The significance of sense in the time of plagues: Curricular responsiveness to the Covid-19 crisis

Hannah Spector¹

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Abstract The purpose of this article is to interrogate ways that curriculum can respond critically to already existing global emergencies (including pandemics) while also becoming more proactive toward the prevention of world risks. To do this, it calls for the fortification of the traditional course of study that introduces students to the analysis of literary texts. However, a traditional approach to school-based literary analysis that attends exclusively to a text's formal properties in order to determine its meaning is insufficient to get ahead of the world risk curve. Instead, the article turns to the concept of allegory as theorized in curriculum theory and to a theory of preventative foresight to interpret a famous dream (of a world-shattering contagion) in a famous work of literature (Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*) that provides a novel opportunity to understand the significance of sense in the time of plagues.

Keywords Curriculum · Covid-19 · Crisis · Curriculum theory

Never has our future been more unpredictable.

Hannah Arendt (1973, p. vii)

How did Dostoevsky know?

Gary Morson (1999, p. 30)

One of many consequences that have arisen due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is nationwide school closures. These closures have impacted over 90% of the world's student population (UNESCO 2020). As a social distancing technique, school closures and the move to remote teaching and learning are meant to help flatten the curve of this highly contagious virus. However, they also put into focus the ways that schooling, in both content and form, has been ill-equipped to respond to this novel crisis.

✉ Hannah Spector
hms22@psu.edu

¹ Penn State Harrisburg, 777 W Harrisburg Pike, Middletown, PA 17057, USA

As Pinar (2020) puts it in the call for submissions to this special journal issue on curricular responsiveness to the Covid-19 crisis, there is a “critical need for curriculum to become more responsive and proactive, perhaps even refocusing curricular time away from traditional school subjects toward timely topics, the understanding of which would be informed by traditional school subjects”. Along these lines, in a Viewpoint published in *Prospects*, Daniel (2020) proposes that classroom curriculum ought to be supplemented with “varied assignments and work that puts Covid-19 in a global and historical context” (para. 1). In refocusing curriculum so that it engages with un/predictable events like the Covid-19 emergency, the hope is that educators can “address the specificities of their students’ situations while reminding them of everyone’s global interconnectedness” (Pinar 2020). Both appeals seem particularly apropos as school curriculum has generally struggled to respond in timely ways to current issues—and how those issues relate to the lived experience of our students. Indeed, “curricula can seem somewhat set-in-stone, stuck in the past”. Students across the world are aware of this problem. They want more curriculum and instruction on important, ongoing global issues (Cambridge Assessment 2020).

Concurrently, school closures have further exposed the digital divide. Some forms of remote learning, mainly synchronous ones, are inaccessible to youth who lack the required tools, such as reliable internet service or computers. Those responsible for curriculum policy and practice are therefore faced with a challenge that this pandemic has brought forth: finding ways to make school curriculum relevant and obtainable in an age marked by “communities of global risks” (Beck 2011, p. 1346) that cannot be “socially delimited in space or time”. The Covid-19 pandemic—which is both a world risk and “actual catastrophe” (see Beck 2009, p. 10) given that it is continuing to unfold in un/predictable ways—forefronts urgent questions concerning the nature of the school curriculum in a period when youth are struggling to understand and make sense of their individual, family, and society’s situations. The struggle to make sense of this disorienting situation—in terms of a *sensus communis* rather than “the logical stubbornness of insisting on one’s own (*sensus privatus*)” (Arendt 1978, p. 268)—when making judgments has much to do with what is still not known rather than what is known about the virus and its side effects. This “not knowing” fills human beings with alarm, which can result in confusion, deep (political) divisions, and in some cases, even paranoia. It is hoped that curriculum and pedagogy can respond to the Covid-19 crisis and anticipate other world risks in ways that unite rather than divide human beings.

With pandemics and other global threats in mind—from radioactive poisoning of the planet (Spector 2015a) to climate change (Spector 2015b) to systems of education that educate for obedience and conformity (Spector 2016)—this study centers on the need to cultivate “the idea of a sense common to all, i.e., of a faculty of judgment” (Kant, as cited in Arendt 1978, p. 268) in youth, who are the next generation, to renew our common world. This analysis in support of common sense as a way to live sensibly in the world appreciates the important critical contributions in educational research of taken-for-granted common-sense assumptions (e.g., Kumashiro 2009). Certainly, if common sense is never questioned, there is a danger of adopting what Nietzsche (1886/1989) calls “herd animal morality” (p. 115)—a point I will return to. However, I am presently concerned with what happens when common sense reasoning breaks down across parts of humanity during a pandemic, which has been the case in the United States, where my teaching and research are situated. I thread this concern throughout this analysis, which culminates in an exegesis of a dream of a worldwide plague in a prominent piece of world literature that finds its way into the secondary school curriculum in United States classrooms: Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. What makes this fictional dream ripe for interpretation at this moment

in time—despite the fact that the dreamer himself dismisses it as a “ridiculous fantasy” (Dostoevsky 1989, p. 462)—is that the contagion works by destroying common sense. Those attacked by the virus become convinced that their *sensus privatus*, their personal convictions, are infallible, which leads to total chaos in and destruction of communities, cities, and nations. It is a dream that will be interpreted as an allegory of the United States present—see “Allegories-of-the-Present” (Pinar 2012, pp. 49–56)—and as a “cautionary tale” (see Kurasawa 2007, pp. 94–105) for a world at risk (p. 104). If the concept of allegory encourages educational experience through the representation of knowledge that may seem related to the present moment (Pinar 2012, p. 57), then the “labour of preventative foresight” (Kurasawa 2007, p. 109) stipulates that we must “act prudently”, to avoid human and non-human suffering and “do no harm” (p. 118) that moves the world closer to a crisis of global proportion.

