems should be discussed, including the challenges of informal productive activities and forms of super exploitation.

Seminar 6 concludes Unit 2 and focuses on the interdependencies of workers' health with other groups of socio-economic human rights. These rights include access to a quality education; nutrition, food sovereignty and the right to water; affordable housing and adequate living conditions; ecology and environmental protection; hospitalization and medical care; public health; income security and the right to work; safe and reliable transportation; and the right to scientific, literary and cultural production. The concept of the indivisibility of rights is essential in this seminar, and the politics of the restoration of rights should be introduced as forces of commodification require the perpetual restoration of rights.

Table 2. Unit 2 – Landscapes of Risk – Curriculum Map

Seminar / week 3 – Multilateral action and geopolitics (3 hours)
3.1. Describe the importance of multilateral action as it relates to workers' health and safety.
3.2. Differentiate the role of multilateralism across its categories of influence on workers' health.
3.3. Investigate how geopolitical interests are expressed in the regulation of labour and health.
Seminar / week 4 – Development models and paradigms (3 hours)
4.1. Examine the importance of development paradigms and explain their philosophical worldviews.
4.2. Analyze some formal development models and their prescriptions for workers' health protection.
4.3. Assess different development models and paradigms as expressions of geopolitical interests.
Seminar / week 5 – Systems of work and labour exploitation (3 hours)
5.1. Summarize how labour systems resolve problems and shape workers' health and well-being.
5.2. Contrast different labour relations systems and their actors, processes, and ideologies.
5.3. Design a case study investigating the nexus of labour relations and workers' health.
Seminar / week 6 – Socio-economic rights and their restoration (3 hours)
6.1. Interpret workers' safety and health in a framework of fundamental socio-economic rights.
6.2. Evaluate the importance of different categories of socio-economic human rights.
6.3. Apply the notion of the interdependency of rights to the protection of workers' health.

The Production of Risk. Unit 3 turns to the immediate production of risk in five seminars: The governance of sectors and occupations, surveillance of the working environment, labour inspection services, trade unions and worker participation, and the ethical obligations of professionals. The aim of this unit is to focus on the scientific literature on occupational safety

and health from the standpoint of political economy and explore how decisions by states and societies have been shaped in the process.

Seminar 7 is the governance of sectors and occupations. This topic revisits the question of the realistic vigilance of economic sectors for the protection of workers' health. It examines minimalist and maximalist sectoral governance strategies before and during the neoliberal period and how there have been different viewpoints on the role of economic foundations in social policy. It introduces sectoral governance as an important workers' health problem and discusses and critiques current sectoral and occupational governance strategies promoted in the multilateral system. Students discuss how to design a case study of a single economic sector and compile a socio-political economic analysis of that sector.

Seminar 8 is the surveillance of the working environment. Concepts and frameworks related to the surveillance of the working environment are ubiquitous in research on safety and health at work. In this session distinctions are made between primary and secondary prevention, the inadequacy of the concept of primary prevention, definitions of hazard and risk and their evaluation and assessment, and the distinction between health surveillance and medical surveillance. One important discussion is the definition and use of the precautionary principle, the role of science in defining acceptable harms, and the corruption of science in the interest of capital as well as the material basis of scientific knowledge.

Seminar 9 is labour inspection services. This seminar covers the historical development of the labour inspection function in the capitalist political economy from colonialism to neoliberalism. It includes a discussion of the main international labour standards on labour inspection, how societies must define the function and powers of labour inspectors to comply with international norms, and the use of labour inspectorates to address new threats to workers' health in capital-labour relations, such as new forms of work, the protection of migrant labour, and integration with OSH management strategies. The privatization of the labour inspection function under neoliberalism is also discussed, including the review and investigation of private systems of social auditing and multistakeholder initiatives.

Seminar 10 turns to trade unions and worker participation. These topics are addressed across the course. The focus of this session is to consider trade union rights as a form of workers' health protection, to assess formal collective bargaining systems in terms of workers' health protection, and how trade unionists possess deep knowledge of the production process and its hazardous work. Union action through work stoppages, work refusals, and worker education programs are discussed, as these strategies relate to the protection of workers' health. Emerging risks, violence, and psychosocial risks can also be discussed with case studies given the front-line nature of unions. Different forms of OSH worker participation are also discussed, including OSH committees and the use of safety delegates.

Seminar 11 is the ethical obligations of professionals. Workers' health professionals are broadly defined to include any professional that has an impact on occupational safety and health, including HR professionals. International and national laws regulating professional conduct often have professional codes of conduct prohibiting harmful impacts on workers' health and well-being. This is especially the case where medical professionals are involved or in cases of workplace injury and illness, either in their lost income claims or return to work. Workers' health professionals are recognized as an important social actor by international codes of conduct and by U.N. resolutions. This session is dedicated to the research and discussion surrounding human rights and professional ethics in workers' health protection, and how workers face abuse where professional practices are made subservient to corporate interests.

