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Middle - Upper Primary +

Make A Difference Challenge

Enabling students to
take positive action
on an issue in their
community that they
feel passionate about.



Step 4

Step 3

Step 2

Step 1

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Make a Difference Challenge

Teachers' Notes

The Make a Difference Challenge (MDC) is the opportunity given to students to select an issue they feel particularly passionate about and wish to do something about to improve the current situation. The book is written in a simple, step-by-step format that will show students how to access organisations, resources and the people necessary to make change. In the process, your students will develop communication skills, gain confidence and the appreciation of new-found responsibilities in learning how to make a positive impact in their community.

The MDC fits perfectly as part of any humanities unit or can be programmed as a stand alone activity. It's the ideal vehicle to motivate students of all ages to be involved in issues that affect them, their family, their class or school, their country or even the world. The scope of MDC encourages flexibility in determining what the students would like to undertake. The entry level can be guided by the curriculum, or the school-based needs of the students as determined by the teacher and community.

You will find the MDC one of the most interesting, rewarding and personally satisfying projects you can undertake with your students. This challenge is not your average school project. Please enjoy – and be prepared to be inspired!

Frequently Asked Questions

Teachers' Notes

What exactly is the Make a Difference Challenge (MDC)?

The MDC encourages students to provide solutions for a particular issue that will impact positively on the lives of themselves and others. The application and appreciation of knowledge is often wasted unless students are presented with opportunities to act on their issue and put their actions to good use in their community. The MDC is that opportunity.

Do students have to be successful in making a change in the community?

No, and this point should be stressed upon the students as well. As adults we know how difficult it can be to always make the sorts of changes we want in our communities. These things take time, patience and determination. For example, issues like global warming, nuclear disarmament and saving the whales are complex, political problems. The real point of the MDC is to empower students to find ways they can peacefully effect change. The outcome may not always be what they want and this is, in itself, a valuable lesson in life. It would be hoped that the students' MDC campaign was effective enough to have instigated some change or community debate. Final success may even come some time later, after the challenge is officially over.

Can students pull out or change their mind about their challenge mid way through?

The world really is a different place from what it was a generation ago. Students are more worldly, generally more empowered and collectively more confident about their

place in society. Initially, younger students in particular may question their own abilities to influence outcomes. At this point the teacher can offer reassurance and provide the material support needed for the student to get started. Soon, the students will realise that if they go about their task in the right way, people will listen and take notice. Influencing enough people can shift the balance of power in their favour. Students should realise they don't have to be elected representatives to have influence, nor do they necessarily need to make representation to elected officials to get what they want. Civil action like striking, boycotting and protesting are examples in history that supports this point.

Should students make a difference?

This question recognises a level of innocence in children and the importance of being allowed to grow up, free from the worries of the adult world. There are two points that should be understood in relation to this. Firstly, there is a time restraint on the MDC. They are not asked to continue on with it indefinitely or until all their objectives are achieved. The second point is that students should be guided in their selection, to pursue topics that have emerged from the needs of their community. It could, for example, be something simple at the class or school level. This makes the MDC meaningful and personal. Properly managed, the MDC can be one of the most rewarding endeavours for the student and teacher.

How does the MDC work?

In its simplest form, the MDC can be broken down into four steps:

1. Select an Issue

The student selects an issue belonging to one of the four community bands (see below).

2. Research and Plan

The student finds out more about their selected issue to determine the best course of action to make a difference.

3. Act

The student puts his/her research and planning into action.

4. Share and Reflect

Afterwards, the student shares and reflects on his/her work and successes.

How do students select an MDC issue?

The greatest success stories tend to be from students who are given the freedom to select their own challenges. To select an issue for the MDC, students should think about what they feel passionate about. Their age and interest will also determine the direction of this pursuit. The teacher may wish to steer the class in a particular direction. Generally, issues that the students are personally connected with work best. There is also an advantage in selecting issues that allow them to become physically involved (such as attending meetings or meeting people) and not simply writing letters or sending emails to people in different countries. Some students will need further assistance in the selection process to ensure it is both appropriate and suitable, given their

individual capabilities and the inevitable time constraints in completing the project. To further assist with the selection process, issues are categorised into one of four different groups called community bBands, as discussed below.

