

# Sarah Dwan – Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship Research Report 2024

## Sparks, Drips and the Power of Young People



Artwork by Quinlan Tran, Year 12, St. Mary's College, Auckland New Zealand

### Introduction

Leading and teaching in a Mercy school in Auckland New Zealand where the vision is “21<sup>st</sup> Century Women of Mercy” means that our students are well grounded in the story of Catherine McAuley, Cecelia Maher, the Sisters in New Zealand and Catholic Social Teaching. The level of knowledge about what is currently happening in the Mercy world was not as developed or comprehensive.

This piece of research started as part of the Water Focus by Mercy Global in 2023 and like any good research project has morphed in a number of directions due to circumstance and opportunity.

It now falls into the three interrelated sections:

**Sparks** – the use of Mercy Global Action 2023 Publication from Sparks to Fire as the basis for the 2024 Year 13 Social Studies Course

**Drips** – the use of Sustainable Development Goal 6 in the creation of series of relief lessons for Year 9/10 Social Studies. This builds on work students have already done and allows them to apply knowledge in a different context.

**Power of Young People** – student leadership is a big part of what we going, looking at models of Servant Leadership like Catherine McAuley. Linking our Rotu Tōtu or Enviro Group into this work has given them a wider context to explore.

Sparks and Drips also refer to the idea that it only takes something small to have a ripple effect or to spark an idea. It is the hope that these sparks and drips continue to involve young people in the very necessary work that is happening in the Mercy World.

Further information about the context of St. Mary's College can be seen in the associated presentation, slides link [here](#).

## Sparks

Staffing in New Zealand Schools is a challenge and due to a number of late changes in Social Studies I ended up teaching the Year 13 Social Studies Programme in 2024. It is a programme that we have said for a number of years could do with a bit of a refresh. There are no prerequisites to come into this programme, and it is a subject that is only offered as an option at Year 13. (Social Studies is a compulsory programme in Years 7-10). It is a popular course with an extra 10 students selecting the course at the beginning of 2024.

Having read from Sparks to Fire on publication in September 2023, I had already sent this to the department as a possible model to use in the course as one of the key standards (assessments) completed is: 91599: Examine personal involvement in a social action(s) that aims to influence policy change(s). Having the Mercy Advocacy framework, tools and case studies would provide this unit with some structure and a grounding in Mercy.



However, when planning for the first assessment of the year 91600: Examine a campaign of social action(s) to influence policy change(s), it became even more relevant. The first case study used in From Sparks to Fire is that of Catherine Murepenga-Iken, a Māori wahine who has been involved in many social actions, with links to Mercy. In the three months after the publication of From Sparks to Fire one of the campaigns that Murepenga-Iken was involved in around Te Tiriti became a [nation-wide talking point](#). This became the focus for our first assessment, where students had to look at points of view, values, perspectives, actions, and an analysis around the campaign. Being able to start with connections to Mercy, using the case study in the book was great platform to begin the year with. As we were looking at concepts such as point of view, values, perspective, we could apply a Mercy lens to this.

As Catherine McAuley stated, "A good beginning is of great importance." and being able to use this resource set the programme off in that right direction.

The second assessment 91597 Conduct a critical social inquiry has potential to be linked to a case study in From Sparks to Fire. But was not considered for the programme at this time.

Students have recently begun preparatory work towards their own social actions. The questions posed by the activities in From Sparks to Fire have been instrumental in creating these. I think the introduction from Sr. Angela Reed links what we are trying to achieve in the Year 13 Social Studies Programme.

"I celebrate that this publication is a contribution that the Mercy World makes to the often hidden impact of advocacy work. It is, of course, not the final word on advocacy, but we can continue to celebrate our contribution to making our world a better place for earth and people. In celebration then, I offer this publication in the hope that it may inspire others to recognise that they are indeed advocates whether working at the grassroots level to make changes at the local level or whether working on policy at the national or global level"

### **How Can This Be Linked to Other Educational Contexts:**

Whilst Social Studies is not a particularly popular subject in New Zealand (in 2023, 2150 students across the country completed at least one internal assessment), the skills and content covered in From Sparks to Fire has relevance across many subject areas. It can be adapted for a variety of contexts (for example, we checked with Religious Studies before proceeding with the development of these units). Highlighting to students the breadth and depth of some of the work of Mercy, in areas that they may not necessarily expect, is one of the key things that can be taken from using this resource with young people.