Table 3. Unit 3 – *The Production of Risk* – Curriculum Map

Seminar / week 7 – The governance of sectors and occupations (3 hours)
7.1. Demonstrate the role of economic foundations in the protection of safety and health at work.
7.2. Identify economic sectors and recommend maximalist or minimalist governance strategies.
7.3. Conduct a step-by-step sectoral analysis with a case study problematic about workers' health.
Seminar / week 8 – Surveillance of the working environment (3 hours)
8.1. Recall the concept of surveillance of the working environment and its different functions.
8.2. Compare key surveillance concepts, like primary and secondary prevention, hazard and risk, etc.
8.3. Justify when the recognition and activation of the precautionary principle is necessary.
Seminar / week 9 – Labour inspection services (3 hours)
9.1. Paraphrase the historical development of labour inspection and its use under colonialism.
9.2. State the functions and authority of labour inspection and relevant international standards.
9.3. Compare new inspection strategies (ex. forms of labour, labour migration, OSH integration).
Seminar / week 10 – Trade unions and worker participation (3 hours)
10.1. Defend the role of trade union action and negotiation for occupational safety and health
10.2. Name the different types of worker participation in OSH and their strengths and limits
10.3. Explain some participatory OSH strategies for psychosocial risks, emerging risks, violence, etc.
Seminar / week 11 – The ethical obligations of professionals (3 hours)
11.1. List the different ethical dilemmas of professionals related to workers' health protection.
11.2. Propose solutions for ethical dilemmas based on internationally recognized codes of conduct.
11.3. Troubleshoot ethical conflicts between corporate business interests and professional ethics.

Legacies of Risk. The fourth and final unit turns the focus to workers' injury and illness as the legacy of risk and includes four seminars. The first of these is dedicated to defining and debating the fundamental human rights of injured workers. Second is a session on the democratic control of science and the abuse of scientific knowledge in the determination of occupational injury and illness. The third week examines social insurance as the primary organizing mechanism for responding to workplace injury or illness. The final seminar turns the focus to injured worker groups as militant social actors around the world and their campaigns for reparations and justice. These seminars conclude the course. They aim to heighten the profile of injured workers and their social activism as an important part of the legacy of hazardous work and as important to the teaching of the political economy of workers' health.

Seminar 12 opens the study of injured workers by focusing on their fundamental rights. This includes a historical perspective on international debates about workers' injury compensation through social insurance, social insurance as systems of differed compensation from the mass

of wages, the impact of the neoliberal era on international standards of social protection, the state's obligation to monitor and lift the burdens of proof required of worker claimants, the challenge posed by new forms of injury and illness, and other forms of abuse faced by workers after a work-related injury and illness. It introduces the conflicting philosophies of probabilistic science and the determination of certitude in law and examines how science can be used to extend the commodification form to injured workers.

Seminar 13 considers in depth the question of science and evidence production in systems of social security for injured workers. It discusses how science plays a role in obfuscating responsibility for workplace injury and illness, considers different models of financing for workers' compensation system and the negative impacts of experience rating individual employers upon workers' claims, including the suppression of claims, the private surveillance of injured worker claimants, disparities in compensation among workers with different legal statuses, racial, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds and how and different strategies for the democratic control and management of scientific knowledge in systems of social security for the contingency of work-related injury and illness. Gender disparities in the recognition of occupational illnesses are another important subject of science and evidence policy. Case studies help illustrate different models for the recognition of occupational illnesses and injuries.

Seminar 14 considers the current state of social insurance systems for the compensation of occupational injuries and illnesses around the world. Gaps in social insurance systems are documented and include a variety of problems in law and in practical public administration. Some countries do not have workers' compensation systems, causing crises of legitimacy for productive sectors that require ad hoc international action after high-profile industrial disasters. The horizontal extension of coverage is an issue where established occupations benefit from coverage, while other sectors have no coverage. The question of vertical extension represents another category of gap in social insurance systems. This may include narrow terms of coverage, insufficient economic support, and onerous administrative burdens. Case studies can help students develop plans to eliminate these gaps and to propose solutions.

Seminar 15 concludes the course with a seminar on workers' campaigns for reparations and justice. This includes the opportunity to write historical case studies or report on contemporary action for social justice. These campaigns are among the most challenging in terms of success and cases can be used to document successful or unsuccessful campaigns, with students evaluating some of the social or political reasons these campaigns face obstacles to achieving their stated aims of reparation. Methyl isocyanate, white phosphorus, chrysotile asbestos, gender-based violence, Mesoamerican nephropathy, and crystalline silica dust are some examples where injured workers have formed social movements.

