

# Promoting Belonging among Adult Learners through Sharing and Feedback

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This article highlights how intentionally equipping adult learners to engage in productive and kind sharing and feedback intersects with writerly self-efficacy and belonging. Using qualitative data gathered from a community-engaged ethnographic study of a community writing group for adult undergraduate students called Our Writing Group (OWG), I ask, how can sharing and feedback practices help build and strengthen a sense of community within the writing group and avoid damage to writers' confidence and senses of safety and belonging in OWG? This is important because a writerly self-efficacy lens provides a helpful framework for sharing and feedback on writing across the curriculum that honors adult learners' academic and life experiences. Thus, it's essential that these practices be intentionally crafted to augment writerly self-efficacy and that writerly self-efficacy be seriously considered in discussions of sharing and feedback more broadly.

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## Introduction

In January 2020, in a small back room at the Venture classroom space, I facilitated the first meeting of Our Writing Group (OWG)<sup>1</sup> around a circular table with four other writers. I had been volunteering and working with my community partner, Venture—a credit-bearing, humanities-based, university-sponsored program for low-income adults<sup>2</sup>—for over eighteen months as a grant-writing intern and writing center instructor when I proposed starting a writing group for alumni of the program. After the initial two-semester Venture course ends, opportunities for program graduates to continue writerly development and build solidarity are limited. OWG fills this gap by providing consistent time, space, and support for Venture alumni to write with others without necessarily moving toward a degree.

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1. All names used in this article are pseudonyms, including Our Writing Group (OWG). Participants of the writing group chose their own pseudonyms, while I chose the pseudonyms for the group and adjacent partner program.

2. To apply for admission to the credit-bearing, university-sponsored program, a prospective student must be at least eighteen years old, have a high school diploma or GED/HSED, and demonstrate financial need (income at or near the federal poverty level).

OWG operates adjacently to Venture: it is a community writing group facilitated by and for graduates of Venture, and OWG benefits from some of Venture's infrastructure, such as using its Zoom Business account, its physical space for in-person annual community readings, and its funds to print the group's biannual magazine. While it started in person before the COVID-19 pandemic, since the fall of 2020 OWG has met weekly on Zoom, and members of the group, including me, take turns facilitating meetings on topics of our choice. The ten regular members of the writing group who agreed to participate in my research range in age from 23 to 66. They are primarily low-income adults of color, and they are either currently based in the Midwest or originally from the Midwest. Some members of the writing group have earned terminal degrees since graduating from Venture; others are currently taking courses toward terminal degrees; and many are not currently enrolled in any credit-bearing, postsecondary-education coursework. Group members are teachers, parents, students, working professionals, retirees, storytellers, poets, rappers, novelists, short-story writers, kid lit authors, life-writers, community activists, and much more. Each two-hour meeting of OWG includes a check-in, an introduction to the member-facilitator's chosen topic, time to respond to optional prompts connected to the meeting's theme, and time to share and get feedback. Members of OWG have facilitated on topics ranging from meditation and women's suffrage to self-actualization and implicit bias. OWG creates a space for adult writers with economic barriers to feel capable of writing and supported in their work.

This article highlights how intentionally equipping adult learners to engage in productive and kind sharing and feedback intersects with writerly self-efficacy and belonging. After a review of literature showing how sharing and feedback have been theorized to impact writerly self-efficacy, as well as how Peter Elbow's teacherless feedback model supports the development of writerly self-efficacy in adult undergraduate writers,<sup>3</sup> I discuss researcher field notes about OWG meetings, OWG participant interviews, and anonymous contributions by participants from the 2020–2021 academic year to collaborative field texts gathered for an IRB-approved, community-engaged ethnography of the writing group. Specifically, I ask, how can sharing and

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3. I use the term *adult undergraduates* throughout this piece to refer to a heterogeneous group of students who have followed alternative pathways to and through higher education. The word "adult," whether attached to "learners," "students," or "undergraduates," makes room for histories, constraints, hopes, pressures, ambitions, responsibilities, pasts, and futures that can be productively included and addressed in educational spaces. The comprehensive modifier *adult* doesn't necessarily preclude students in the eighteen-to-twenty-two or over-twenty-three age ranges, while the term more often used, *nontraditional*, usually refers to students over the age of twenty-five without a college degree (U.S. Department of Education) and highlights a lack that reflects larger problems regarding race(ism) and class(ism) in higher education and the field of writing studies.