### **Feedback from Students:**

- "Social action is about people coming together to help improve lives and solve the problems that are important in their community"
- "I think that Sparks to Fire" is a good resource because it provides relevant information about what we need to know..."
- "It is amazing to see many types of advocacy being carried out in the world" Eloise
- "From Sparks to Fire enabled to me excel in my schoolwork"
- "Sparks to Fire was really interesting. It was cool to see how Mercy works in everyday, but also how it can align with social activism, which was super inspiring" Ceanna

## Drips

Again this part of the research has undergone a number of changes, what originally started as a thought about how a current unit of work at Year 9 could be tweaked to include more of a focus on SDG6 has moved into the creation of standalone relief (substitute lessons) focussing on the 'Do' context of the Social Sciences Curriculum.



Resource One: Search Coach and SD6 information

Rationale: Students need to be able to identify sources that are valid and reliable. They need to be able to identify biases and limitations in them and what they information they may not include.

### Links to NZC:

**Te kohikohi, te tātari, me te whakamahi mā tāpuna** | Collecting, analysing, and using sources

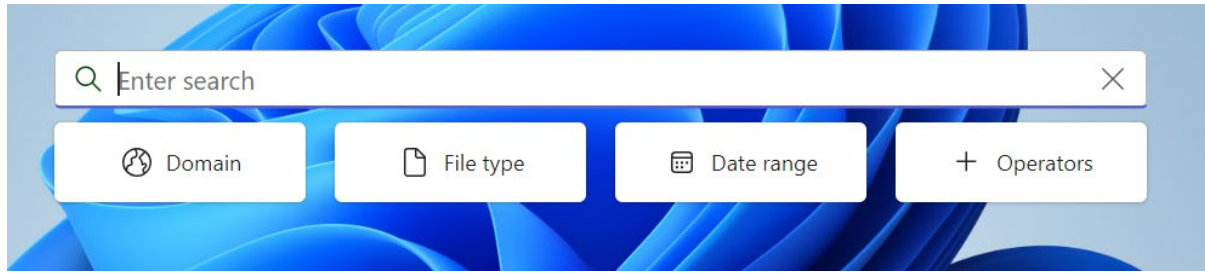
#### *I can:*

- › consider whether my sources are valid and reliable, identify gaps in them, and reflect on limitations and biases in representing the people and groups involved
- › engage with sources and people in the community ethically and with generosity and care
- › use historical sources with differing perspectives and contrary views (including those that challenge my own interpretation), giving deliberate attention to mātauranga Māori sources. I can recognise that the sources available may not capture and fairly represent the diversity of people's experiences
- › process information, using social science conventions and literacy and numeracy tools to help organise my research.

This is not a new skill for our students, but rather one that is applied in other contexts.

Being able to critically search for and then evaluate sources is a key skill that you need both at school and in life. It is not effective just to type questions into google! With the rise of AI and false/mis information you need to think critically about the material that you are consuming.

Did you know that you can refine (shape) your searches by



Domain - .org, .govt.nz

File type - for example if you want a power point on something you can limit your files searches to this

Date range you can find a source produced in the last week as opposed to five years ago

Operator - allow you to make your searches much tighter

Spend some time in search coach reading the information about each of these search types.