It has been said that “world risk society sets free a ‘cosmopolitan moment’” (Beck 2009, p. 15), given the “anthropological shock” (p. 61) of un/anticipated global catastrophes. Such moments are cosmopolitan because they open up lines of transnational communication due to the incapacity of the nation-state to effectively deal with boundary transcending emergencies. The anthropological shock of the coronavirus pandemic, however, has also unleashed xenophobic and anthropophobic responses. In the United States, President Trump, who repeatedly referred to Covid-19 as the “Chinese virus” (Rogers, Jakes, and Swanson 2020) and “Kung Flu” (Lee 2020), proposed an executive order that would temporarily ban immigration in order to combat the “Invisible Enemy” (Smith 2020). The virus has also been used to virtually end asylum at United States borders, including turning away unaccompanied minors (Merchant and Perez 2020). On a different note, in Italy, Agamben (2020) points out that the fear of getting sick from “possible spreaders of the plague” (para. 1) undermines social relationships and reduces the human condition to its biological functions. Reducing life to its bare necessities, he adds, does not unite people but atomizes them. In other words, if one can say that this crisis acts as an example of what Beck (2009) calls “enforced cosmopolitanism” (p. 61), then one must also say it has given rise to the entrenchment of national borders and the construction of social distancing techniques and restrictions on individual movement. These responses to the pandemic have created a multiplicity of unanticipated side effects, some of which have adverse consequences for school closures, including but not limited to “coronavirus-related racism” (Redden 2020), “social isolation”, “confusion and stress for teachers”, and “increased exposure to violence and exploitation” (UNESCO 2020).

In this article, I add another perspective to proposals by Daniel (2020) and Pinar (2020) that normal classroom subjects ought to be supplemented with, if not redirected toward, curriculum that is pertinent to the Covid-19 emergency. These proposals have included “encouraging students to engage with the crisis by preparing hampers of food and supplies for vulnerable families or writing letters to elderly residents in care homes” (see Daniel 2020, para. 12). If performed, these sorts of activities can instill students with a sense of agency and cultivate an ethic of care around helping to mitigate devastation at a local level. They might also help children cope with their own experience of the crisis. In a first-year tertiary-level Educational Theory and Policy course that I teach, students gave reports on a range of news articles about the coronavirus and education, including such topics as the impact of the pandemic on school meals around the world, students with disabilities being left behind with the move to remote learning, and the cancellation of standardized exams—including the International Baccalaureate Exams (IBO 2020). The aim of this assignment was to help students keep abreast of a variety of educational issues that have surfaced as a consequence of Covid-19 related school closures. It also provided an opportunity for

students to practice their public speaking skills remotely through a live video teaching and learning platform.

While the aforementioned activities serve important purposes pertaining to a program of content that redirects learning to the Covid-19 crisis, they are not particularly innovative, proactive, or critical. They follow the curve of the crisis. They are also more practical and informative than they are interpretive. If curriculum is to get ahead of the curve, then it must do more than react to the reality of what is or what was by anticipating, by way of the imagination, what could be as a consequence of “becoming members of a ‘global community of threats’” (Beck 2009, p. 8). On this note, Pinar (2020) asks, “Can we conceive of curriculum with the capacity to stay proactive and contribute to the prevention (or at least management) of external vulnerabilities, including outbreaks and emergencies?” We can—and in ways during the crisis that do not require synchronous communication. At a time when students are negotiating the responsibilities of home, school, and perhaps work, asynchronous and flexible scheduling seems a sensible, humane approach to teaching, as Daniel (2020) argues in his “simple approach to remote teaching” (para. 2) during the Covid-19 pandemic. A switch to asynchronous methods is surely needed when responding to the immediacy of the crisis; however, more can and should be done at a conceptual level by policymakers—at whom this piece of writing is aimed—in order to become, following Pinar, proactive toward the perennial possibility of global catastrophes.

In the United States, public school curriculum has over the last few decades been controlled by a high-stakes standardized testing regime that is part of a policy design to hold schools accountable (Au 2007, p. 258). Accountability, as it has been sanctioned under these policies, is not exactly mindful of the existential challenges that human beings face in a world at risk. Policymakers have not only the power but an existential responsibility to conceptualize education as a primary place to engage urgent questions concerning global threats. Conversation is a starting point to help mitigate threats before they become emergencies. And in the United States, the pandemic has reached the stature of “a humanitarian disaster” (Gupta 2020).