feedback practices help build and strengthen a sense of community within the writing group, thereby avoiding damage to writers' confidence and their sense of safety and belonging in OWG? This is important because a writerly self-efficacy lens provides a helpful framework for sharing and giving feedback on writing across the curriculum that honors adult learners' varying academic experiences and their substantial life experience. I demonstrate how the group enacts love as an action (hooks) and operates with a rhetoric of respect (Rousculp) in OWG meetings through its sharing and feedback practices. Consequently, I establish that sharing and feedback practices can help or hinder the growth of adult undergraduate writers, like those in OWG and those in writing courses across disciplines. Thus, it's essential that these practices be intentionally crafted to augment writerly self-efficacy, and that writerly self-efficacy be seriously considered in broader discussions of sharing and feedback.

## Literature Review

Writerly self-efficacy is crucial for adult undergraduates because they have been historically disenfranchised from literacy (Schantz; Brown; Lundberg et al.; Graff; Perry et al.). Intentional sharing and feedback practices can help writers—especially adult undergraduate writers, who have a lifetime of experience that guides the writing they produce and the feedback they give—recognize and push back against inequitable, marginalizing systemic conditions that they've experienced in other academic and/or writing contexts. As writing studies scholars have theorized, sharing and feedback impact writerly self-efficacy, or students' understandings of their own writing abilities (Pajares and Valiante). Basically, a writer's success in achieving the purpose of a given writing task deeply depends on effectively reaching their audience; it therefore follows that sharing and feedback practices can help boost a writer's confidence by proving that their writing is accomplishing what they intend.

Scholarship in writing studies has also indicated that writing groups can be a significant wellspring of writerly self-efficacy due to their democratization of writing ("Question of Time," Mathieu et al.; Westbrook; Highberg et al.). This is because self-efficacy in writers doesn't bloom in a vacuum; it is cultivated by "engage[ment] with other humans" because writing is a cognitive *and* a social practice (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 65). Writing groups provide a particularly useful and regular opportunity for sharing and feedback. When writers listen to or read other writers' work, as typically happens in writing groups, they are exposed to new or different writing processes and perspectives, such as diverse decision-making models and an array of writing strategies and tools, that can enhance their writerly self-efficacy. Learning happens organically in collaborative writing groups, where writers form a community with other like-minded individuals looking for support and motivation (Highberg et al.); thus,

writing groups possess “considerable potential for strengthening writing self-efficacy” (Bruning and Kauffman 167).

Generally, sharing and feedback practices intersect with writerly self-efficacy in that they combat the notion that “writing is an individual activity,” which can induce anxiety in writers of all levels and abilities (Bruning and Kauffman 167). Through sharing and feedback practices, writing groups offer a less competitive learning environment where members can see “peer models make errors, engage in coping behaviors . . . , and verbalize emotive statements reflecting low confidence and achievement” (Pajares and Valiante 167), which can help other members feel like they are not alone; in addition, writing group members can be encouraged by and learn from other members’ experiences with overcoming difficulties and achieving success (Bruning and Kauffman 161). Thus, sharing and feedback practices within writing groups present great opportunities for writers to engage in vicarious experiences that enhance their writerly self-efficacy: they are able to identify writers who are similar to them (Pajares and Valiante 167), and they engage in important reflection on their own writing choices as well as act on their own writing aspirations in ways that are both similar to and different from their peers (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 78).