Do a general search for SDG 6 water

A screenshot of a NewsGuard credibility analysis for the website unicef.org. The interface shows a search bar with 'unicef.org' entered. Below the search bar, there's a '77.5/100' score and a 'Generally credible' label. The main content area is divided into two sections: 'Credibility' and 'Transparency'. The 'Credibility' section lists five criteria with checkmarks or X marks: 'Does not repeatedly publish false or egregiously misleading content' (check), 'Gathers and presents information responsibly' (check), 'Has effective practices for correcting errors' (X), 'Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly' (N/A), and 'Avoids deceptive headlines' (check). The 'Transparency' section lists three criteria: 'Website discloses ownership and financing' (check), 'Clearly labels advertising' (N/A), and 'Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest' (X). The 'The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information' (X) criterion is also listed. At the bottom, there's a link to 'Full NewsGuard Analysis'. On the left side, there's a sidebar with links to 'Home | SDG 6 Data', 'SDG Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation', and 'Summary Progress Update 2023'.

Now you are aware we are a Mercy school, but did you know that Mercy International has a special consultative status as the United Nations? And that Mercy is doing a lot of work in this space?

Six sources to look at - which three are you going to save and why?

[water-guide-final-pdf.pdf - Google Drive](#)

UN, Mercy and Water <https://www.mercyworld.org/global-action/degradation-of-earth/water/>

Mercy Water Justice Toolkit <https://www.mercyworld.org/f/45074/x/160c800e46/mercy-water-toolkit-2023.pdf>

Water, Women and Wisdom <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AcZhOWTdjuOIme3wLN-VV0jA4jV768iS/view>

Reflections on Water <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NRN7OHYfFKw1rUy0Gd0xEV1ce2KzsKw9/view>

World Water Day Animation [World Water Day 2023 animation starring the hummingbird!](#)





Solo Play Kahoot

<https://kahoot.it/solo/oauth2/authenticated?code=uOJKwXHsw3OuyAWBOEUdbDFaI2omTaqWUiYeB30LX7Q&state=d49fc96f11714bae8b15569c723c018e>

### Student Feedback

- This was a different way to look at sources
- I like that the sources were provided and we had to analyse things
- I didn't realise that impact of water issues in other parts of the world
- I liked the kahoot

### Resource Two: Perspectives on Water

Links to NZC:

**Te tautohu uara me ngā tirohanga | Identifying values and perspectives**

*I can:*

- › describe the values behind diverse perspectives within and between groups, and explain the implications of missing perspectives
- › develop frameworks and criteria for analysing perspectives and considering why people think and act the way they do
- › use tools to identify and respond to attempts to influence or manipulate people's values, perspectives, and actions.

Using the sources you used in the last relief lesson have a go at answer the following questions. You want to be writing full sentences.

1. How is water valued?
2. Is water taken for granted?
3. What are the key water issues for people and nature?
4. How does water affect women and men differently?
5. Any steps (big or small) you can take to alleviate the water crisis?
6. What does a rights-based approach to water mean to you?
7. What are the primary sources of water - rivers, lakes, groundwater, aquifers? Are these sources of water at risk of depletion or contamination?
8. Who funds water infrastructure – supply and treatment? Is it publicly funded or privatized?
9. Who uses most of the water? Who pays for water? What happens if you cannot afford to pay for water? The People's Guide to SDG6 identifies a number of red flags – do any apply?

### Resource Three: Numeracy Contexts

In 2023 a corequisite literacy and numeracy assessment were introduced to our National Qualifications Framework. Students must achieve both literacy and numeracy before they can achieve any of the NCEA Levels. The numeracy is quite literacy based and students need to be able to apply knowledge in a variety of contexts. It is not the responsibility of the Mathematics or English Faculties to deliver this knowledge; it is the responsibility of all teachers.

There are some standard question types that are used in the questions. For example,

Short topic questions/Numbers and operations

ID: 25876-3

All Year 10 students at a high school went on a school camp together with a group of teachers.

a) One year 16 teachers and 208 students went on the camp. Write the ratio of teachers to students in its simplest form.

Answer:  :

b) In total, 24 instructors and 180 students went on a kayaking trip. Write the ratio of instructors to students in its simplest form.

Answer:  :

c) For the camp dinner the students cooked 22.5 kg of mince and 30 kg of sausages. Write the ratio of mince to sausages in its simplest form.

Markscheme

Level: Mixed difficulty  
Marks: 3

Mark distribution

2/1/0

Concepts			
Methods			

+

Add

One of the sources above links to Mercy Beyond Borders. So it was a relatively simple exercise to rewrite the questions to a Mercy context, whilst retaining the numeracy skills required.