If in-person communication is not required in order for students to analyze and raise critical questions about the current crisis or labor to mitigate future catastrophes, whether unanticipated or not, what is required, I posit here in a plea to policymakers, is the fortification of the traditional course of study that introduces students to the analysis of literary texts. As a narrative art form, literature provides a unique opportunity for the reader to be transported to another world, one that gives insights into the human experience and worldly affairs. This sort of transportation requires students of literature to close their eyes in order to see. But before a reader can reflect on a literary characters’ situations and struggles, the reader has to imagine that this lifeworld exists. As Arendt (1978) explains, “the operation of imagination prepares the object for ‘the operation of reflection’. And this operation of reflection is the actual activity of judging something” (p. 266). The more opportunities one has to practice standing in the particular position of others and the larger the realm in which movement between standpoints can occur, the better equipped one becomes at forming sound and sensible judgments about human affairs (p. 258). However, judgment never becomes a principle—or, in the case of education, a best practice—to follow. “By putting ourselves in the place of another man [sic]” (Kant, as cited in Arendt 1978, p. 268), we compare “our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgment of others”. The more practice one has to compare one’s perspective with the perspective of different others, the closer one gets to “adopt[ing] the position of Kant’s world citizen” (Arendt 1978, p. 257). This position is realized by drawing upon the faculty of imagination and using common-sense reasoning. Common sense has been called the “mysterious ‘sixth sense’”

(Arendt 1978, p. 50) as it is not found in a bodily organ; and it is this sense that “make[s] us at home in the world” (p. 59). While not everyone operates with all five senses (coincidentally, a symptom of the coronavirus infection is the loss of smell and/or taste), people who are blind or hearing impaired cannot be said to have less common sense than some of our most prominent world leaders. A point to be returned to in this article.

Although the traditional school subject of science is not the focus of this analysis, it should nevertheless be pointed out that “all science still moves within the realm of common sense experience” (p. 54) since it uses evidence as its criterion for knowledge. Although what science says today may be different from what it tells us tomorrow, when it comes to world leaders and policymakers responding sensibly to a pandemic, science still provides the most reliable information to turn to in order to curb the crisis. This is because science is on a search for a type of knowledge that stands outside the political realm (which does not mean science cannot be politicized). To be discussed in more detail when interpreting Raskolnikov’s dream, when one makes judgments using *sensus privatus*, “insane results” (Arendt 1978, p. 263) can occur. These results can have devastating consequences on our common world, especially if the decision-maker(s) wields great political power. While other classroom subjects may also be valuable for education in “preventative foresight” (Kurasawa 2007, p. 109), I leave it to others to investigate what type of knowledge to pursue when confronted with “hypothetically catastrophic futures” (p. 113).

On the one hand, my proposal is a modest and perhaps even conservative one, as the study of literature in schools across time and place is hardly new. Curiously, this mainstream school subject has been falling out of favor in the United States, as illustrated in the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS 2020), which takes time away from interpreting literary texts in order to examine informational ones. On the other hand, the standard approach to school-based literary analysis used in the United States, which draws upon Formalism and New Criticism, is insufficient when looking at ways to get ahead of the world risk curve. This is because attending exclusively to a text’s formal properties in order to determine its meaning disregards the ways that a fictional story may provide insights into other real-world issues relevant to its day, our day, or anticipated days ahead. Taking an allegorical perspective when studying select works of fiction and an approach that aims to “cultivat[e] a farsighted cosmopolitanism” (Kurasawa 2007, p. 109) might provide some of the most sound and sensible educational means to respond critically to already existing global emergencies and to lessen or ideally prevent catastrophic futures.

Allegory and farsighted cosmopolitanism

Pinar invokes “the significance of allegory for curriculum theory” (Pinar 2012, p. 57) for its capacity to enable “representation as central to understanding self and society through study” (p. 52). Different from “instrumental calculation” (p. 57), which pervades educational practices but suffocates education as lived experience, allegories can act as field manuals for “how we can sensibly live” in the present and attend to the future without knowing precisely what it holds. At the same time, allegory is said to “reactivat[e] the past in order to find the future” (p. 49). Pinar focuses upon the historical circumstances of Weimar, Germany, as an allegory of the “totalitarian temptation” (Peukert, as cited in Pinar 2012, p. 63) in the United States educational present. The attraction to totalitarianism is said to arise “not through Nazi-style burning of books but through standardized testing” (Pinar 2012, p. 63) for the reason that “testing controls what teachers teach and what students learn (p. 64). These tests numb the mind and install submissiveness (p. 65), given

that a fill-in-the-bubble education encourages rote memorization, improves factory-model hand-eye coordination, and animates the regurgitation of facts. This type of education also neutralizes the human capacity to think critically and speculatively about facts and falsehoods, both of which have serious ramifications for world risk society when either is used for political gain. But no one in 2012 could have predicted that states across the United States would cancel federally mandated standardized tests due to school closures as a consequence of a global pandemic (Strauss 2020). This does not mean, however, that the not-so “secret site” (Pinar 2012, p. 53) of the totalitarian temptation that is “the school” has become any less tempting. One might speculate that if new and improved technologies can provide equitable means to move public education online, the totalitarian temptation might present itself in Orwellian fashion, given technology’s capacity to record and file class conversations.

It should nevertheless be pointed out that Pinar is making a theoretically broader point when endorsing the concept of allegory as central to the work of curriculum theory. If “allegory is ... a specific narrative that hints at a more general significance” (p. xiv), then its significance “forefronts both History and questions of its representation as central to understanding self and society through study” (p. 52). Allegory redirects education from teaching skill sets necessary for passing the test and becoming college and career ready to studying the intersection between my life and the life of close, distant, and imagined others. Allegory, then, can enact “subjective and social reconstruction” (p. 231) as it juxtaposes the past with the present and subjectivity with society. While Pinar notes similarities and differences between the historical facts of Weimar, Germany, and the totalitarian temptation found in the United States present (see pp. 62–66), works of fiction—or a particular passage within a work of fiction—can, of course, be read allegorically too. In his call for curricular responsiveness to the Covid-19 pandemic, Pinar asks if curriculum can “encourage educators to address the specificities of their students’ situations while reminding them of everyone’s global interconnectedness”. The condensed world of fiction can do both and in ways that respect the problem of “[teacher] time constraints and workload” (Melnik and Meister 2008, p. 44). How might studying works of fiction also help students respond to and take action toward the prevention of global emergencies like Covid-19?