I assert that the sharing and feedback practices that are most appropriate for adult undergraduates, and that engage them in these reflections and aspirations, are those outlined in Peter Elbow’s teacherless writing-class model because they have at their foundation a sense of writerly competence: a belief that *all* pieces of writing have an effect on readers (78). Importantly, teacherless feedback helps position writers as having agency, experienced, and competent. In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow asserts that writers can make substantial improvements in their writing by sharing their work with fellow writers “in a supportive atmosphere, often with no response other than appreciation.” They can “get responses from readers based on the readers’ efforts to understand the writing and enjoy it and tell the story of what was happening in their minds as they were reading—rather than trying to judge it and figure out how to make it better” (xix–xx). This is natural for community writing groups like OWG, according to Paula Mathieu and colleagues, who write,

When we have witnessed community writing groups, the participants will often stress the positive and productive elements of a piece—an image that works, a sentence that captures a local moment. In an academic class, the next move might then be to critique the piece of writing as well—the word choice is a bit redundant, there is no satisfactory conclusion. This secondary move, the critique, will often not occur in community writing groups. Instead, there is a sense that positive comments can serve the same function of moving the writer toward their ultimate goal. (*Circulating Communities* 13)

Clearly, writers' self-efficacy can improve when they are "being understood" and "hearing readers' experience of [their] words and trying to have their experience" because "different readings help the writer see [their] text through more lenses" (Elbow xix–xx). Elbow's reader-based and writer-based feedback models served as the foundation for the feedback practices taken up in OWG in order to enhance participants' writerly self-efficacy specifically and the democratization of writing more generally.

The scholarly literature on writerly self-efficacy, sharing, and feedback may lean into the transfer benefits of writing with others, but the writers in OWG and I are more interested in the community-building potential of intentional sharing and feedback practices. Community writing groups help build relationships around writing, demonstrating how writing is a relational action and product. Sharing and feedback practices are one way to realize the relational potential of writing because they can reveal the "mixings of sometimes conflicting and sometimes conjoining beliefs and purposes" that characterize a community (Harris 20). Thus, the relationships between writers that sharing and feedback can help build are an even bigger boon to writerly confidence because, in our experience, they help us *feel* like writers and help us *feel* like we are a part of something larger than ourselves—like we *belong* to a community of writers that may even extend beyond OWG. Participating in the sharing and feedback procedures of OWG helps us feel seen and understood as writers; sharing our writing and giving and receiving feedback during meetings serves as the site for building relationships between members. This is important because OWG was started for exactly that purpose: to continue to build long-term, trusting relationships among writers after graduation from Venture. OWG members' responses to writing don't always have to be about writing craft or producing actionable and specific feedback; instead, their responses can be about the content of a piece, experiences writers share, or what listeners learn about the writer as a fellow human being. The reader- and writer-based feedback models used in OWG help members develop sustained relationships with one another, and building trust between members can not only lead to more informed feedback but also influence how productively feedback is received.

## Sharing and Feedback as Love and Respect

Sharing and feedback routines are one way group members practice love and respect for writing and for one another, helping Our Writing Group promote a sense of belonging. This is especially meaningful in the face of previous writing experiences that made the adult undergraduates in OWG feel *less than* or like an outlier. In fact, one piece of feedback in the two collaborative field texts from the fall of 2020 reads as follows: "[Writing is] a hidden talent, and I'm leery of sharing. Being misunderstood

in real life, I can only expect to be misunderstood in my writing. It sometimes seems that people aren't willing to give me criticism about my writing." Before getting to know one another very well, we could not realize the *full* positive potential of sharing and feedback in OWG. Love, as theorized by bell hooks, and a rhetoric of respect, as conceptualized by Tiffany Rousculp, needed to be cultivated first.

Love, according to hooks, is a combination of knowledge, care, commitment, responsibility, and trust (195). While bell hooks writes about the practice of love as a move toward liberation from white supremacy (195), the practice of love in OWG involves sharing one's writing as a move toward liberation from low writerly self-efficacy. Seen through the lens of hooks's five factors of love, sharing in OWG is what moves the group beyond just a group of individual writers and promotes belonging: members demonstrate *care* for writing, for one another, and for themselves; demonstrate their *commitment* to causes and to one another; demonstrate their *knowledge* and expertise; take *responsibility* for the group; and build on their shared experiences from the original humanities-based course, the writing group itself, and a shared commitment to the regular practice of writing in a community to develop *trust* in one another. This practice of love is nicely summed up in two contributions to the October 2020 collaborative field text: one member wrote, "I think the biggest thing is that we trust the integrants of our group and we share similar experiences so I feel understood and relate [to them]"; another remarked, "OWG is special because [it] helps us to feel we are one whole family so we can trust each other." As is apparent from these field text contributions from just a couple months into the semester, OWG members trusted one another to listen and engage authentically with good intentions. The sense of respect, comfort, and belonging that ensued helped the writers in OWG experience major sources of writerly self-efficacy, such as a sense of mastery and vicarious experiences.