All teenage girls in a village had to collect water from the well.

- In one month 16 women and 208 girls went to the well. Write the ratio of women to girls in its simplest form.
- In one area there are 24 wells and 180 villages. Write the ratio of wells to villages in its simplest form.
- From one well girls collected 22.5 litres of water that was decanted into buckets and 30 litres of water that was put into other containers. Write the ration of buckets to other containers in its simplest form.

Answers:

- 1:13 (16:208 dividing by 16 gives 1:13)
- 2:15 (24:180, dividing by 12 gives 2: 15)
- 3:4 (22.5:30, multiplying by 2 gives 45:60. Dividing by 15 gives 3:4).

**Other Examples Used:** Mercy Beyond Boarder, Water, Catherine McAuley and teaching children.

## Resource Four: Links to Previous Knowledge

**Te whakaaro arohaehae mō ngā wā o mua** | Thinking critically about the past

*I can:*

- › construct a narrative of cause and effect that shows relationships. By comparing examples over time, I can identify continuity or changes in the relationships. I can recognise that others might interpret these relationships differently
- › make informed ethical judgements about people's actions in the past, basing them on historical evidence and giving careful consideration to the complex predicaments people faced, what they knew and expected, the attitudes and values of the times, and my own attitudes and values.

In previous years you have looked at a range of topics that link into the Sustainable Development Goals (think Sustaining the Pacific, Human Rights, Systems of Government).

Using your research skills, existing knowledge; choose one of the following:

1. Choose an area where water is of concern (remembering that we are very privileged here in New Zealand) and explain the issues and potential solutions.
2. How do water issues link to other world issues such as the displacement of people?
3. How has access to water and implications from water changed in the last 5-10 years? Explain if/how you think the rate of change has varied. Why might this be?
4. What are New Zealand's concerns with water? Why is water becoming more of a concern?

Once you have collated your ideas in your OneNote, create this into a poster that can be displayed on the walls in MB.

## Resource Five: Extension Activities

**Te whakaaro huatau** | Thinking conceptually

*I can:*

- › apply conceptual understandings across contexts and case studies in order to develop generalisations
- › explain that concepts are contested and mean different things to different groups.

1. Taking either a paper map (will be in the relief kit) or using google maps, identify at least six countries where water is a significant area of concern. Plot these countries on the map and then give a reason why you have included them on your map. Think carefully about the different things your map might need - a title? A key? A scale? If you are using Google Maps you can also add some images.
2. Think carefully about water in New Zealand, think about an action that you could take either to raise awareness about the importance of water or how we can work to protect the water that we have.
3. If there are enough interested people in your class (you will need six people) prepare a debate on one of the following moots:

This house believes that water is the most significant resource in today's world

This house would charge people for their use of all water in New Zealand

This house believe that people do not value water as much as they should

This house believes that there should be an international body to oversee the use of water in the world



## The Power of Young People

The final part of this piece of research was about what happens when young people are encouraged and supported to pursue environmental advocacy for themselves.

Enviro Groups are relatively common in New Zealand Schools, thanks to the Enviro Schools programme. <https://enviroschools.org.nz/>

St. Mary's College Enviro Group has been working on their Enviro School Status for a number of years. The group is student led, with a Prefect role to oversee it and supported by interested teachers. Initiatives have involved the introduction of beehives and bees to the College, indicators or where water is going directly to the Ocean so people can be conscious of what is going down the drain, information campaigns, beach cleanups, and increasing the planting around the College.

When giving them the challenge of contributing something to the Mercy Water Justice Taskforce, they came up with many options.

This is the email that I received from the leaders:

The Enviro group and I have come up with the following plan in order to tackle water action and do our part as Mercy Water Leaders! I hope you like the sound of these ideas and can help us along the way 😊

### **1. Speaking in Assembly**

What?

A group of students within the Enviro group will put together a fun and engaging presentation for assembly that promotes easy ways to conserve water in everyday life. The presentation will also educate students on the importance of water and why it must be treasured and preserved.