This question might be taken up by thinking along with and adding to Kurasawa’s (2007) work on “farsighted cosmopolitanism” (p. 95). Farsighted cosmopolitanism is a concept meant to map future risks of human rights atrocities and global injustices (p. 121). But mapping, as described by Kurasawa, is not meant to conjure up “images of fortune-telling crystal balls and doomsday prophets” (p. 94); nor does mapping adhere to “scientific forms of knowledge” (p. 95) whose “flawless projections inevitably come up short”. Rather, this sort of farsighted labor closely attends to warning signs of possible or looming global catastrophes by way of the “moral imagination and reason” (p. 112). Included in Kurasawa’s research is the “scourge of HIV/AIDS” (p. 133) and what has, debatably, been called “the first truly global pandemic”. Kurasawa rightly speaks to this scourge in terms of rights and justice because it disproportionately affected marginalized, disadvantaged groups and revealed, once again, that members of so-called “inferior or ‘backward’ socio-cultural groups” (p. 135) can be treated with disdain by Western, colonial powers who tend to supply the global South with not only pharmaceutical treatments but also bare life essentials such as food and housing (p. 135).

On the subject of pandemics, rights, and justice, Covid-19 is posing grave risks to indigenous people across the world, many of whom suffer from a lack of essential services, including healthcare (United Nations 2020). Some of these populations are defying government orders to reopen roads that go through indigenous lands when science and facts

say they should not yet be reopened. In continuing to hold Covid-19-related checkpoints, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Chairman Harold Frazier (as cited in Boyette and Hackney 2020) told the South Dakota governor that “you continuing to interfere in our efforts to do what science and facts dictate seriously undermine [sic] our ability to protect everyone on the reservation” (para. 4). This interference, which includes “ignorant statements ... encourages individuals already under stress from this situation to carry out irrational actions” (para. 5). One might say that Frazier is an indigenous leader with a cosmopolitan sensibility—see Forte (2010) on “indigenous cosmopolitans”—given that his sensible judgments are in the name of both human rights and indigenous rights in order to “save lives rather than save face” (para. 6). Other disadvantaged groups are also experiencing the pandemic at amplified levels. High rates of Covid-19 related deaths in the African American community are “revealing the deadly legacy of inequity” (Brooks 2020). While it might still be too soon to fully appreciate the extent of these and other injustices that Covid-19 is bringing forth, the crisis raises serious questions concerning the need for and challenges involved with the United Nations plea for “‘solidarity, unity, and hope’ in battling COVID-19 pandemic” (Guterres 2020).

But how do we go about engaging “the moral imagination for solidarity” and “the faculty of rational judgment” (Kurasawa 2007, p. 113) in order to prevent, or at least manage, global crises like the one the world is currently experiencing? Kurasawa maintains that dystopian fiction (e.g., novels, films, and other art forms) encourages audience members to transport themselves via the moral imagination into the lifeworld of the story and positions of the protagonists. He references Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and alludes to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as novels that summon readers to reflect and take action on the dangers of totalitarian patriarchies and a “lifeless planet” due to the reality of destructive environmental practices—e.g., “Frankenfoods” (p. 103). These novels, moreover, can frequently be found in the secondary school curriculum. But if these and other dystopian imaginaries—from classics like Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* to contemporary works such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*—are read in schools without attention to what they caution or without instilling a sense of agency in the reader, then they serve no purpose in the practice of preventative foresight. On this negligent note, *Frankenstein* is touted as a great book to read for those students preparing to take the Standardized Aptitude Test (SAT), given the SAT-style vocabulary words in it. The Kaplan test preparation edition of the book guarantees that this “score-raising classic” will improve SAT scores if the scoring guide is followed, or readers can “get their money back” (see Shelley 2011).

According to Kurasawa (2007), the “practice of preventative foresight” (p. 105) or “farsighted cosmopolitanism” (p. 95) can be nurtured by attending to the dystopian genre of fiction, which “help[s] warn the world about upcoming dangers” (p. 106). Such foresight, however, must be “grounded in a sense of responsibility for temporally distant others” (p. 105) if it is to be oriented toward the anticipation of the “numerous dangers facing humankind” (p. 104). It is not only dystopian fiction that can nurture foresight in order to heed warning signs of looming disaster. Works of literary realism can also play this role, as illustrated in the 19th-century Russian realist writings of Dostoevsky. Unlike dystopian imaginaries that take place in quasi-alternative universes and function with author intent as warning signs of dark times to come, Dostoevsky’s works are set in real places, describe “real” people’s problems, and explore through dialogue, action, and inner conflict philosophical debates of his time. Dostoevsky’s biographer Joseph Frank (2010) referred to this quality in the title of his multivolume work, *Dostoevsky: A Writer of His Time*. However, Dostoevsky’s works can also be read allegorically and with the aim of practicing farsighted cosmopolitanism—despite the fact that he was a patriotic Slavophile with great disdain for

cosmopolitanism as an Enlightenment-Western idea and cultural category (Spector 2017). In this way, I read Dostoevsky against Dostoevsky. I interpret his description of a worldwide plague in *Crime and Punishment* as an allegory of the United States pandemic present and as a cautionary tale for a world at risk.

