

By [IU PIIC Mentors Carol Adams and Heather Moschetta](#)

The iceberg is often used (sometimes overused?) as a metaphor for the work that coaches do. In fact, as we were preparing for our breakout session at the October PLO, we centered it around Otto Scharmer's (2013) iceberg model of current reality, which "suggests that beneath the visible level of events and crises, there are underlying structures, paradigms of thought, and sources that are responsible for creating them. If ignored, they will keep us locked into re-enacting the same old patterns time and again." Coaches with whom we work often lament that they work *so hard* but nothing changes.

Ernest Hemingway, who wrote in a short, simple style, was famous for developing his iceberg theory for literature. His theory states that, like an iceberg, only 20 percent of a story is above the surface, expressed through the words of the writer. The other 80 percent is what the reader must infer from the clues the writer gives. The way Hemingway describes it, if the writer does his job, the reader almost innately gets a sense of the underlying story, even without all the details.

Good thing Hemingway was not an instructional coach. If we try to apply his theory to coaching, it would be the responsibility of the teacher to drop hints and the coach to automatically "get it" from those hints. We know that coaches must ask the kinds of questions in the BDA cycle that will help reveal what is beneath the proverbial surface. As Scharmer points out, meaningful change will happen only if we can uncover the root causes that keep us stuck where we are and work together as a coach-teacher team to determine the best course of action.

This is not accomplished in one-and-done coaching interactions. That's why the BDA cycle of consultation is a cycle. It does not stop with the "A." An ongoing coaching cycle allows the teacher and the coach to expand their vision of the BDA. Together, they recognize that what is discovered during the AFTER becomes the next BEFORE. The next action or intervention emerges and new "look fors" are revealed.

The iceberg model can also be applied to levels of coaching. We realize that coaching takes on many different forms, but if you are living on the surface of your own iceberg (light coaching such as providing resources and leading professional development sessions) and would like to spend more time with heavier coaching activities (such as the BDA cycle with teachers),

challenge yourself to dive below the surface. Start with your own analysis of the reasons why you are stuck in “light” coaching activities and determine how you can move into heavier coaching. Once you have figured it out for your own situation, it is a step toward supporting teachers in trying something new to strengthen their own practice.

And, know that at whatever level of coaching you are operating, there is an iceberg showing you 20%. Take a moment to consider some problem, issue or challenge that you currently face. Write down the story of that situation. Then, as you re-read your story, wonder about what underlying assumptions hold this pattern in place. As you begin to notice the larger context, you have greater access to the system, the mindset, and/or the social dynamic. That increasing awareness opens you up to new ways of acting, thinking and speaking; and, becomes the foundation for teachers to see beneath the surface.

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