


REVIEW

A review of “Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience: Confronting Cultural and Ecological Crisis”

Williams, L. (2022). Indigenous intergenerational resilience: Confronting cultural and ecological crisis. Taylor and Francis.

Review Author

Bronwyn A. Sutton 

Deakin University, Burwood, VIC, Australia

Email: bsutton@deakin.edu.au

Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience: Confronting Cultural and Ecological Crisis responds to the need for a profound shift within relationships and social structures towards decolonisation. Lewis Williams asserts that this requires deep listening to more-than-human relatives, the restoration of Indigenous lifeways and demolition of dominant settler paradigms. This requires finding and re-finding tūrangawaewae, “the places, spaces and peoples we belong to and with whom we are powerful” (p. 21). Williams describes her identity as a person connected to people and place, though displaced and on a “lifelong journey of reconnecting with [my] Indigenous roots” (p. 10). She returns to this journey throughout to describe her experiences of “re-knowing” what it is to be of place and bound by whakapapa (genealogy) to the Tauranga Moana that her tīpuna (ancestors) have become Indigenous to as Ngāi Te Rangī.

I pause here to explain, following Williams’ lead, who I am and where I am from. I was born on, and live, work and research on Wurrundjeri Country, unceded Indigenous lands also known as the outskirts of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia. My people are no longer Indigenous to the places we live now, my ancestors were “long ago colonised”¹ and have experienced dislocation from their traditional places. I experience feeling deeply connected to multispecies kin (Haraway, 2016; Kimmerer, 2015). As an educator interested in environmental leadership, I understand that my responsibility for living and learning ethically with place involves developing deeper relations with place and people. This means paying attention to located Indigenous knowledges of place(s) and foregrounding Indigenous philosophies in thinking about our pedagogical practices. I engage with the book from this positionality, which includes living in a location that is culturally, geographically and politically different to those in which the book is situated.

Lewis Williams integrates some of her previous work into this book as she explores the question of what forms Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience practice could take in response to the related crises of westernisation, neo-colonialism and climate and social injustices, in ways that are connected with people and place. Williams shares insights from interviews, conversations and collaborations with people who are Indigenous and no longer Indigenous to place. Through this she balances ontological and cosmological stories common to Indigenous peoples globally with geographically and culturally situated Indigenous knowledge of place, and her own story of understanding who she is and where she is from. Williams integrates Indigenous and Western scholarship in traversing the fields of transformative sustainability education, public health and

social innovation in what could be described as a practice-led exploration of the possibilities for Indigenous-led socio-ecological climate activism.

In Chapter One, Williams situates her position and the book within the global context and timespace of intersecting crises of climate and social injustice through events including the 25th Convention of the Parties (COP) on climate change, the global pandemic of COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter campaign, and the defacing of statues celebrating colonialism. Describing the climate crisis as a risk amplifier rather than a problem related to the emissions of carbon, Williams explains climate and social injustices as ecological crises, born out of the cultural, political and generational disconnection of people from place.

Chapter two furthers the contextual discussion of intersecting crises through voices of those who are Indigenous and no longer Indigenous to place (Williams et al, 2017) and who have lived experiences of working in the areas of climate and intergenerational resilience. It includes an extensive discussion of the fractures and traumas of colonialism and colonialist structures that impact Indigenous peoples globally. Through chapter three, Williams introduces the practice of Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience, describing its paradigms by building on a framework of scaling deep, scaling out, and scaling up developed in previous work (Williams & Claxton, 2017; Williams, 2018). Through this engages with and explores the ways empowerment has been constructed through western epistemologies, and argues for awareness of the worldviews that support our epistemologies including who we are and where we are from. This chapter offers a deep and wide ranging overview of what Williams considers important for human and ecological wellbeing. Arguing that diverse onto-epistemological positions and rationales for taking action are necessary, Williams moves to foreground Indigenous epistemologies as critical in regenerating relations with place, providing a rationale for the remainder of the book.

In chapter four Williams explores the possibilities of rongoā Māori: the holistic system of healing that contains Maori philosophy for regenerating health and culture given it is “a state and practice which continually enacts the principles of balance and reciprocity” (p. 106). Noting that the right to practice traditional lifeways is protected by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and that this right was not ceded through Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi), Williams argues rongoā Māori should be the basis for public health in Aotearoa. In chapter five Williams shares her theoretical and conceptual framework for finding tūrangawaewae and reconnecting with people, place, and Indigenous lifeways, explaining this underpins Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience work. The framework draws on Maori philosophies and ways of knowing, including whakapapa, genealogical connections between kin; dreaming as a way of knowing; Pūrākau, traditional Maori narratives containing philosophical life wisdom, as a way of sense making; and consideration of Indigenous knowledges from a global perspective.