The breakdown of *sensus communis* as worldwide plague

How does reading Raskolnikov's "famous final dream" (Frank 2010, p. 506) allegorically and as a cautionary tale inform understandings of Covid-19 correlated crises and anticipate future global catastrophes? What does this dream teach us about the need for persons in positions of prodigious policymaking power to exercise judgment by way of *sensus communis* rather than by personal "hunches" (Trump, as cited in Egan and Khuraha 2020) of *sensus privatus* when it comes to decisions concerning pandemics and other boundary-defying emergencies that threaten world stability? How can the practice of reading select pieces of literature allegorically help school curriculum and the student of literature to become more critically aware of global crises and proactive toward the prevention of world risks? The following theory-into-practice analysis aims to respond to these questions.

As part of the backstory to *Crime and Punishment*, the reader learns that Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov—"a former student ... who moved in academic circles" (see Dostoevsky 1989, p. 9)—has written a scholarly publication called "Concerning Crime". The article posits that there are two classes of people: the "ordinary" and the "extraordinary" (pp. 218–219). If ordinary people "live in submission and have no right to transgress the laws" (p. 218), then extraordinary individuals "have the right to commit every crime and break every law just because they are extraordinary". For the extraordinary, "everything is permitted" (p. 232). Putting theory into practice, Raskolnikov attempts to become extraordinary by murdering an "old woman" (p. 4) simply to see if he can get away with it. He eventually confesses his crime and is sent to prison. During his time there, he is taken ill not because of "the horrors of a convict's life" (p. 458) or because he felt great remorse for his crime. He becomes ill because "his pride was deeply wounded" when he realizes that his theory about two classes of people was "stupid"—though not any more stupid than "other ideas and theories that have sprung up and multiplied like weeds all over the world" (p. 459). His mental disturbance turns into a physical illness characterized by delirium and fever; it is at this time that he dreams of a global contagion:

He had dreamt in his illness that the whole world was condemned to fall victim to a terrible, unknown pestilence which was moving on Europe out of the depths of Asia. All were destined to perish, except a chosen few, a very few ... People who were infected immediately became like men possessed and out of their minds. But never, never, had any men thought themselves so wise and so unshakable in the truth as those who were attacked. Never had they considered their judgments, their scientific deductions, or their moral convictions and creeds more infallible. Whole communities, whole cities and nations, were infected and went mad. All were full of anxiety, and none could understand any other; each thought he was the sole repository of truth and was tormented when he looked at the others... They did not know how or whom to judge and could not agree what was evil and what good. They did not know whom to condemn or whom to acquit. Men killed one another in senseless rage. They banded together against one another in great armies, but when the armies were already on the march they began to fight amongst themselves... In the towns the

tocsin sounded all day long and called out to all the people, but who had summoned them and why nobody knew, and everybody was filled with alarm...every man put forward his own ideas, his own improvements, and there was no agreement...men congregated in groups, agreed together on some action, swore not to disband—and immediately began to do something quite different from what they themselves had proposed, accused one another, fought and killed each other. Conflagrations were started, famine set in. All things and all men were perishing...(pp. 461–462)

The dream is said to take place during the time of Easter (p. 461), which teaches the story of Christ's resurrection. As such, interpreting the dream as a climactic representation of "the main theme of the book" (Frank 2010, p. 507) is a safe strategy given the significance that the story of Lazarus plays in the novel (Dostoevsky 1989, p. 241)—a story that concludes with Raskolnikov's "perfect resurrection into a new life" (p. 463). According to Frank (2010), the last dream "represents nothing less than the universalization of Raskolnikov's doctrine of the 'extraordinary people'" (p. 507). Similarly, Girard (1974) maintains that the dream must be read "in the context of Dostoevsky's entire work" (p. 836), and Mortimer (1956) says that "the entire dream is an allegory...[r]epresenting the final stage in Raskolnikov's renunciation of his theory" (p. 113). While Mortimer speaks of allegory, his usage of this term does not enable reflection on anything beyond the scope of Raskolnikov's world, which is different from the way Pinar treats allegory in curriculum theory (2012). In the aforementioned interpretations, nothing from outside the story provides insight into the dream, and nothing about the dream teaches the reader anything about the world outside the self-contained universe of the story. The point of including these interpretations has to do with the ways that this approach to literary analysis has also been advanced in the school curriculum, particularly in the United States (e.g., College Board 2019; CCSS 2020) but also in other places such as Canada (e.g., Government of Alberta 2003; Ministry of Education 2007). However, the origins of the self-referential focus on form are found in Russian literary theory (Thompson 2012). It is unlikely that this approach to the study of literature can help school curriculum respond critically to, or get ahead of, the world risk curve.

Dostoevsky's imagining a worldwide plague originating in the depths of Asia and spreading into Europe might have had more to do with his longstanding predilection for xenophobia (see Frank 2010, p. 62) than any Nostradamion capacity to predict the likely origins of the coronavirus. In this sense, one might say that Dostoevsky and the 45th President of the United States have one thing in common: fear of foreigners. This sort of irrational fear can spread as quickly as a highly contagious virus. It has been said that "where ever a pandemic goes, xenophobia is not far behind" (Serhan and McLaughlin 2020, para. 4) and that coronavirus racism in the United States has become "the other problematic outbreak". That former President Trump insisted that the country would be reopened by Easter 2020 when cases of the virus had yet to peak certainly had more to do with his desire to reboot the economy than rush to church. And while Trump pandered to the religious Right during his time in office (Rogers 2020), Dostoevsky was in fact a religious man. The Easter date for reopening was not based on science or reason. "Trump did not budge on the April 12 date, which he acknowledged he did not arrive at by examining any data. 'I just thought it was a beautiful time', he said" (Karni and McNeal 2020, para. 9).

