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Salmon, Gilly. (2011). *Emoderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online*. NY: Routledge.

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Reviewed by Stephanie Nicole Robinson

Recently, I read the results of a ten-year study on online education conducted by the Babson Survey Research Group and the College Board (2013) which reported that the academic leaders, who were surveyed, perceived online learning either in a positive or neutral manner. The study also showed that over the past ten years from 2002-2012, academic leaders maintained that faculty members have consistently rejected the value and legitimacy of online learning. After reading these results, I found myself questioning why faculty members were not surveyed especially those that actually taught online courses. The absence of the faculty perspective was notable because they are crucial to shaping the course experience for online students. To a certain extent, they have the power to impact the quality of online courses

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based on their content knowledge and teaching practices. The book, *Emoderating*, partially resolves this issue because it is written from the perspective of an online instructor. Information is provided for novice and experienced online instructors regarding online platforms and the nature of distance education. Various online scenarios which are commonly faced by students are presented throughout the book. Possible solutions are also given to trouble shoot issues. The role of the online instructor in helping students overcome their obstacles adds a unique prospective to the book. The book is grounded in traditional learning theories. However, the author's own research which was conducted in online course forums and her personal experience as an instructor enabled her to give practical advice to online instructors whom she refers to as e-moderators.

The book is divided into two parts. In the part one, the terms, "emoderating" and "online learning technologies" are defined. Research is also presented on training emoderators and the learning experiences of online students. The research showed a contrast between the goals of the course instructors and the goals of the students which are influenced by outside factors such as time limitations due to family or employment obligations. Even a goal that is seemingly shared by both emoderators and online students such as student satisfaction and course quality is perceived in different ways. For example, emoderators may attempt to increase student satisfaction by increasing the frequency of their discussion board posts and emails while online students are satisfied with an email response from the emoderator as needed (p. 10). Increasing the frequency of instructor discussion posts, compels the student to increase the number of their responses which can cause a hardship for them due to work and family obligations (p. 113). Practical advice was given to bridge these opposing factors displayed by these two groups. In part two, resources and tips are provided for emoderators. Online teachers, course developers, and software designers are included in the author's list of people who may be interested in reading the book. I agree with the author's suggestions because online teachers and course developers will benefit from the teaching and learning models presented in the book. The book has also areas where technical language is used and the issues involving technology are discussed from both an

instructor's and a student's point of view which could be appealing to an educational software designer.

A five-part model for teaching and learning online is presented in the book. The stages include: Stage 1: Access and Motivation, Stage 2: Online Socialization, Stage 3: Information Exchange, Stage 4: Knowledge Construction, and Stage 5: Development. During Stage 1: Access and Motivation, online instructors are advised that students may not be familiar with the technology that the course utilizes which may interfere with them being able to access the course. Salmon recommends that online instructors provide an encouraging welcome message containing assistance for technical issues. Students should also respond to each other's discussion posts during Stage 1. By responding to each other's posts, students will progress into Stage 2: Online Socialization. Emoderators use assignments to create opportunities for social interaction in an online environment. In this stage, learning styles become more apparent. It is suggested that during this phase, emoderators and students should resist the urge to post videos and photos to overcome depersonalization and enjoy the freedom from assumptions that are based on physical appearance. In Stage 3: Information Exchange, course content and other forms of information are used in course interactions. Information overload can also occur at this stage. Emoderators should be watchful of students disengaging and help them to sort through information. During Stage 4: Knowledge Construction, students build knowledge by participating in groups and using real situations and experiences. Emoderators continue to help students organize information by summarizing participant posts and clarifying their relationships to the theories presented in the course. Students are expected to become independent learners in Stage 5: Development. Students are encouraged to continue to use technology and social networking to interact with each other. The ultimate goal of the five stage model is to promote communication and to help students learn more effectively. The model seemed viable but I wondered what the estimated time frame was for the accomplishment of each stage. I also pondered if the five-stage model could work effectively in an accelerated learning class or one that was less than a semester in length.