For example, sharing and feedback are mechanisms of OWG through which members gain knowledge about themselves and about writing. This is really important for members, as one contributor pointed out in the November 2020 collaborative field text: "[This writing group] is more enriching because we listen and discuss. Others I've been involved in, no one else wanted to share. You can't learn by just listening all the time." By listening and discussing, as mentioned by this OWG member, writers in the group are enacting love as theorized by hooks because they are exchanging knowledge: members express how much they value the knowledge they gain from listening to each other's writing, which in turn contributes to a sense of mastery and writerly self-efficacy. In fact, throughout the fall of 2020, members' feedback to one another was largely about validating folks' experiences and responses to prompts, enabling another source of writerly self-efficacy—vicarious experience, or "observing others' performances and assessing one's capabilities in relationship to

what is observed” (Bruning and Kauffman 161). Initially, focused on my role as a writing center instructor, I viewed OWG members’ affective reactions to one another as less important than actionable suggestions because they weren’t about the writing. Members did not typically ask for more details, talk about a line or image that stood out to them, or mention craft, organization, or engagement. Instead, members generally talked about the content of stories and poems and gave positive (albeit vague) feedback, like “I loved it,” “that was really good,” and “I can’t wait to see where it goes.” However, by engaging in community listening, or listening that prioritizes a community’s values rather than outside narratives (Rowan and Cavallaro), I recognized how these responses were important to building a community in OWG because they demonstrated *care* (another of hooks’s factors of love). OWG members’ responses didn’t always have to be about the writing process but could be a means of connecting with the writer, thereby strengthening personal, loving relationships within the group and promoting belonging.

Furthermore, the responses to OWG writers (as opposed to their writing) were cultivating a “rhetoric of respect,” which Tiffany Rousculp, director of a community writing center, says “requires . . . maintain[ing] a solid faith in a potential partner’s own capability and in their agency to determine what they needed or wanted” (27). As in bell hooks’s theorization of love, trust is central to a rhetoric of respect (80). For Rousculp, a rhetoric of respect allowed the community writing center she directed in Salt Lake City to “be a place of collaborative experimentation, a place to take risks without evaluation, where people from all different backgrounds could come to work on any kind of writing task” (47). A similar description could be used to describe OWG: it is a space where writing is not evaluated but shared and responded to responsibly. That is, OWG writers take responsibility for the writing they share as well as the feedback they give and receive as part of enacting love for and within the group. This is why viewing OWG’s sharing and feedback practices through the lens of hooks’s five factors of love makes sense—because writers in the group *love* OWG. As one member wrote in the March 2021 collaborative field text, “I love everything about OWG but I [especially] love when people share their writing because many times [they] inspire me to keep writing.” This feeling is also expressed in another contribution to the same collaborative field text: “I love hearing the different voices throughout the writing process, and I have gained many different perspectives about writing in general, and about my own as well.” In the April 2021 collaborative field text, another contributor wrote, “The OWG also is the healthiest place to get feedback on writing that I’ve ever been involved with! There are no haters in the OWG so everything that is said to you about your writing is said with love[,] so instead of deflecting critique you internalize criticism so you can come week after week with hotter material.” These participants specifically mention how much they love OWG’s

sharing and feedback practices, which enhance their writerly self-efficacy: not only do these practices give writers diverse examples of authentic voices and perspectives, topics to write about, and audiences to reach, but they also provide them with a greater understanding of their own writing process. In the words of another contributor, “[OWG] has given me confidence in the writing that I have shared with the group.”