But more importantly than these time (Easter) and place (Asia) coincidences when thinking allegorically of the United States present, an uncanny resemblance can be seen between Raskolnikov's dream and a not exactly new world risk that Covid-19 has brought forth: the dangers involved in making decisions using the "*sensus privatus* of a person's

fantasy” (Oberreiter 2018, p. 229) rather than exercising judgments by way of *sensus communis*, which relies on the human capacity for communication (Arendt 1978, p. 268). The latter testifies to “your ‘turn of thought’ (*Denkungsart*) in the worldly matters which are ruled by the community sense” (p. 269) while the former puts faith in one’s instinct. While using one’s “gut feeling” to make personal choices is one’s personal choice, if it is used to “lead” a country through a pandemic (see Edsall 2020), the consequences can be fatal—and fatalities from the virus in the United States continue to climb (Mundell and Foster 2020). As American immunologist and whistleblower Dr. Rick Bright warned in his congressional testimony on creating countermeasures to combat the spread of the virus, “[i]f we fail to improve our response now, based on science, I fear the pandemic will get worse and be prolonged...Without better planning, 2020 could be the darkest winter in modern history” (C-SPAN 2020b). His prediction that “there will be likely a resurgence of Covid-19 in the fall” has come to fruition, but the Trump administration did not heed his sense of preventative foresight and instead preferred to put “politics and cronyism ahead of science” (Bright, as cited in Shear and Haberman 2020).

The lack of a coherent national plan to combat the virus was not out of line with President Trump’s incoherent ideas on ways to protect oneself from the virus. In one of his Coronavirus Task Force Briefings, he suggested that injecting disinfectant into the body and using ultraviolet rays might be used to treat the virus (see C-SPAN 2020a). If common sense does not tell one that misusing disinfectants can be extremely dangerous and potentially deadly, then one should read the warning labels on solutions before using them in this way. Common sense also says that basking in UV rays to combat the coronavirus is not a bright idea. UVC rays, which are “particularly good at destroying genetic material” in human beings (Gorvett 2020, para. 8), have been harvested by scientists for sterilization purposes. These rays are being used during the pandemic in China to disinfect buses, hospital floors, and cash in banks. However, if used on people, “you would literally be frying [them]” (Arnold, as cited in Gorvett 2020, para. 1). While scientists have done research indicating that there is no health benefit to using hydroxychloroquine to treat Covid-19 (Mehra, Desai, Ruschitzka, and Patel 2020)—indeed, it has a potentially fatal side effect (Servick 2020)—this did not stop the President from promoting its use while later claiming to be taking it himself to keep the virus at bay.

But at bay it did not stay. The President, as well as other members of his administration, contracted the virus, quite possibly because they (following the President’s *sensus privatus* leadership, which is the antithesis of judgment in a Kantian sense) have regularly refused to wear face coverings or social distance despite scientific consensus that both can help slow the spread (CDC 2020). Worried that mask-wearing would make him appear weak and meek (Plank 2020)—i.e., “ordinary” in a Raskolnikovian sense—the President was more concerned about his personal appearance than practicing common sense in the interests of a nation that he represented. In a public media display of “extraordinariness”—i.e., a Raskolnikovian right to transgress laws—he carefully and confidently took off his mask for the world to see, despite still being sick from the virus. *Crime and Punishment*, however, shows extraordinariness to be a deluded idea. Trump’s standoff against masks and common sense amid a deadly pandemic spreading across the country has had a ripple effect: It has inspired herd morality (which Nietzsche despised). Herd morality is not the same as Kant’s conceptualization of *sensus communis*, which is exercised through the collective reasoning of humanity (Arendt 1978, p. 268). In the United States Covid-19 context, herd morality has come in the form of an anti-mask campaign that has played off of and transmogrified the reproductive choice slogan “My body, my choice”. One can see how the triumph of herd morality that comes in the guise of American individualism (not to be confused with

individuality) gets expressed through close and potentially deadly encounters of the viral kind.

The breakdown of common sense *is* the plague in Raskolnikov's dream and has become another sort of contagion spreading across the United States, one whose origins may or may not be found in the skewed sense of a particular world leader. When leaders use their *sensus privatus* rather than *sensus communis* to make judgments that negatively impact our common world, part of that world can begin to look like Raskolnikov's dream. Not only does Raskolnikov's nightmare cause distress in the dreamer (Dostoevsky 1989, p. 462), but the people in the dream are likewise "full of anxiety" (p. 461), "filled with alarm", given the plague's will to destroy common sense as sound practical judgment. This mental corrosion triggers disagreements among individuals—"they did not know how or whom to judge"—eventually culminating in the atomization of the individual and destruction of all social bonds that give *communitas* its meaning. In short, the people afflicted with the contagion lost their minds. Because this affliction infected people throughout the world, the entire world was in peril.

