

Dear Watershed Community,

I just want to share a short note as we all head off for break! I've had the pleasure of being part of a book group (with other educators) reading [The Good Ancestor: A radical prescription for long-term thinking](#) by Roman Krznaric. This title was inspired by a quote from Jonas Salk, "The most important question we must ask ourselves is, 'Are we being good ancestors?'"

It's been a thought-provoking read, pushing me to think (with the other educators in the group) about how our society typically rewards short-term thinking over long-term thinking, how this constrains what we can achieve together, and how schools might be able to help young people think more long-term.

A few quotes that struck me:

The first lesson history teaches is that nothing is inevitable until it happens. We should feel hope when remembering that colonialism and slavery came to an end. We should feel hope in the transformative potential of the six ways to think long [Deep-Time Humility, Legacy Mindset, Intergenerational Justice, Cathedral Thinking, Holistic Forecasting, and Transcendent Goal] and in the emerging time rebellion dedicated to winning the tug-of-war against short-termism. We should acknowledge too that future generations would never forgive us if we gave up while there was still the possibility of change, no matter the odds. We must hear their voices in our dreams and heed them in our decisions.

[see below for a description of the six ways to think long]

It is worth giving yourself a death nudge with a penetrating question about the legacies we leave, which was first asked by the long-term thinker Stewart Brand: What might our descendants wish we had done better for them?

Here's a future I would like to see across the democratic world: Every few years, citizens aged 12 and over would be randomly selected to take part in a "good ancestor" citizens' assembly, broadly based on Japan's Future Design movement and Ireland's Citizens' Assembly. These "intergenerational juries" would debate the long-term issues of the day—perhaps whether the government's target for reaching net-zero carbon emissions should be brought forward by a decade, or whether new regulations are needed on AI technologies.

Lowering the voting age from 18 to 16, as has happened in Austria and Brazil, on the grounds that longer-living populations in many nations mean that the interests of older voters systematically outweigh those of disenfranchised youth.

There is a lot here for us to think about, and this is just scratching the surface. I wonder if we could take a small step in schools – first by just raising the ideas of long-term thinking, and by asking this question (from the book), "What obligations and responsibilities do we have to the generations who will succeed us?" I would love to hear our students' answers to this question. I'm sure I would learn a lot.

Well, enough for now.

I wish you all a great break. And thanks for reading.

Warmly,

Tim

The tug-of-war for time



Six drivers of short-termism

Six ways to think long

Tyranny of the Clock
the acceleration of time
since the Middle Ages



Deep-Time Humility
grasp we are an eyeblink
in cosmic time

Digital Distraction
the hijacking of attention
by technology



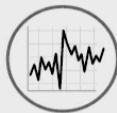
Legacy Mindset
be remembered
well by posterity

Political Presentism
myopic focus
on the next election



Intergenerational Justice
consider the seventh
generation ahead

Speculative Capitalism
volatile boom-bust
financial markets



Cathedral Thinking
plan projects beyond
a human lifetime

Networked Uncertainty
the rise of global risk
and contagion



Holistic Forecasting
envision multiple pathways
for civilization

Perpetual Progress
the pursuit of
endless economic growth



Transcendent Goal
strive for
one-planet thriving

Graphic: Nigel Hawtin