To reiterate, OWG members, in listening to others’ writing, were able to gain a sense of other group members’ performances and capabilities in relation to their own, establishing the group as a source of both affinity and aspiration and thereby contributing to members’ writerly self-efficacy. Furthermore, feedback that validates writers’ experiences and responses to prompts offers an important mastery experience that can yield writerly self-efficacy for members, as those responses communicate that a piece was successful. Thus, OWG writers’ instincts that a piece of writing is or is not successful were bolstered by social interactions facilitated by the group’s sharing and feedback practices from (nearly) the beginning of the fall semester. Nonetheless, as the fall progressed, it became clear that the adult writers in OWG were unsure of *how* to give and receive *actionable* feedback on various pieces of writing, many of which were written in the moment during group meetings. In this way, the adult undergraduate writers in OWG were not unlike other college-level writers, in first-year writing courses and beyond, who develop over time the skills necessary for giving and incorporating productive feedback as a result of direct instruction and practice.

In hindsight, I recognize how augmenting writerly self-efficacy and promoting belonging through community-building went hand-in-hand from the beginning in OWG. The writers in the group were teaching me that good feedback stems from love and mutual respect: treating each other with love and respect helped members come to trust one another, providing a foundation for giving informed feedback with the best intentions. This is important given OWG members’ experiences sharing their writing in other spaces that have had detrimental effects on their writerly self-efficacy. For example, during our interview, Sol, a Mexican woman in her thirties, shared that

there was another group that somebody invited me to be part of with people that has already published books, and I thought maybe this group will help me, you know, but it’s so intimidating. It’s so intimidating and it’s only, I mean, yeah, it’s only in English and, but, most people is white, and I just have this difficulty, like, trusting, is it real? Or is it, it doesn’t feel real. It feels kind of like business.

Sol makes clear that vicarious experience as a source of self-efficacy only works when writers are learning from other writers with whom they can strongly identify or whom they aspire to emulate (Bruning and Kauffman 161). The first writing group Sol tried was not a positive experience because those members came from such

different backgrounds, which made it hard for her to connect with and trust them. Alternatively, sharing and feedback in OWG help inspire Sol. In the same part of our interview, she said,

Well, when I share my writing, I like the feedback. I feel like it makes me a better writer, it makes me to reflect on the things that the people point out. It helps me grow definitely. And, but also listening to other writers, because, for example, there is a couple of people in the group that . . . write with a lot of passion, and they use a vocabulary that is different than the one that I use. But it's beautiful. And so it's just like . . . wow, you know, like inspire me, like, I want to keep writing because I want to get to that level. You know, or I want to keep writing because, yeah, I want to share something the same.

Sol's experience in OWG enhances her writerly self-efficacy by inspiring her to keep writing and helping her to (in her own words) "grow." Claudia, an Italian American woman in her forties, shared a similar sentiment:

[OWG has] helped me with confidence in my writing, like I said . . . I'm not very good at sharing my writing with people just because, I don't know, a lot of people don't know me on that level, I guess. And so it's weird. But I also thought that a lot of people could relate to the stuff that I wrote in [OWG]. So that's why it inspired me to share.

Importantly, Claudia and Sol's comments demonstrate how their writerly self-efficacy—and that of the other low-income adult undergraduate members of OWG—was uniquely augmented by participation in OWG, especially due to the group's sharing and feedback practices. What's possible in OWG because of affinity within the group had not been possible elsewhere for OWG writers. In addition, listening to each other's writing as well as the responses to other members' writing during that first semester helped members of the group feel understood and understand the impact of their words on an authentic audience, even though much of the feedback they were receiving did not necessarily provide them with next steps.

Upon reflecting on the fall semester of OWG, and through conducting interviews with participants like those cited above, I recognized that OWG members might benefit from peer-review training similar to that which writing center tutors receive and which writing instructors give to students in their classes. In the spirit of writing center approaches and values, such training should "meet [the] writers where they are" in order to enhance the already positive effects of feedback and sharing in OWG (Nichols and Williams 95). I conducted such training during our second meeting in the spring of 2021. I began by explaining that the workshop was meant to "challenge us all to offer more critical and constructive feedback to one another." On the initial

presentation slide, I wrote that this means continuing to be supportive, challenging one another to always push our writing to the next level, and operating according to the belief that no piece of writing is ever truly finished—it's just put away for a while. To accomplish these goals, we can respond as readers and as writers to each other's work using our emotions and our opinions about what makes writing "good." Aloud, I added, "We each have our own ideas of what is good."