A line of thought can be drawn between Kant's (as cited in Arendt 1978: II) understanding of "insanity [which] is the loss of the *sensus communis*" (p. 268) and his writings on mental illness in "Essay on Maladies of the Head" (Frierson 2011):

In the higher degree of this disturbance [insanity] all kinds of presumed excessively subtle insights swarm through the burned-out brain: the contrived length of the ocean, the interpretation of prophecies, or who knows what hotchpotch of imprudent brain teasing. If the unfortunate person at the same time overlooks the judgments of experience, then he is called *crazy* [italics in original]. (p. 214)

While Kant does not differentiate between a crazy person and a person who engages in crazy behavior, this distinction can be useful for the purposes of this allegory-of-the-present analysis.

In his psychoanalytic study of dreams in *Crime and Punishment*, Lower (1969) argues that Raskolnikov's last dream represents "profound regressive defenses typical of a paranoid delusional" (p. 738). For Lower, Raskolnikov's mind has been deteriorating not only because his worldview (concocted in his article "Concerning Crime") has been shattered but also because there existed "a terrible unbridgeable chasm" (Dostoevsky 1989, p. 460) between himself and the other prisoners. "They regarded him, and he them, with mistrust and hostility" (p. 460). His sense of isolation turns into a profound state of loneliness. For Arendt (1973), loneliness is "the experience of not belonging to the world at all" (p. 475). In loneliness, "common sense" breaks down "because not one man [sic], but men in the plural inhabit the earth" (p. 476). In the case of Covid-19, isolation due in part to social distancing recommendations can lead to loneliness. Loneliness is linked to a loss of "'common sense'—the shared reality that allows us to know ourselves, to know where we end and the world begins, and how we are connected to others" (Gessen 2020, para. 3). It is "unreliable and treacherous" to be enclosed in one's "own particularity of sense data" (Arendt 1973, p. 476). In the end, however, Lower (1969) interprets Raskolnikov's last dream along with the other dreams in the novel as "a product of Dostoevsky's attempt to resolve his own unconscious" problems (Lower 1969, p. 742). For the purposes of thinking allegorically about the novel's last dream, how might Lower's analysis be expanded?

While persons who experience delusions may be able to function in the world normally, the deluded individual cannot decipher between what is real and what is fake. Deluded people, moreover, are "difficult to treat and possibly treatment resistant" (Manschreck 2007, p. 117) because "they deny they are ill" (p. 118). Even a suggestion of illness can

“provoke anger” (p. 118). A deluded person exhibits a range of observable features, such as feelings of grandiosity and persecution. The grandiose type has an “inflated appraisal of one’s worth...” (Monro 2006, p. 140) that can contribute to “a lack of insight”; the persecutory type “has a profound and persistent sense of having been wronged and “ceaselessly and endlessly seek[s] redress” (p. 132). It is not uncommon for this type to engage in litigious battles. Humorlessness is another feature associated with delusional disorder (Manschreck 2007, p. 120; Saß 2001, p. 11305); however, the research does not develop how a lack of humor presents itself other than to say the humorless delusional is easily insulted and responds to perceived insults with excessive force—even if those insults are done in jest. Additionally, “mistakes are usually blamed on others” (p. 11305). The issue of primary concern here is not that the 45th President was mentally unfit for office—for a detailed analysis of his mental health written by 27 psychiatrists and mental health experts, see Lee (2017)—but that he was (and is) dangerous to the United States and the world because he appears to lack or chooses to reject common sense. Common sense is in direct competition with “alternative facts”. The belief in “alternative facts” affects the common sense of a nation. Raskolnikov’s dream teaches us what can happen when common sense is no longer common.

In his televised comments on the Coronavirus Task Force Briefings, Friedman (2020) refers to “a friend, a teacher, Marina Gorbis, a futurist” to describe what made Trump’s health recommendations on Covid-19 dangerous to the public:

[Gorbis] talks about cognitive immunity. And cognitive immunity is our ability to sort out truth from lie, fact from fiction, science from, you know, quackery. And what Trump has done throughout his presidency, but particularly through these briefings, is that he’s destroying our collective cognitive immunity...He is destroying our cognitive immunity and in the process, that’s going to lead to undermining our physical immunity.

That Friedman turns to a teacher who is also a futurist is aligned with the position of this article—namely, that given imminent global threats, there is a dire need for those in positions of prodigious political power to emphasize preventative foresight in educational policy. A curriculum to cultivate preventative foresight can help combat the “presentist myopia” (Kurasawa 2007, p. 113) that has contributed to the Covid-19 humanitarian crisis in (and beyond) the United States. With regard to education policy, the President pressured top health experts to “water down recommendations for the nation’s schools [to] reopen safely” (Baker, Green, and Weiland 2020, para. 1) during the pandemic while also threatening to cut funding from schools that do not fully reopen. His insistence that schools fully reopen (in order to return to the economic stability that initially defined his presidency) undermined the farsighted cosmopolitanism needed to confront “catastrophic futures” (Kurasawa 2007, p. 113). Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos followed up this apparent disregard for the health and safety of the country’s youngest citizens and their educators by asserting that it is not her or the federal government’s responsibility to track school reopening plans. Not surprisingly, educators expressed dismay over the lack of guidance on the part of DeVos and the Trump administration on how to fully reopen schools safely and not fall into chaos (Camera 2020). Recalling Pinar’s (2020) call for submissions to this special issue of *Prospects*, policymakers (like DeVos) not only have the *reactive* responsibility to help make places of education safe from a worldwide plague but also ought to have the *proactive* insight to reimagine classrooms as places for youth to engage urgent questions on global threats. If sites of formal education do not seriously engage with these sorts of existential questions, how will the next generation be able to transform our common world?

