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Revisiting the Blue & Orange Card Metaphor

John Novak and William W. Purkey

This article introduces the Blue & Orange Metaphor to those Alliance Members who may not be familiar with a color-coded way of thinking about Invitational Education. The Metaphor provides Invitational Educators with a simple way to explain the complexity of Invitational Education.

Blue & Orange Cards

As soon as a child is born he or she begins the life-long task of giving and collecting cards. Countless millions are exchanged and stored in internal filing systems. Each card contains a sense of what the world is like and how things fit together.

In each person's collection there are only two kinds of cards: Blue Cards & Orange Cards. No matter what cognitive information is placed on a card and filed, the cards are always either Blue or Orange.

Blue Cards invite the person to see the world as a good place to be where there are many things to love that will love in return. These cards call forth the finest qualities of trust, respect, care, and optimism. Each Blue Card encourages the best in self-esteem, excitement for living, and human decency. Orange cards are exactly the opposite.

Orange Cards signal to the individual that he or she is unable, worthless, and irresponsible. Orange Cards warn the person to beware of one's own feeling, of relationships, of life itself. Every time a person is racist, sexist, ethnocentric, homophobic, insulting, uncaring, or thoughtless with oneself or others, personally or professionally, intentionally or unintentionally, he or she is dealing orange cards. Orange Cards are so painful that individuals will do almost anything to escape the hurt. A terrible factor is that Orange Cards can be internalized and manifested in masochist or sadist thinking and behavior..

The Metaphor of Blue & Orange Cards can be distilled into ten aphorisms.

Ten Aphorisms

- 1 Everything in life is either Blue or Orange: nothing is neutral.
- 2 The cards may be big or small, good or bad, but always Blue or Orange.
- 2 Healthy and unhealthy living is influenced by Blue & Orange Cards.
- 4 Life is a ratio between Blue & Orange Cards.
- 5 Blue & Orange Cards are unavoidable and can be matters of life and death.

- 6 Although there is no discard file in life, the cards can be reinterpreted.
- 7 A great danger is when humans justify and rationalize Orange Cards.
- 8 Perhaps the most significant Blue & Orange Cards are those we give ourselves.
- 9 It requires courage, bravery, and moral strength to go Blue in an Orange environment.
- 10 Even small children can understand the metaphor of the Blue & Orange Cards.

Blue & Orange Cards can serve as a constant reminder that everything in and around a school is either positive or negative, beneficial or lethal, inviting or disinviting. The metaphor provides a fresh language of transformation for talking about Invitational Education. It is a way that Invitational Educators can share their vision of what schools can and should be.

The concept of the Blue & Orange Cards was originally presented by Purkey and Stanley (1990) in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*.