



17th Annual Symposium | August 12-13, 2021 | Virtual

Hospitality through languages: Pain, joy, gist
A Reflection from the LESLLA 2021 Board of Directors
and Virtual Symposium Committee

Patsy Egan

Hamline University School of Education, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

Andrea Echelberger

Adult Academic Program Robbinsdale, Crystal, Minnesota, USA

*I celebrate the sacredness of the gathering.
We will not leave the same way we entered.
We will be transformed in one way or another.
-Tawona Sithole*

When the LESLLA community entered the virtual event space for the keynote talk on August 11, 2021, we didn't think of it as a sacred gathering. We simply clicked on the link, adjusted our headphones, and perhaps took a sip of coffee and absentmindedly checked our email while we waited for the talk to begin.

It began with singing.

Maybe like us organizers, you were a bit taken aback. Maybe you put down your phone, made the zoom full-screen, and leaned forward in your chair, curious to see what would happen next.

The next hour was full of anything but what we have come to expect in an academic conference. As speaker Dr. Alison Phipps reminded us, *how* we gather matters. We were hosting this virtual gathering, an alternative way to reconnect the LESLLA community across the globe

during a pandemic. There was space for the usual suspects: academics and teachers, and all their slide decks, handouts, Q&A, and tech glitches.

But this time, there was also space for art. Space for music, for poetry. By welcoming Dr. Phipps and artist Tawona Sithole, we expanded our meeting space in new ways. *How we gather matters*, and when academic ways took a step back, something new came forward. Just as Dr. Phipps reminded us in her talk that when English/dominant language takes a step back, we redistribute power. We find that vulnerability and emotion fill in where space has been made. We sink into something more grounded, more human, and we are able to see each other more clearly.

A thread of hospitality runs through any gathering, whether it's a wedding, a dinner party, a conference, or a classroom. Wherever people are gathered, there are hosts and those hosted. On a larger scale, immigration is also a gathering of those who already inhabit that space, and those just arriving. "[Immigrant] integration is a question of mutual, reciprocal hospitality. It's the opposite of assimilation. It's formed in the meeting together, and the making together. We can't know it until we make it together," said Dr. Phipps.

And so it is. As Sithole said, referencing a proverb, "We know the way because our feet have beaten a path. That is how we find our way." We can become the LESLLA community we crave by walking the path we envision for ourselves. Already LESLLA prides itself by hosting a symposium in an English dominant country followed by a non-English dominant country. The heritage language resource hub on the website is extraordinary. How can we continue to make space for each other, as a truly global community of educators? Efforts for more multilingualism might mean more symposium sessions in various languages, as well as multilingual journal articles, blogposts, and social media updates. It might mean more advocacy for immigrant integration that pushes against current policies that mistreat our students, ways that go against how we know people should gather hospitably. It might mean widening our familiar circle - explicitly inviting more teachers, researchers, volunteers, and students into the LESLLA space.

What would it mean to practice radical, reciprocal hospitality in our classrooms? What might happen if our academic and dominant language tendencies took a step back? If we made space for art, music, and poetry in the midst of it all? If students' and teachers' roles were more fluid, and the creation and nurturing of learning spaces was more shared? As the title of Phipps and Sithole's keynote talk demonstrates, we might find that *grief*, *joy*, and *gist* all find their way in.

We can make space for each other, for our students, and for new ways. And as Sithole said so eloquently in his welcoming remarks, "We will not leave the same way we entered. We will be transformed in one way or another."

Poet Joseph Cherry writes,
*If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
 we must be
 bold enough to step into our discomfort,
 brave enough to be clumsy there,
 loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.*

May we, as the LESLLA community, be so bold, so brave, and so loving.

Resources

- Full recording of this keynote talk, August 2021:
Hospitality Through Languages: Pain, Joy, Gist
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTcIX6fJ0AU&t=219s>
- Poem “Good English” - recording from Tawona Sithole
<https://vimeo.com/98254165>
- Book of Poetry by Alison Phipps and Tawona Sithole
The Warriors Who Do Not Fight
<https://www.ionabooks.com/product/the-warriors-who-do-not-fight/>