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## Invitational Education:

### *An Introduction to the Metaphor of Blue and Orange Cards*

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An imaginative way of thinking about Invitational Education is to imagine schools as dealing an endless supply of Blue Cards (beneficial) and Orange Cards (toxic). Everything in the school is a source of Blue and Orange Cards. Everything counts. Everything in the school can be measured by a single question. Will the people, places, policies, programs and processes in this school be a source of Blue Cards or Orange ones?

The Blue and Orange Metaphor is a highly simplified explanation of Invitational Education's complexity. However, the metaphor does provide a sort of shorthand in visualizing and understanding the incredible power in inviting and disinviting school environments.

In Invitational Education everything matters. The ways the cans are stacked on the back loading dock, the ways the bathrooms smell, the ways phones are answered, the ways that people relate to one another, the ways that procedures, programs, and policies are created and followed. Everything in and around the school is inviting or disinviting. Nothing is neutral.

Each Blue or Orange Card sent and received varies in size and power. Some cards are so small as to be almost insignificant. Other cards are so large in impact that they can be a matter of life or death. Unfortunately, Orange Cards are far more powerful than Blue ones. As in life, it is easier to destroy than develop. The absence of Blue Cards in a school is tragic, but an even greater tragedy is a school of Orange Cards. To borrow from the medical profession, schools should first do no harm.

We give and receive myriad cards throughout our lives. These cards tell us who we are and how we fit into the world. Life is an endless quest for Blue Cards. If we are fortunate, our collection of Blue Cards is far greater than our collection of Orange ones. When there are too few Blue Cards, or too many Orange ones, people learn to question their own feelings and value and question the value of their relationships with others. The power of drugs and alcohol is that they often turn Orange Cards to Blue, but the effect is temporary. Simply stated, the best remedy for Orange Cards are lots of Blue ones, and the best preparation for Orange Cards is a storehouse of many Blue ones.

The process of collecting Blue and Orange Cards begins at birth, if not before. Children enter this world with absolute trust that adult caregivers will be the source of Blue Cards. They

have absolute trust that that they will be fed when hungry, cared for when hurt, comforted when fearful, and encouraged in their efforts to realize their relatively boundless potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor.

Even small children can grasp the significance of the cards. Once they learn the language of Blue and Orange Cards, it influences the way they think about things. They are quick to seek out Blue Cards, and to complain about Orange ones. Once the language has been explained and incorporated, students who feel mistreated or demeaned will say, "That's an Orange Card."

Orange Cards are a part of life. It is naïve to think that Orange Cards will vanish from human existence. However, schools do not need to increase the number. What schools can do is to invite the people who enter a school house door to view themselves as able, valuable, and responsible and to act accordingly. Each person in school should be encouraged to see the world as a good place to be, and that there are many things to love that will love them in return.

No amount of rationalizations or "special reasons" justifies Orange Cards. Whatever a hospital should be, it should not be a source of infection. Whatever a police department should be, it should not be a source of criminality. Whatever a government should be, it should not be a source of corruption. And whatever a school should be, it should not be a source of Orange Cards.

It is vital to remember that there are no discard piles in life. Every Blue Card and Orange Card you receive is forever. This being so, the metaphor is a constant reminder that schools should do everything they can to create, sustain, and enhance a truly Blue Card environment for everyone.

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The Blue and Orange Card Metaphor was first introduced in 1990 by William Purkey and Paula Stanley in *The Journal of Counseling and Development*. (68)