Given the state of the world and its imminent world risks, transformation is the only way to prevent, or at least manage, catastrophe.

Kurasawa's (2007) vision of cosmopolitan farsightedness is focused on "putting into practice a sense of responsibility for the future" (p. 97) in order to avoid global injustices. Moreover, Kurasawa believes that looming catastrophes confronting humanity cannot be predicted. This is because once we are certain of the future, it inevitably changes based on a course of action that seeks to hold onto or alter that very future. This does not mean there should be no attempt to make the world a better place. The incapacity to predict the future means that we should "remain ever more vigilant for warning signs of disaster" (p. 106) because we have a duty to do so in such a way that "transcends the conventional bonds of nationality...by virtue of our common humanity" (p. 111). Kurasawa's concept of preventative foresight is grounded in a deep sense of ethical responsibility to humanity built upon "transnational solidaristic relations between persons and groups" (p. 166).

If curriculum policy and practice hope to become proactive toward looming global catastrophes, then teaching toward transnational solidarity would seem to be axiomatic. However, as Gaztambide-Fernández (2020) describes in his explanation of the ways the term solidarity has been problematically employed during this global health crisis, "teaching for solidarity requires relationships, intentions, and actions grounded in explicit ethical and political commitments" (p. 1) when it comes to pandemics and (other) structural inequalities. Because Covid-19 has radically altered the world in ways unimaginable prior to this crisis, he adds, "we are forced to imagine new ways of being with one another" (p. 6). This requires that curriculum policy and practice not only demonstrate ethical and political commitments to issues pertinent to the reality of already existing emergencies like Covid-19 but also, I would add, forefront in the curriculum ways for youth to engage in ethically oriented deliberation about different types of global risks on the horizon—from the concrete to the abstract.

To combat the ways that social bonds and a sense of responsibility for our common world break down, Kurasawa (2007) contends it is incumbent on us to "imagine the kind of world we will be leaving for future generations" (p. 113). This is best done, he says, by studying works of art that provoke the moral imagination and the faculty of judgment. While he maintains that dystopian imaginaries help us to better understand and take action to abate the concerns of our day and days ahead, other imagined worlds, such as the one interpreted here, can hopefully inspire curricular responsiveness to anticipated crises, too. However, the crisis interrogated here, the loss of *sensus communis*, is a more nebulous problem than Covid-19 because it cannot be quantified or empirically ascertained. This does not mean that it is any less deadly than Covid-19, since it can lead to "men kill[ing] one another in senseless rage", as Dostoevsky (1989, p. 461) imagines in Raskolnikov's dream.

Common sense is a "specifically human sense", says Arendt (1978, p. 267), "because communication, i.e., speech, depends on it". Common sense comes about, in part, by placing oneself in the position of another by way of the imagination. When we can imagine the world from another person's vantage point, the more practice we have at stepping into the shoes of another, the better able we are to make sound practical judgments in the world. Following Arendt (1998), "with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world" (p. 176). The fundamental question of speech and action is: "Who are you?" (p. 178). If one does not know who one is, action, which needs "a 'who' attached to it, is meaningless" (pp. 180–181). Such meaninglessness is profoundly disturbing in the case of Covid-19 when, in the words of the 45th President, "There has been so much unnecessary death in this country. It could have been stopped...but somebody a long time ago, it seems, did not

do it that way. And the whole world is suffering because of it” (see Rubin 2020, para. 1). It is not disclosed who this somebody is or ought to be.

The question of *who* is also found in Raskolnikov’s dream. One of the effects of the plague is that people “went mad” (Dostoevsky 1989, p. 461), so mad that those infected could no longer understand or trust one other. Subsequently, the people in the dream began fighting and killing each other. But there was hope even as the plague spread wider:

In the whole world only a few could save themselves, a chosen handful of the pure, who were destined to found a new race of men and a new life, and to renew and cleanse the earth; but nobody had ever seen them anywhere, nobody had heard their voices or their words. (p. 462)

This new race of men is argued to be a symbolic representation and reversal of Raskolnikov’s extraordinary people theory because the saviors are not “Napoleonic supermen” (Lower 1969, p. 738). They are those who act with humility and care for the world. The dream is also said to act as a vehicle that transports Raskolnikov back to sanity and “humanity” (Mortimer 1956, p. 113) while serving the remainder of his prison sentence. However, the dream can also be interpreted as the loss of *sensus communis* in a time of global crisis and as a world risk unto itself. Risks increase in a world where individuals, especially those who wield tremendous power, do not exercise common sense, as common sense requires a multiplicity of *whos* who come together when forming judgments and reflecting on human affairs (Arendt 1978, p. 258). Without the *who* of *whos*, who will take responsibility for our common world?

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Hannah Spector is an Associate Professor of Education at Penn State University – Harrisburg. Her primary research interest involves the interplay among politics, ethics, and education. Her research is published in academic journals such as *Curriculum Inquiry*; *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*; *Studies in Philosophy and Education*; and *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*. She co-edited a special issue of the *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* (2017, with R. Lake and T. Kress) on *Maxine Greene and the Pedagogy of Social Imagination: An Intellectual Genealogy*, which has been republished as a book with Routledge (2018). Hannah has received several awards for her scholarship – most recently the 2019 Early Career Scholar Award from the American Educational Research Association SIG Critical Issues in Curriculum and Cultural Studies. Currently, she is writing a monograph titled: *Centralizing Responsibility in Education: Political, Ethical, and Environmental Responsibilities*.