Why?

The purpose will be to engage students in the school community in water issues and their importance. The presentation will give them valuable information and practices that they can take home to their family and friends in order for water conservation habits to spread into the wider community.

Next Steps

I will arrange an assembly slot with Mrs Bray and assist group with putting presentation together.

### **2. Working With the Tuck Shop**

What?

Asking the tuckshop to stop selling bottles of water or finding an alternative option, such as a school drink bottle, that they could sell.

Why?

Commodifying water undermines the idea that water should be a fundamental human right that is accessible to all. Those that may have forgotten to bring water to school should not be buying water from the tuckshop, especially when there is free water provided by taps as it supports the idea of considering water as a commodity or a business opportunity which will leave behind those that cannot access or afford the market prices. Selling plastic bottles of water at the tuckshop also increases the amount of plastic being consumed by the school, when students should be encouraged to use reusable drink bottles which can be refilled by the schools taps.

Next Steps

I will need assistance getting in contact with the right people at the tuckshop and advice about how to go about this. I understand we may need to come to a compromise on how to fix this issue.

### 3. ***Tree Planting***

What?

Tree planting in the community-currently searching for what organisation we will do this with

Why?

Riparian planting improves water quality by acting as a sieve to filter out contaminants such as chemicals, nutrients, sediment particles, or bacteria before they enter the water. As we well know In New Zealand, these contaminants are mainly caused by activities such as farming, which has greatly impacted the quality of our waterways. By getting involved in tree planting, we can help to restore the quality of water and regenerate our beautiful NZ waterways. It also gets students out of the classroom and involved in practical activities that may encourage them into more environmental work in the future.

Next Steps

Find and decide on a planting date and organisation

Organise health and safety, transportation etc.

Whilst not all the ideas may have been executed, this was what they came up with. They completed their assembly presentations, worked with the tuckshop with what turned out to be packaging and we didn't get to the tree planting.

### **How This Can Be Applied in Other Contexts:**

This is an example of how resources can be applied in a particular context. A number of them can be used across a range of educational contexts.

The challenge comes from already have a full curriculum, co-curricular opportunities, life outside of school, how to we continue to prioritise what is meaningful and useful for students.

### **Conclusion**

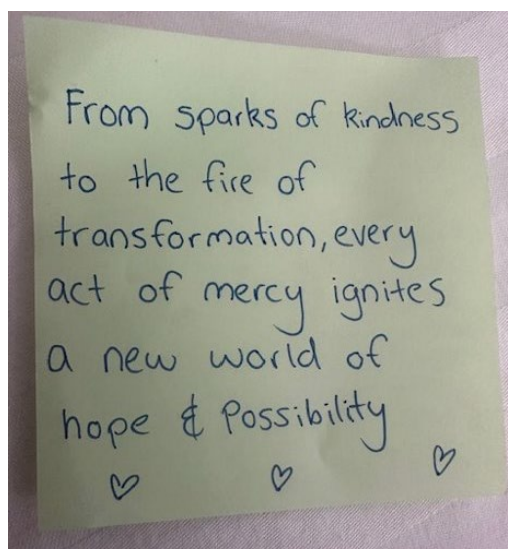
The resources available to the Mercy world in documents like from Sparks to Fire, are of such a high quality and very accessible to higher secondary school students, we need to make sure we are utilising them.

The Mercy context, particularly around water, can be woven into many aspects of student learning.

The saying "Obvious to You, Amazing to Others", is one that comes to mind. Schools can learn a lot from each other in the different ways that the approach things.

As with lots of things in education, we need to be guided by the words of Catherine McAuley:

**"The simplest and most practical lesson I know is to resolve to be good today, but better tomorrow."**



## **Links and References (not linked in report)**

[From Sparks To Fire](#)

[Senior Social Studies](#)

[Senior Social Studies – TKI](#)

[Numeracy Requirements](#)

[Search Coach](#)

## **Acknowledgments**

St. Mary's College Social Sciences Department

Year 13 Social Studies Class of 2024

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