I continued my presentation to OWG by defining peer review as an opportunity for writers to articulate what they are trying to say in their pieces and a chance for attentive readers to tell writers what they're hearing and what isn't coming across clearly. OWG members added that it's a respectful, noncompetitive, and supportive practice, clearly building on the love and rhetoric of respect built throughout our fall 2020 meetings. We discussed how peer review is a chance for writers to engage with one another's ideas, use feedback to implement revisions, pull the curtain back on individual writing processes and the stages of various pieces, and practice openness, collaboration, and constructive critique. This peer-review training workshop for OWG members was meant to provide them with "the tool of awareness, with which they could navigate the unease of not knowing what to do" (Rousculp 77). I aimed to encourage OWG members to understand that "practice in feeling scared about how [their audience] might react," as well as "learning how they do react," can be "liberating" because writers "discover the world doesn't fall apart" (Elbow 83). Importantly, writers in OWG had the benefit of practicing this awareness in a space built upon a shared formative experience (Venture) as well as love and respect—and in a group to which they already felt they *belonged*.

In other words, the knowledge, care, commitment, responsibility, trust, and respect already established in the group helped us share our reactions in a way that demonstrated that "people are actually listening," as Song, a Black woman in her sixties, reflected during our interview. Furthermore, it helped us see the benefit of feedback and feel comfortable asking for what we needed or were ready for as writers. To that end, I provided OWG members with possible questions they could ask to indicate whether they were looking for feedback on a part of their work or only praise for a draft. For example, I encouraged them to consider asking questions about the main idea listeners understood from their piece, how they can make their piece more effective or persuasive, and/or what readers gravitated to and where they felt less engaged. In terms of giving feedback, I encouraged members to take on a reader's perspective, providing the following basic sentence structure: "when you wrote (THIS), I felt (THAT) because (REASON)." In these ways, I aimed to capitalize on the love and rhetoric of respect writers had been demonstrating in OWG since the previous semester, and I intended to frame providing and receiving actionable

feedback as an opportunity to model kindness and appreciation for each other as writers and humans.

OWG members took to heart this framing of giving and receiving feedback, inspired by the loving and respectful patterns that characterized their initial responses to one another's writing throughout the fall semester. At the next meeting, Heaven, a Black woman in her forties, shared a piece of writing she wrote for a credit-bearing introductory composition course she was taking that semester. Her piece was about the creativity of many influential Black women singers. Heaven asked for "any feedback," and Dean, Sol, and Song all responded with positive feedback, sharing how the piece made them feel: Dean said that Heaven read her piece with a "conviction" that commanded his attention and appreciation; Sol shared that Heaven's "good choice of words" made her feel "empowered"; and Song pointed to a specific question Heaven asked in her piece ("What if they weren't able to sing?") that made her feel "so grateful." All three responses were grounded in Heaven's writing and were not just about the topic she wrote about; moreover, Dean, Sol, and Song's feedback were acts of social persuasion that effectively convinced Heaven that her writing was achieving its goal. This likely contributed to the courage it reasonably took for Heaven to then ask for "any bad feedback," which I rephrased as "areas of growth." Song responded to Heaven's request by suggesting adding "some of the messages that were in the songs that the slaves used to sing where they were sending messages." Heaven was grateful for Song's specific and actionable suggestion. Heaven came away with a sense of mastery, feeling that she had reached her audience with her writing, as well as a sense of potential improvement thanks to a viable direction for revision—both of which contributed to an enhanced sense of writerly confidence.

