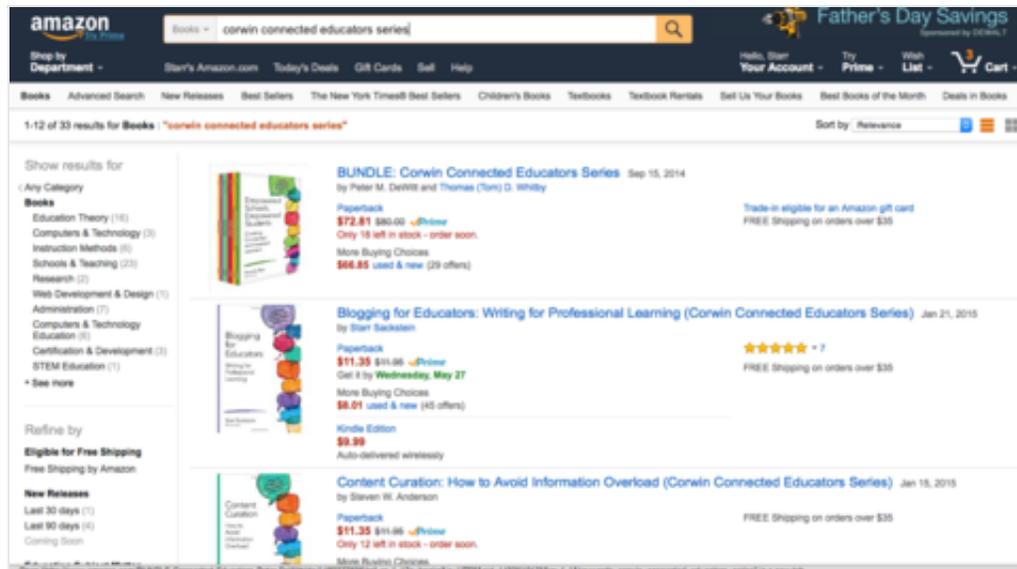


Are You Amazon Literate?



Guest Post by Ross Cooper

When delivering effective professional development, instruction must be as explicit as possible.

- It is not enough to just tell teachers, "Promote number sense." We must also let them know why the shift is necessary, show them how, and provide them with practical resources for making these improvements.
- **We can't just bark at teachers**, "You're not differentiating!" We must also explain why differentiation is necessary, discuss the disconnect between where they are and where they need to be, and provide them with practical resources for making these improvements.

Despite the explicit nature of these examples, this approach to professional development is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to effective educator learning. It is imperative that we also take a sledgehammer to the idea this learning should be confined to only a handful of specified days throughout the year.

In a **recent post** I stated, "Give an educator a PD Day and you teach him for that day; show an educator Twitter and you support him for a lifetime." Now I am declaring that districts should also promote continuous professional development and learning by taking the aforementioned explicit approach with teachers when it comes to helping them find "the best" educational books out there. This is what I call being Amazon Literate.

Amazon Literacy is the capacity to navigate through searches, descriptions, and reviews in order to find "the best" product(s) in any given area.

(I do realize that not all of our information has to come from books. However, in my experiences I have found that change is more likely to occur when teachers have 1-2 "definitive" books and dig in deep, as opposed to using a myriad of resources, which can be overwhelming. Start with 1-2 books to build a solid foundation and then integrate articles, blog posts, videos, etc. when necessary.)

I have always thought that given about 10 minutes on Amazon, it is quite easy to find the definitive book(s) and author(s) on any subject, both in and out of the field of education.

(Seth Godin has **talked about the importance** of knowing the must-read names in your field.)

Yet, I have routinely had experiences in which (1) only a select few teachers per school actively read and promote books, and (2) it is obvious that a book being read by many (perhaps for a book study) is inferior to others on the same topic.

After all, how many times have you purchased something on Amazon, only to realize soon after that you missed out on something better?

Amazon professional development can take place over the course of one 1-2 hour session, and I do not think it would really require all that much follow-up or ongoing administrative support after the fact.

Here are some examples of tasks/questions that can drive the educator learning. Keep in mind that it is not so much the specific resources that are important, but rather than building of **Amazon Literacy**:

- You are a first grade teacher. Find the book with the best collection of number sense ideas/activities.
- You have decided to do some research on formative assessment. What is the "go to" book? Also, who is the top researcher/author on the subject? (This might not be the same person who wrote the book.)
- Find the book with the best collection of formative assessment ideas/activities. (This is different from research. We are looking more for practical classroom application.)
- You are an elementary school teacher. You need some ideas for more effectively organizing your literacy-based centers. What is the "go to" book?
- You are a high school teacher. You have heard the buzz around project-based learning. With what book do you start? Also, who are three reputable authors on this topic?

For each task/activity, participants can also describe the processes for finding their answers, while also providing justification for what was found. All of this work can serve as the basis for collaborative discussion amongst educators attending a professional development session on Amazon Literacy.

Effective professional development must be as explicit as possible by bridging the gap between what takes place during educator learning and what we would like to see take place afterwards, both in and out of the classroom.

Now it is time to take this same approach when it comes to working with educators to find "the best" books, with the hope that this work will lead to ongoing, independent learning. Give an educator a PD Day and you teach him/her for that day; teach him/her how to use Amazon and you support him/her for a lifetime.

Connect with **Ross on Twitter**.

Next month, Ross will start work as the Supervisor of Instructional Practice in the Salisbury Township School District. Currently, he is an Elementary Assistant Principal, and before that he taught for six years in the East Penn School District as a fourth grade teacher.