Table 4. Unit 4 – Legacies of Risk – Curriculum Map

Seminar / Week 12 – Injured workers and their fundamental rights (3 hours)
12.1. Classify the different categories of protection of the fundamental rights of injured workers.
12.2. Critique some of the weaknesses in the standards of social protection for injured workers.
12.3. Create an action plan to improve the system of protection for work-related injury and illness.
Seminar / Week 13 – Democratic control of science and evidence (3 hours)
13.1. Recognize the important role of science in the protection of occupational safety and health.
13.2. Differentiate the philosophies of science and law and their roles in work injury recognition.
13.3. Develop a plan for the democratic control of science to protect the rights of injured workers.
Seminar / Week 14 – Overcoming gaps in social insurance systems (3 hours)
14.1. Compare the major gaps in social insurance systems for injured workers around the world.
14.2. Use your knowledge of these gaps to identify impacts on workers, families and communities.
14.3. Construct a brief action plan in response to gaps and assess the consequences of your plan.
Seminar / Week 15 – Campaigns for justice and reparations (3 hours)
15.1. Name some of the grievances of injured worker groups in their campaigns for remediation.
15.2. Analyze and explain why an injured worker group has been successful or unsuccessful.
15.3. Reinvent a campaign for injured workers' rights that includes an analysis of past obstacles.

Throughout the semester, students discuss case study methods, including the need to historicise cases and document case antecedents (Yin, 2003; Orozco Alvarado & Díaz Pérez, 2018). The course is largely evaluated based on the quality of a written case study. Among the many case studies produced by students in this seminar include a case study of the role of the World Bank on occupational health in the Nicaraguan sugar industry, a case study of exploitation in the agriculture sector in Tunisia, a case study of the impact of the U.S. Colombia free trade agreement on workers' health in the cut flower industry, a case study of French telecom privatization's impact on psychosocial workers' health, and a case study report of the industrial explosion at Zhongzong Metal Products Company in Kunshan on 2 August 2014. Some students have continued their research to complete a *Travail dirigé*, a project that is required to conclude a non-thesis M.Sc. program in industrial relations at the University of Montreal. Case study research is a flexible social research method that coheres well with a political economy of workers' health pedagogy. It gives students the opportunity to pursue their own research interests and mobilize and translate their own socio-cultural knowledge and life experiences into academic research.

CONCLUSION

This paper does not claim to offer any perfected elaboration of a university course curriculum on the political economy of workers' health. Starting from a short autoethnographic reflection, it offers modest insights about the challenges that face the teaching of the political economy of

workers' health. These challenges are both theoretical and pragmatic. They relate to the constitution of knowledge but also to the frameworks of power influencing the neoliberal university. Ambivalence, evasion and even opposition in the academic field of Industrial Relations to the study of political economy are objective obstacles to curriculum development in this area. Health research to a degree approaches a curriculum in the areas of global health and global occupational health but these textbooks do not make central the role of the labour process and capital accumulation in workers' health or make reflections on the social dynamics of the capital labour relationship, including the labour theory of value and its role in workers' health, or development paradigms. The result of this reflection is a need assessment for strengthening the curriculum to teach the political economy of workers' health at the college and university level, in a framework independent of both business school curriculum and technical based occupational health.

Labour studies and industrial relations as fields of study have been boondoggled by their fear of political economy theoretical frameworks, reinforced by the academic legacy of twentieth century Cold War anti-communism. Important debates on the protection of workers' health, however, are informed by labour process theory, the dynamics of capital labour relations, variations in the forms of work and capital accumulation, and the international and ecological dimensions of these viewpoints. Persistently grounding labour in liberal theoretical tenets with methodological nationalism is an impediment to the teaching of the political economy of workers' health. At the same time, university teachers of labour from critical standpoints are in unenviable positions of having to perpetually defend courses and curriculum as neoliberal values expand and reshape universities and programs towards prioritizing business, managerialism and seeming apolitical technical solutions to questions of workers' health.

Reflecting further on this brief autoethnographic account, it is striking to note that early formal academic thought in North American labour and industrial relations scholarship embraced with vigour critical questions of political economy. As the foundations of Western labour scholarship shifted in the twentieth century to their current underpinnings of war-friendly liberalism, so too did it fail in teaching the political economy of workers' health. Shifting in this historical period was the human rights lens. Early labour scholarship read the human rights idea as a feature of property rights and the distribution of aggregate surplus value or social capital in the political economy. Shifting through the twentieth century, human rights are now objects of formal legalism on liberal market foundations. The 2022 amendment of a safe and healthy working environment to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work is an illustration of formalistic human rights applied to safety and health at work without analysis of its political economy foundations. The teaching of the political economy of workers' health requires struggling with these foundations. A new global curriculum is needed. The aim should be to support the next generation of researchers and educators to study workers' health through a lens rooted in political economy and the social dynamics of capital-labour relations as internationally constituted and shaped by geopolitics. Such a project requires understanding debates about the labour process but also structural questions of the political economy and the landscapes and legacies of risk.

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