During this same sharing and feedback session, Song specifically asked for a glow (praise) and a grow (area for growth/ improvement) after sharing her piece, though everyone who provided feedback only provided glows. When Sol shared her piece about the connection between hands and the arc of an amorous relationship, she asked for "a lot of feedback" and expressed uncertainty about whether her message was clear. Here, I saw Sol asking for specific feedback: did her message come across clearly to her OWG peers? Heaven responded by reiterating Sol's message back to her, adding, "I loved it. It sounds very romantic. How you just go on and with your feelings, how you want things, want to hold hands and you don't want to be alone when you die, you want to be with your husband till your last breath." In this piece of feedback, it's clear that Sol's message was not only received but also enjoyed by Heaven. I also responded affirmatively, sharing that "the progression [of the relationship] came across to me as a listener for sure." When I gave Sol a suggestion to number the hands to express time passing, Sol pushed for more by asking for an example. After I provided one example, Song added to my suggestion and responded directly

to Sol's specific feedback request when she said, "I like the way I could visualize everything . . . it was so romantic to me. And I could just see it happening, holding hands. . . And also . . . I thought about naming the hands: the hand of matrimony, the hand of romance, the hand of caress on her face, or his face, and stuff like that. As opposed to, um, numbering." Sol's eyes and smile widened as Song spoke, and she expressed gratitude and excitement in response to our suggestions. Similar to Heaven, she had learned specific ways in which she could move her piece forward. In all of these examples from the meeting after the feedback training, but especially the examples from Heaven and Sol, we see writers in OWG navigating the uneasy process of taking risks, making mistakes, and making improvements in their writing. These stories also demonstrate their understanding of "literacy as a collective activity of rhetorical problem solving" and their trust in the group's ability to do that collective work with them (Rousculp 58). I believe that this would not have been possible (or at least as successful) without the sense of belonging that was built in the OWG community the prior semester.

These examples are representative of a larger trend that appeared in OWG over the course of the spring 2021 semester. The feedback practices of the group served to strengthen OWG's value for members and the bonds between them, as described in five contributions about feedback in the four collaborative field texts from that semester. (As stated earlier, our group's feedback practices were mentioned only *once* in the two collaborative field texts from the fall.) For example, in the March 2021 collaborative field text, one writer wrote that their favorite part of OWG is "when we share our writing and appreciate one another because it makes me feel good." In that same field text, another writer called the feedback in OWG "healthy" and "constructive." I think it's important to highlight these positive associations with feedback for the adult undergraduate writers in OWG because they help explain how the Elbow-inspired sharing and feedback practices of OWG contribute to a sense of confidence and potential that the individual writers feel with regard to both themselves and the pieces they produce.

For example, in another collaborative field text from the spring of 2021, an OWG member wrote about the connection between peer feedback and their writerly self-efficacy: "I like that I can reach the readers in the group, all in their own ways. I also enjoy when they like my language, as I tend to overexplain things in my speech; it seems to be well received within the group, as far as my writing goes." This writer specifically acknowledges, and enjoys learning, how different members of OWG understand and react to the writing they share; they even come to view what they previously saw as a negative writing trait—overexplaining—as a positive one, given how it was received by other group members. Similarly, a contribution to a collaborative field text from April 2021 reads,

Not long ago I got a compliment from someone in the group she told me . . . that now I put more details in my writings and that she loves my style. Listening to those comments helps me to keep improving and also the feedback that I receive helps me to add more or shape my writing better because I know this community really cares for me so they are very honest and that helps me a lot.

Not only does the compliment this person received demonstrate a recognition of this writer's increasing mastery of, or facility with, an aspect of their writing and thus engage in social persuasion that affirms this writer's prowess—significant sources of writerly self-efficacy—but this writer also recognizes the positive impact that feedback they receive in OWG has on their writing. Furthermore, this writer's contribution to this field text names an important and foundational element of OWG that enhances the value of feedback that writers in the group receive: this “community really cares for me.” Feedback in OWG is an act of caring and therefore of love and respect. The training in reader- and writer-based feedback techniques—built upon members' sense of belonging in OWG—helped amplify their love and respect for one another and the group.