There were interesting points made in the book regarding the democratic nature of online learning. Salmon likened the modern instructional practices present in online learning to ancient Nordic *folkbildning* traditions. Both involved the forming of groups in order to achieve learning goals through the use of critical thinking, tolerance for the opinions of others, and respect for developed arguments (p. 15). In doing so, the groups reflect the democratic values of equality in that everyone's opinion is valued and liberty because everyone has the freedom to have their own personal beliefs.

Moreover, online interactions can be free from bias due to the anonymity of the participants. The lack of pictures and video images of the participants eliminates discrimination based on age, gender, class, and race. According to Salmon, the lack of visual cues "tends to favour [*sic*] minorities of every kind and encourages everyone to 'be themselves' online groups. Online it is now easy to include pictures and videos of all kind. However is often a good idea not to rush into much with visual images until after the learning community is established" (p. 15). Unfortunately this advice is not heeded by all online universities. Some instructors are required to post their photos and personal information to online classroom forums and university websites even if they are disfigured and without regard to their personal safety. I have been approached by students whose faces that I have never seen before while walking around my hometown. A friend of mine has had online students show up at her home address attempting to submit papers and express grievances over their grades.

In part two of the book, advice is given to overcome problems and it is a how-to- guide for common online situations. The two resources that interested me the most were Resource 9 Creating Presence and Resource 20 Understanding Lurking because they contradict what has traditionally been accepted as best practices for online classrooms. Creating presence in an online classroom has been interpreted by most of the online schools in which I am familiar with to mean posting frequently and responding to questions immediately. In one online class that I taught, instructors were required to respond to every discussion post made by every student in the class. Prewritten responses were provided for instructors to use.

However, Salmon suggests that "as participants become more self-sufficient and motivated (by Stage 3) patiently avoid responding to each message but focus on setting up discussion really well and then summarizing after a given time adding your own teaching point then if appropriate" (p. 215). I agree with Salmon in that it empowers students to be equal and full participants in the class by responding to each other's questions. I have seen this happen in other online classes where the students formed bonds with each other as a result of feeling free to answer each other's questions instead of waiting for the instructor to take on the role of expert. Students have also commented to me that they feel confident enough to initiate discussions about classroom topics outside of the classroom with their family, friends, and work colleagues.

Another issue related to course participation is discussed in Resource 20 Understanding Lurking. Lurking, which means logging into a discussion forum without contributing, is generally unacceptable in most online courses. Salmon goes against popular practices by suggesting that participants be given "time to become used to the online environment before insisting that they post their responses" (p. 245). Most online courses require at least an introduction post on the first day of the course. Again, she recommends reducing the number of messages. I was also surprised by her comment on having a class size of more than six but no more than fifteen active participants for online activities especially considering that I have taught classes with only one student and having as many as forty-five students. In all of the questions, course credit earned by answering discussion question and responding to a minimal amount of peers but follow up interactions and student initiated exchanges are rare. The follow up interactions and student initiated exchanges allow the students to explore topics of interest in more depth on their own without compulsion. In one class that I taught, there was a peer mentor assigned to the course to monitor the instructor, who actively discouraged this type of authentic learning because it increased the amount of course interactions without strict adherence to the number of words required for each post. There was a required number of words for both the instructor of the course and the students who were enrolled in the course.

The book, *Emoderating*, has a host of ideas worthy of discussion and perhaps debate. The five-part model was defined and then applied to a variety of virtual settings throughout the book thus demonstrating its versatility. Online classrooms were shown to reflect traditional democratic values due to the nature of course discussions and the anonymity of the participants. Finally, issues of the quality of course communications ran counter to the current notions of classroom practices in online courses. However, many of Salmon's suggestions are supported by research from longitudinal studies conducted in several countries as presented in the book, *Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Distance Education and e-Learning: Models, Policies, and Research*, (Jung & Latchem, 2012). Both books complement each other well and present research on online learning and practices from an alternative perspective.

## References

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## About the Reviewer

Stephanie Robinson earned her PhD and MA in educational policy studies from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Her research interests include multicultural education, immigrant education, and issues of race, class, gender in education. She has served as a peer reviewer for several publications including, *Multimedia Education Resource for Learning and Online Teaching* and the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. She is the author of *History of Immigrant Female Students in Chicago Public Schools, 1900-1950* published by Peter Lang.

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