

Elizabeth G. Peck, JoAnna Stephens Mink, ed.. *Common Ground: Feminist Collaboration in the Academy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. x + 298 pp. \$25.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7914-3511-3.



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In *Common Ground: Feminist Collaboration in the Academy*, editors Elizabeth G. Peck and JoAnna Stephens Mink, Associate Professors of English at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and at Mankato State University respectively, present a collection of essays by feminist scholars engaged in collaborative teaching, administration, research, writing, and editing. Although the contributors' fields cover a wide spectrum of fields, including History, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Biology, Environmental Studies, French, and German, this collection of fifteen "reports from the field" is nonetheless dominated by the discipline of English, which claims fifteen of the twenty-eight authors, as well as both editors. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this collection, the essays vary considerably in their balance of theoretical and practical content, as well as in their approach to the material and their writing styles. The essays, written in first person, generally take the form of reports and assessments of the contributors' own experiences with various forms of academic collaboration, set within the theoretical context of research on academic collaboration; the reference lists at the end of each essay point the interested reader to the small but growing

body of scholarship on academic collaboration.[1] In general, this volume should be of interest to those pursuing or contemplating collaborative work in academia, as well as scholars of Women's Studies and Literary Criticism, the two subject-matter areas in which most of the contributors focused their collaborative efforts. For readers unfamiliar with the theoretical nature of much of the scholarship in those two fields, however, many of the essays may seem unnecessarily laden with jargon. Taken as whole, the book is also quite repetitive in its discussions of the previous theoretical and empirical scholarship, which a number of different contributors summarize in their essays as the context for their own work.

Of particular interest to the editors, according to their Introduction, is the question of whether feminist collaboration differs from other sorts of academic collaboration. Most of the contributors, however, do not directly address that issue. Several of them identify feminist collaboration as more egalitarian than hierarchical, but the same could be said of many other (non-feminist) forms of academic collaboration. Nonetheless these essays,

taken together, raise many points of interest regarding academic collaboration.

The authors of each essay (almost all the essays are, appropriately enough, co-authored) frankly discuss the benefits and costs of their joint endeavors, as well as explaining the nuts and bolts of the collaborative processes in which they have engaged. The mutual trust and ongoing dialog at the heart of each collaborative enterprise by no means eliminated disagreements but did allow for avenues to explore and resolve differences, often in ways that further enriched teaching, research, or writing. The major problems encountered by most of the collaborators were the time-consuming nature of joint projects and the lack of respect for and understanding of collaborative work that many of the contributors, especially in the humanities, perceived among their colleagues. Indeed, overcoming that obstacle is one of the goals of the editors and authors of this volume.

The volume opens with an overview by Melodie Andrews, Associate Professor of History at Mankato State University, of the history of the Anglo-American feminist movement, emphasizing the collaborative nature of that activism. Based entirely on secondary sources, the essay offers nothing new in the way of historical scholarship, although it does provide some historical context for those with no background in the history of feminism. More relevant for this collection, however, would have been an overview of the history of feminist collaboration in the academy, rather than in the women's movement, but no such essay is included.

The remaining essays, although not organized strictly by type of collaborative enterprise by the editors, deal with one of more forms of collaborative education or scholarship. Five essays concentrate primarily or exclusively on collaboration in education. Three of these consider issues related to collaborative teaching. These essays, by Mary Ann Leiby and Leslie J. Henson of the University

of Florida, Elaine Allen Karls and Roslyn Z. Weedman of Delta College, and Jamie Barlowe and Ruth Hottell of the University of Toledo, focus on such issues as overcoming differences between faculty team-teaching a course, rearranging classroom space to accommodate collaborative teaching, and encouraging classroom collaboration between faculty and students. Sally Barr Ebest of the University of Missouri-St. Louis focuses on fostering collaborative learning among graduate students, while Diane Lichtenstein of Beloit College and Virginia Powell of the College of William and Mary discuss their efforts as joint leaders of Beloit's Women's Studies Program to develop and refine inclusive strategies to build consensus within the program.

Two essays focus solely on collaborative research. Paula D. Nesbitt and Linda E. Thomas of Iliff School of Theology stress the need for collaboration across the lines of race that produces truly pluralistic scholarship. Kimberly A. McCarthy, a psychologist and music composer at Columbia College Chicago and Sandra Steingraber, a biologist and poet, deal with collaboration in the creative processes of the arts.

Crossing the boundaries between discussions of teaching, research, and writing is the essay by Anne O'Meara and Nancy R. MacKenzie of Mankato State University's English Department. O'Meara and MacKenzie focus on their collaborative research on classroom teaching and their joint efforts to write grant proposals for the project. They highlight the importance of the larger context in which collaborators function.

Three other essays, those by Mary Alm of the University of North Carolina at Asheville, by Constance L. Russell of the University of Toronto and Rachel Plotkin and Anne C. Bell of York University (Toronto), and by Angela Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant of California Polytechnic State University, concentrate on their experience with collaborative writing. These authors stress that the

process of collaborating provides mutual support for those involved and enriches their scholarship.

The three remaining essays, considering issues related to joint editing and the collaborative writing associated with such ventures, were written by Carol Shiner Wilson of Muhlenberg College and Joel Haefner of Illinois State University, by Carol J. Singley of Rutgers University at Camden and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney of Holy Cross College, and by Helen Cafferty of Bowdoin College and Jeanette Clausen of Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne. Each pair of authors has collaborated in editing a book of essays or a scholarly journal, and each of their essays offers insights into the negotiations involved in doing so. It should be noted by those reading Singley and Sweeney's essay that their statement that Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton worked together on the 1848 Seneca Falls Declaration on women's rights is incorrect. The two did indeed share a long and fruitful collaboration, but it did not begin until after they first met in 1851. [2]

Many of the contributors to this volume refer to the process of collaboration as essentially a "conversation," to which each participant must contribute and listen. Together they must develop the mutual trust necessary to delve jointly into time-consuming projects, confront and overcome their differences in order to reach a consensus, and negotiate the assignment of responsibilities associated with any pedagogical or scholarly project. For those intrigued by the possibilities of collaborative teaching or scholarship, this book will provide a wealth of models and approaches as inspiration.

Notes

[1]. The two most commonly cited works in the field of academic collaboration were Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990); and Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose,

"Strange Bedfellows: Feminist Collaboration," *Signs* 18 (1993): 547-61.

[2]. The error appears on page 63 of *Common Ground*. On the origins of Stanton and Anthony's friendship and collaboration, see Ellen Carol DuBois, ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 16.

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