Additionally, feedback in OWG brings members not only feelings of being cared for but also confidence in their writerly styles and in their capacity to improve. When OWG writers listen to another member's writing and provide the feedback requested by that person, they are able to comment on the effectiveness of the piece as well as demonstrate their responsibility for and commitment to that writer's self-efficacy and growth. For example, one contributor to the March 2021 collaborative field text wrote, “We are mainly a positive bunch, and there's constructive criticism, which helps us become better writers in general. I've been told I'm too wordy, which isn't frowned down upon in the group, and that helps my writing self esteem, which helps me share more with the group.” Throughout the spring 2021 collaborative field texts, feedback is frequently cited as members' favorite part of OWG because, as one person wrote, “it helps me to grow” (March 2021 collaborative field text). Another writer shared in the March 2021 field text, “I don't like to be the center of attention, so I try to lift others to that point, help them be comfortable.” This comment makes clear that the sharing and feedback practices in OWG, augmented by the training workshop facilitated early in the spring semester, are opportunities that encourage members to demonstrate their love and respect for one another. As is apparent from these field text contributions, OWG members trust one another to listen and engage authentically with good intentions because they feel that they *belong* in the group—because they love OWG. That sense of belonging—built upon a foundation of love and a rhetoric of respect—helps OWG and the writers in it to flourish.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, OWG's sharing and feedback practices help the group operate with love and a rhetoric of respect: they offer opportunities for members to have meaningful mastery experiences and celebrate those with one another; have vicarious experiences through pieces of writing with which they identify and which they can aspire to emulate; share and collaboratively address emotional and physical experiences that writing can bring up; and provide one another with social support (or social persuasion, according to Bruning and Kauffman) that helps members remember that their voices and stories are important. However, a sense of community—of belonging—is at the heart of the success of OWG and the growth of the writers in it.

Writers in OWG began with the shared formative experience of my community partner Venture's humanities-based course; and while not all members took the course at the same time, OWG extends the sense of community the Venture course builds by providing a collaborative writing community for participants after they graduate from Venture. All members have the foundational experience of reading and writing about the same material, participating in similar activities with the same instructors, and completing the two-semester course. But the Venture course also establishes a foundation that OWG extends, a foundation articulated by a contributor to the March 2021 collaborative field text: "I feel OWG is an even playing field for us all, as we all relate to being low income/on the poverty line." These baseline experiences are integral to OWG members feeling that the group is "a safe place for our thoughts, feelings, and ideas to be shared with like minded individuals" (April 2021 collaborative field text). This is the kind of setting necessary for the growth of writerly self-efficacy: writers learn best from other writers with whom they can strongly identify or whom they aspire to emulate (Bruning and Kauffman 161; Elbow xii). Therein lies the strength of Elbow's teacherless writing workshop model for adult undergraduate students. This model helped encourage OWG writers to exercise agency when giving and receiving feedback, as represented by Sol's description of what she's learned from OWG in our one-on-one interview: "I learned how to give feedback. I learned how to receive feedback, which was another thing. How to ask for a feedback, like being specific, what do I want?"

Asking for the feedback a writer wants and/or is ready for requires courage and trust. As demonstrated above, writers in OWG practiced this in a space that was built with love and respect and in which they felt they belonged. This led to positive associations with sharing and feedback that worked against the previous negative experiences with writing in academic and professional settings that many members had previous to encountering Venture and OWG. The sharing and feedback practices in OWG are enactments of love and respect for members of the group; this in

turn deepens members' sense of belonging and sets in motion an iterative cycle that strengthens the bonds within OWG and members' appreciation of it.

I'd like to end by sharing three takeaways about adult learners' writerly self-efficacy across the curriculum that were yielded by my experience learning about and building upon sharing and feedback practices with members of OWG: (1) productive and kind sharing and feedback are not only about specific actions and next steps but are also about cultivating a sense of belonging; (2) building community and augmenting writerly self-efficacy often go hand-in-hand; and (3) love and mutual respect provide a strong foundation for giving and receiving good, informed feedback and can help writers remember that we are all humans seeking acceptance and appreciation. These takeaways are especially relevant to adult undergraduate writers because promoting love, respect, and belonging in and through sharing and feedback practices helps acknowledge adult learners' various academic experiences and considerable life experiences, proving that these are important values to recognize and practice in diverse writing classrooms.

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