

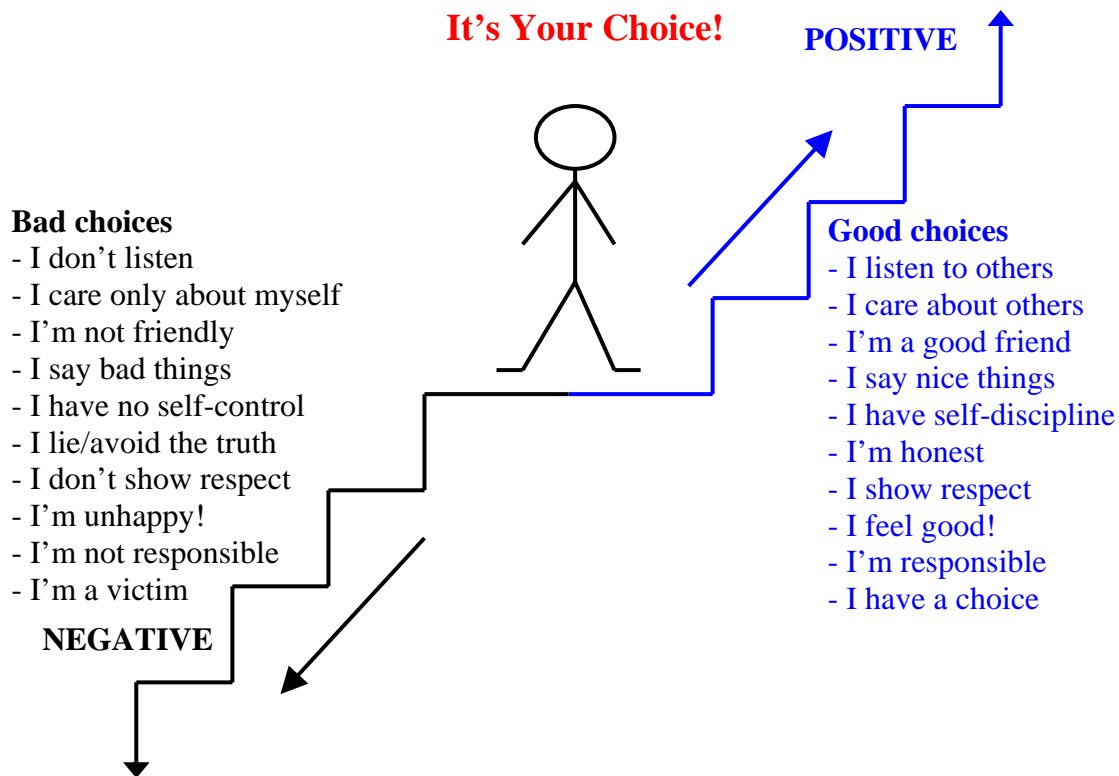
## A moral context that generates maturity

Experiences from Denmark in applying the model “It’s your choice!” in primary school grades one and two

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*Staircase model: It's Your Choice! (Student version)*

I've been a teacher since 1976 and have experimented with different methods in order to gain a good culture/atmosphere in the classroom, as well as to give the pupils some values concerning good manners in all aspects of life. To make a long story short, I find that I've been repeating myself over and over again in my response to the student's actual behaviour and manners.

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About two years ago I got to know the model “It’s your choice” through Mats Edin, and I read a dialogue between Patrick Bryson and Nick Drummond from an interview. The title was “A Moral Dimension to Parenting and Teaching”. This started a lot of thoughts and reflection of my own practice concerning this matter. I also realised that I had never met a context that gave the pupils consciousness of knowing, that they had a choice. I decided to start giving a 1<sup>st</sup> grade the opportunity to work with this as a context in the classroom.

The first year we referred to it in all situations, concerning relationships, learning, competences, behaviour, how we talked and how we acted. This gave the pupils and myself the understanding and language to get this context “under our skin” For example, "I made a bad choice, because I didn’t talk nice to her, and I could have done so!" – Or: “I made a good choice, because I decided to listen instead of talking to the boy/girl I sit next to!”

