

## GOING DEEPER—TEXT-BASED LEARNING



### TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS SUPPORT LOWER LEVELS OF MEANING MAKING

In our experience, traditional school environments are structured so as to reinforce the early levels of adult development as identified by Drago-Severson as the *instrumental* and the *socializing* minds. When psychological safety is threatened, emotional responses set off a series of stress reactions that limit human growth and stymie human development, reverting human capacities to stages previously left behind.

Sommers and Zimmerman (2018) in their book *9 Conversations to Change our Schools* describe how when stress in a school is high, school cultures revert to the mindsets of the first two developmental levels: instrumental and socializing. We make distinctions between eustress and distress. Both are the body's reaction to taxing change. Eustress, the "good" stress, is associated with the efforts to accomplish, feels exciting, and improves performance. Distress causes anxiety, seems outside our ability to cope, and decreases performance. This is one reason that leaders are advised to protect teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their instructional time or focus.

Distress evokes protective responses that limit growth and development. Instrumental knowers find safety in rules, and hence spend time talking about how to control the school environment. They find solace in imposing order through rule making. Socializing knowers seek to form alliances with colleagues deemed "safe" or "like me." It is comforting to be in a relationship where the responses are predictable and supportive. The problem arises when these groups form cliques including and excluding staff members. These small groups foster loyalty, not inquiry. Conversations are controlled by what these social cliques are willing to talk about in order to protect the status quo.