Community Bands

Issues suitable for the MDC selection can be thought of as belonging to one of four groups or bands. In each case, students need to identify something they feel they can make a difference about. Some issues are more 'adult' and are suitable for older students. The teacher may guide the students towards one or more particular band.

Band One – My School Community

- ▶ My School Community involves the issues concerned directly with what takes place at school. This might include improved shaded eating areas, better road safety to and from school, a healthier canteen menu list and the installation of more drink fountains.

Band Two – My Local Community

- ▶ My Local Community is the social and physical network that a student is directly associated with. For example, a student may be involved with a soccer club outside of school or be a member of a dog or pet association. They might be involved with a tennis club or attend Saturday cultural schools. This band also includes the local park, shops and the neighbourhood in which the student lives.

Band Three – My Country Community

- ▶ My Country Community includes the issues that affect a nation. Examples

in this category include pollution, the national anthem, censorship, public art and multiculturalism.

Band Four – My Global Community

- ▶ My Global Community refers to issues not confined to cultural or political groups or boundaries. They are problems shared by all people of the planet. Examples in this band include global warming, ivory trade, refugees, access to safe drinking water and deforestation.

How can I encourage students to localise global issues like “Save the Whale” or global warming?

Many people feel strongly about issues like saving the whales and global warming. However, these are politically complex and often distant issues. The teacher could instead, localise these issues. For example, since the Save the Whale cause indicates an interest in animal welfare, students could instead, initiate a campaign to save a local frog species from their area that is under threat. If students are concerned about the threat of global warming they could persuade the school to expand their recycling program, start a worm farm or run a campaign to turn off lights in the classroom. Poverty solutions, like child sponsorship, are considered a worthy endeavour, but can be localised by examining indigenous issues. Local issues allow for closer contacts and direct connections.

Can challenge mid way through?

It's important that adequate lead time and forethought be given to the challenge each student would like to

undertake. Chopping and changing mid-stream will create time pressures on a student's campaign. Changing issues should be discouraged and would be done only in exceptional circumstances.

Can students team up with others and form a group?

The MDC is principally designed as an individually inspired activity. If two students by coincidence have taken on similar issues, there is some scope for limited co-operation and sharing of resources. For example, the students may join together to collect signatures for a petition and present it simultaneously to the local council. The students will need to keep in mind that they will be marked individually on their work, and will subsequently, need to conduct their own MDC campaign. If teachers want students to form groups, it is recommended that clear guidelines be set to ensure the work is equally proportioned to each member and that effective working relationships are established and cultivated. Maintaining morale and motivation is paramount to completing a quality MDC project.

What about fundraising?

Fundraising for the MDC is not, generally, recommended for school age students. Fundraising can become a complicated and politicised event to organise. Such events require adult approval and intervention. Many of the principles required to fundraise distract from the altruistic nature of MDC.

As a suitable alternative, students could seek donations of goods or services.

Primary and secondary information

A common complaint from teachers today is the overuse of Internet search engines to locate and cut and paste information. Students need to learn the importance of going beyond secondary sources and generating their own data from primary sources. This might entail surveying people, interviewing experts and gathering signatures for a petition. Ideally, students should be gathering information from both primary and secondary sources. For the MDC, it is part of the teacher's role to develop the students' skills in gathering information and acknowledging their source.

What are the safety issues for students?

Collecting primary sources of information requires students to make contact with members of the public. A commonsense approach is recommended when dealing with student safety. A parent or guardian should accompany the students if they are surveying, door knocking or collecting signatures for petitions. Random doorknocking should be discouraged. The adults should, of course, take a back-seat as the students engage in conversations, but remain in sight and be there for support. All emails sent and received should be vetted. Students should not use chat-rooms for surveys or solicit for supporters. Students should not give out their own private mobile phone numbers and instead, use home numbers or parent contact details.

What is the role of the parent in the MDC?

The role of the parent is like that of the teacher – to act as a mentor. The parent can correct and edit work. They can offer suggestions about strategy and provide encouragement to keep going. The MDC is a fantastic opportunity to build greater independence and confidence in each student. The students are encouraged to rise to the challenge they have chosen and make it their own.

How long is the MDC expected to go for?