Chapter six is a revisiting of Williams’ collective work with Tracy Bunda, Nicholas XEMFOLTW Claxton, and Iain MacKinnon (Williams et al., 2017) around place pedagogies of intergenerational resilience. Here she analyses pedagogical issues that surfaced while developing the inaugural summit of the Alliance for Intergenerational Resilience to suggest that cultural and geographical diversity is generative when it is supported by knowledge of our epistemological lineages and political ecologies. In chapter seven, Williams discusses a project with immigrant and refugee women in Toronto in an effort deepen the conceptualisation of *resilience* and *intergenerational resilience*. Chapter eight returns to the context of multiple global crises that Williams describes as interconnected challenges caused by “unravelling of our whakapapa” (p. 211), with reminders of the complexities involved in decolonisation, the importance of developing capacity to ride the storm, and of the need for love. Williams concludes with a story of being captured by the healing nature of the ngahere (bush) on damaged lands, which needs diversity to survive, suggesting it is the answer. I am left to wonder what simple questions I might ask as I move “towards living the truth of our reciprocity with other living beings.” (p. 7).

Williams (2022) describes this book as for those involved in Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience work: that is, work that involves connection and knowledge sharing between

generations and between humans and non-humans “in ways that centre Indigenous world views, traditional ecological knowledge and lifeways, and leadership” (p.13). It embodies the onto-epistemologies, principles and practices of Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience in its structure, content and impact. While it doesn't necessarily offer prescriptive solutions for *how* to enact Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience, nor what specific responses to climate and social justice might look like, it offers leadership in thinking with ontologies and epistemologies beyond the binaries of Indigenous-non-Indigenous, which Williams argues is necessary in recovering our relationship with the life-world we inhabit, regardless of our identity and our level of connection or disconnection with people, place, culture and genealogy. I found this engaging and thought provoking, and at times unsettling: which I suspect is a necessary part of continuing to grapple with our response-abilities for enacting more ethical place pedagogies. As Williams asserts “we are our relationships, past, present and future” (p. 14). *Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience* is recommended as a provocative read for those working across the spectrum of environmental and sustainability education, especially those interested in supporting stronger connections with place, and learning with Indigenous ways of knowing.

Acknowledgements. None.

Competing interests. None.

Financial support. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Ethical standard. Nothing to note.

Note

1 Williams “borrows” Amba Sepie’s (2018) term at times to describe people who are no longer Indigenous to place.

References

- Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kimmerer, R.W. (2015). Nature needs a new pronoun: To stop the age of extinction, let's start by ditching “it. *Yes! Magazine*, Retrieved 13/2/2023.
- Sepie, A. (2018). *Tracing the motherline. Earth Elders, decolonizing worldview and planetary futurity (Unpublished doctoral thesis)*. New Zealand: Te Whare Wānanga O Waitaha/University of Canterbury.
- Williams, L. (2018). Transformative sustainability education and empowerment practice on indigenous lands. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 16(4), 344–364.
- Williams, L. (2022). *Indigenous intergenerational resilience (Routledge Studies in Indigenous Peoples and Policy)*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge Kindle Edition, 26.
- Williams, L., Bunda, T., Claxton, N., & MacKinnon, I. (2017). A global de-colonial praxis of sustainability — Undoing epistemic violences between indigenous peoples and those no longer indigenous to place. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 47(1), 41–53.
- Williams, L., & Claxton, N. (2017). Recultivating intergenerational resilience: Possibilities for “scaling deep” through disruptive pedagogies of decolonization and reconciliation. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 22, 58–79.

Author Biography

Bronwyn A. Sutton is an educator, activist and researcher who uses embodied, arts-based and collaborative approaches in her practice. She researches leadership, climate justice activism, public and place pedagogies and transformative learning from Wurrundjeri Country, unceded Indigenous lands also known as the fringes of Melbourne, Australia. She has particular interest in leadership and learning in informal, nonformal, and community places and spaces. Bronwyn is exploring professional and practice transformation with educators whose work involves leading communities towards environmental sustainability and action on climate change as a PhD candidate at Deakin University.

Cite this article: Sutton, B.A. (2023). A review of “*Indigenous Intergenerational Resilience: Confronting Cultural and Ecological Crisis*”. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 39, 429–431. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2023.25>