On the first meeting with the parents this year they saw the ten points of the good and bad choices of “It’s your choice!”, and they responded very positive towards it.

At the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade the pupils chose which of the ten points they wanted to focus on. (The many situations from 1<sup>st</sup> grade and the talks and reflections about each point had given each child a good and realistic knowledge about themselves and each other.) I then discussed with the whole class what each student wanted to be better at. For example, two of the boys chose to focus on listening to others. The response from the class to them was, “That’s so good, because then you also take part and we don’t use time to tell you that you do not listen”.

At the same time the pupils filled out a sheet with three choices to grade how well they expressed each of the points: can, can almost, cannot. When I read their scores I was surprised at just how well they knew themselves.

	Can 	Can almost 	Cannot 
1. I listen to others			
2. I care about others			
3. I’m a good friend			
4. I say nice things			
5. I have self-discipline			
6. I’m honest			
7. I show respect			
8. I’m responsible			
9. I feel good!			
10. I have a choice			

On the next meeting with the parents, they too will fill out the same score sheet for their own child. This, together with the sheets the pupils filled out, creates a basis of talking about the possibilities of responding in a way that encourages developing good choices together, as well as being a serious adult, when responding. When children meet seriousness and honesty, they very quickly meet you

and respond from the same level. In other words, this context is not for fun, it is not just some rules “to try to make things better in the classroom.” It is a context that’s generates within each individual a strong desire to express good manners and maturity in any aspect and relationship in life. So I’m really looking forward to this meeting with the parents, and I am anxious to see the possibilities in this.

I consider that I have just begun to understand the higher perspective in this context; I have just seen the surface being stirred up and I have the feeling that so much more is possible if we want it and do it together.

The model “It’s your choice!” makes us aware of a moral context that generates maturity. It gives each of us responsibility for our own actions. The moral context is developed by looking at the actual situation and our behaviour in the light of this model. It thus gives a profound understanding of the reality of having a choice – each moment/right now/always.

I have also learnt that I can not develop this moral context alone with my class. I have to discuss and develop it in a constant dialogue – with the pupils, with the parents, with my team and with other teachers or people, like you, who also use this context in their daily work and life.

### **Update from school/parents meeting, Lis Lønborg, 2006-11-22**

In my own class there was a lot of response from the parents to the model "It's your choice". All homes have it hanging up somewhere, the kitchen, the children’s room etc.

One family has an "everybody tells about a bad choice and a good choice from the day” passed at the dinner-table.

The children in the class refer to it a lot, when their parents use bad language, when anyone in the family talk in a "not nice" way, if anybody in the family shouts or loses his or her temper, they just say remember your self-discipline, or you can choose to speak in a proper way a.s.o. That was just great to hear.

On Thursday I have a parents meeting and 1 hour will be used for this purpose only. The parents will use the “can, can almost, cannot” schedule for each of their children, and I'll tell more about how (and why) we use it daily, to inspire them to develop the way they use it at home.

### **Email till Nick Drummond from a father of three children in Denmark**

I used your "it's your choice" this morning when my youngest son, Benjamin at nearly 4 years of age, struggled with his clothes and wouldn't allow anyone to help him - and that resulted in a lot of time-consuming agony for all of us. Using your model, I told him that he had a choice to be a "good boy" or "bad boy" and asked him which he wanted. "Good boy," he said. "And in order to be that, you need to allow us to help you, because we are all waiting for you to finish." And he accepted it, changed his state immediately, and then we set of to go.

What happened next mirrors the experiences you are mentioning in the book. Naturally, his other siblings - his older brother David at 5 y.o.a. and Miranda at 2 - had witnessed the scene. Miranda is a very easy-going child who is always happily going about her own business with a strong

connection to those around her. David, on the other hand, is probably the second most stubborn person I have ever met in the whole world (the most stubborn being myself - he he), and he has required a lot of Red meme leadership in his time. I was therefore quite surprised how easy the trip to the kindergarten was - it was very harmonious, with a natural flow, as if a higher order had suddenly descended. This is not uncommon for us, as one might suspect, but the difference this time was that it had a very subtle but still almost tangible feeling of softness and gentleness, as if a collective, loving intelligence was at work, lifting us all.