There are a number of considerations that will help determine an appropriate timeframe. It is important to carefully guide students so that they don't feel overwhelmed. One way to ensure this does not happen is to set relatively short deadlines for the challenge to be completed.

For example:

Student Age	Suggested Duration of MDC
> 11	Up to 3 or 4 weeks
11/12	Up to 4 or 5 weeks
13+	Up to 5 to 10 weeks

Remember, an issue does not have to be resolved by the completion date. If the student remains interested in the MDC after, they can continue on with it. There are suggestions for the students on how they might do this on page 39.

How will students record and demonstrate what they did?

Inside this book you will find an action plan (see pages 31-32) for students to record their work. You may wish to photocopy these pages and others in this book to make a portfolio for the students. Alternatively, you may wish to adapt or construct your own format. Students may also blog their experience on a suitable website. After the completion of the MDC, the teacher may wish to hold a presentation event in which the students can talk to their peers, teachers and/or parents about their work.

How often should students report back on their progress?

Students can report back on their progress through their action plan (see pages 31-32) and in regular conferences. The conferences are the one-on-one meetings they have with their class teacher, or mentor. These meetings should be at least once a week over the duration of the project and can take anywhere from 5 or 10 minutes up to 20 minutes. At these conferences, the teacher can offer solutions, vet students' work and act as a sounding board. The student should bring what they are working on to these conferences including: their journal, relevant articles they have found, letters they have received and any proposed correspondence they are sending out.

What are things that can go wrong during the MDC?

Here is a list of common problems you may experience during the MDC. They are all surmountable with proper planning and awareness about each.

- Students not starting their project promptly. This creates time pressures as the end of the MDC nears.
- Letters and emails not checked and edited before being sent.
- Students wanting to change their issue after the commencement of the project.
- Students not prepared to collect information using primary sources. Instead, there is an over reliance on secondary sources from Google or Wikipedia searches.
- Students not recording their progress as it happens.
- Students not regularly conferencing with the teacher or mentor on their progress.
- The parents becoming over-involved and doing too much of their child's work for them.
- Students selecting an issue that is too distant or difficult to become directly involved with.
- Students becoming overwhelmed with the apparent enormity of their project. This can result in students starting too late or not at all.

What are the key words?

- action
- challenge
- community
- conferencing
- difference
- global
- issue
- localise
- networks
- mentor
- passionate
- plan
- power
- primary
- reflection
- research
- responsibility
- secondary
- share
- solutions
- sources
- step

The Make a Difference Challenge

Introduction

Welcome to the Make a Difference Challenge. The MDC is your opportunity to become involved in an issue you feel strongly about and to do something about it. The MDC is a unique and exciting project and it's designed specifically with you in mind because YOU chose what YOU want to do!

There are four simple steps to the MDC.

▶▶ Step One: Select an Issue

Think about something that you would like to change or make a difference to. Perhaps there is something at school, in your street, in your country or something around the world that you feel passionate about. Reflect on something that is important to you.

▶▶ Step Two: Research and Plan

Once you have found an issue you would like to have a positive impact on, begin your research to find out more about it and what can be done about this issue. At this stage you should identify your goals and purpose of your action. How do you intend to make a difference? What resources will you need? Who can help you achieve your goals? What are the obstacles you will face and need to overcome?

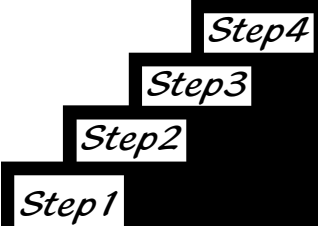
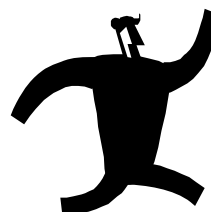
▶▶ Step Three: Take Action

When you have mapped out a plan, it's time to take action. This is an exciting part of your challenge because now is the time to get directly involved in achieving a positive outcome. There are a number of ways you can take action and each needs to be carefully considered. You should record your ideas about your challenge and how you go about achieving the results you want.

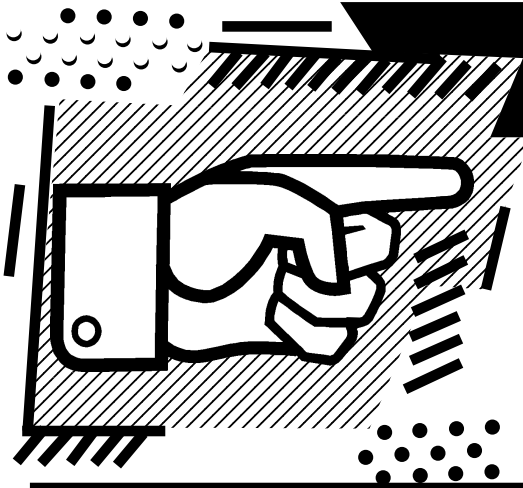
▶▶ Step Four: Reflect and Share

You will only be given a certain amount of time to work on your challenge. This means you may not achieve all your objectives. However, it does mean you will have time to stop, reflect on what you did manage to achieve and share your experience with others.

Be prepared for an exciting, rewarding and positive experience!



Step One



▶▶ *Select an Issue*

Think about what you would like to change for the better in the world. To help get you started, list some things you would like to change in each of these different communities.

- **In my home:** (e.g. Reduce the amount of water we use)

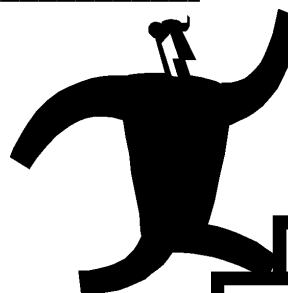
- **In my school:** (e.g. Instigate a recycling program)

- **In my neighbourhood:** (e.g. Removal of graffiti)

- **In my local community:** (e.g. Keep local parks tidier)

- **In my country:** (e.g. Build greater tolerance and end racism)

- **In the world:** (e.g. Save the Whale)



▶ Select an Issue



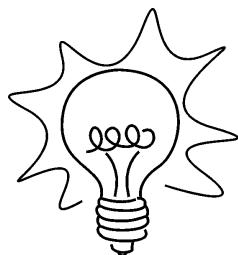
Of course, no matter how much we may want to, we can't change everything straight away. These things take time because other people will want to have their say about any proposed changes as well.

For your MDC, you will narrow your selection down to one particular issue. It should be an issue you feel passionate about and one that you feel you can make a positive difference to in the given time.

A community can be thought of as the people and organisations we connect and form relationships with. They can be found anywhere around the world from your next door neighbour, your neighbourhood and your school to countries on the other side of the world.

Your family and school community are the most prominent and important in your life. However, your expanding interest in the world around allows you to explore communities outside these. It's healthy to connect with different communities.

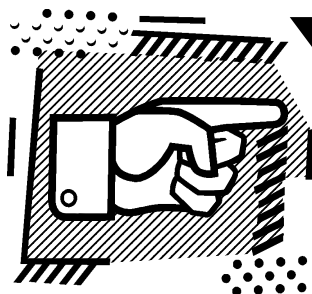
What are you interested in?



List of Ideas

- the environment
- animal welfare
- health and well-being
- the arts
- education
- human rights
- globalisation
- cultural identify
- the rights of workers
- ending world conflicts

» Band One

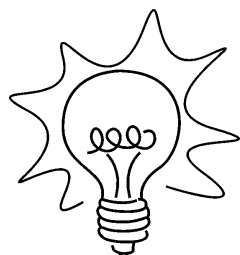


Issues like these are spread across a number of different communities. For the MDC, communities are grouped into four different Bands. These include:

My School Community

My School Community includes issues found exclusively within your school. Consider ways to make your school a safer, cleaner, happier and friendlier place to be.

My School Community (List those of interest to you)



Issues for School Communities

For all

- Building a new play area
- Bullying
- Drinking fountains
- Excessive sun exposure
- Ramps for people with disabilities
- Healthier canteen menu
- Improved fitness
- Better choice of sports
- Improved and greater choice of curriculum
- Recycling
- Internet access
- Sport equipment
- Purchase special play equipment
- Planting trees and gardens
- Library book purchases
- Traffic lights at school zones
- Maintaining a tidier school
- Road safety to and from school

For older students

- Safe sex
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Illicit drug taking
- Homelessness