

# Children's everyday lifeworlds out of school, in Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore: Family, enrichment activities, and local communities

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**Abstract:** Children's everyday lives beyond school need to be considered holistically, in a way which moves beyond time use. In this article we draw on our adaptation of Sarah Pink's (e.g. 2012) video re-enactment methodology for considering children's out-of-school lifeworlds with Year 4 children (9 and 10 years old) in the global cities of Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore. The data presented and discussed here was part of a larger Global Childhoods Project with children in the three global cities of Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Singapore. We use video re-enactment methodology to 'think with', to open up lines of inquiry and create conversations about children's lives in and between the cities. Through these we consider the specifics of each city context, as well as socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts and factors that may impact differently on children's everyday lifeworlds out-of-school within the same city. In order to focus the scope of the article, we consider family routines, enrichment activities and local communities, as aspects that we find useful to reflect on when exploring what children's lives look like, in and across locations. We focus on these as we are interested in how they might add to the complexities of thinking about children in each location. We move between thinking about the re-enactments themselves and broader literature to explore children's out-of-school lifeworlds in the three cities, painting a picture of children's lives and considering the contexts which make particular activities and practices possible and desirable.

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Video re-enactment methodology; Children's lifeworlds; Children's out-of-school activities; Family; Enrichment activities; Community

## Introduction

The data reported in this paper is drawn from a project entitled Global Childhoods: Lifeworlds and educational success in Australia and Asia which was designed to explore and better understand children's lifeworlds and their orientations to educational success in three global cities: Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Schutz (1964) has suggested that the lifeworld is the taken for granted everyday experiential world of individuals. The project sought to explore children's lifeworlds inside and outside of school in the three cities. To do this, we drew on four data collection sources: a video re-enactment methodology in the children's homes (see Yelland et al., 2023), class ethnographies that were constructed over the period of a week at two times in the year, a learning dialogues activity (Yelland & Bartholomaeus, 2021) where the children responded to prompts about their learning and goals for their schooling experience, and a student survey with 643 respondents (see Lee et al., 2023) all derived from their classrooms. The Project\* took a multidimensional view of children's lives, researching with children, teachers, and parents, drawing on conversations, direct responses to our questions, and our observations, to explore perspectives and contexts of children's everyday lifeworlds.

We resonated with the (new) sociology of childhoods theoretical framing of childhood from a

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sociological, rather than the traditional psychological, perspective. In viewing childhood as a social construction, we feel it is necessary to consider children's social and cultural milieu and their active construction of their own identities in their own unique contexts (Prout & James, 1997). The field of childhood studies draws on this original work and has tended to focus on social constructions of childhood and children's agency (Spyrou, 2018). In the Global Childhoods Project, we were wanting to involve the children in collecting data on their own lives. We were interested in how the children viewed their lives as we attempted to consider some of the contributing elements to them. We were also conscious that our data collection constituted only one part of the context of their lifeworlds incorporating data directly from the participants and we began with the learning dialogues (Yelland & Bartholomaeus, 2021) and followed with the re-enactments. Our methodology included engaging directly with the children about their experiences and we also included methods that are broader than their own perceptions about themselves (survey and classroom ethnographies). Thus, the data collection in each of the cities took place in Year 4 classrooms in schools, and we also went into the homes and communities with seven children to re-enact their activities, routines and family events when they were not in school. We did this because traditionally, educational success is determined by considering the performance of children in high stakes tests that occur in schools. We wanted to consider and reflect on broader aspects of their activities and performance, and this meant investigating their lifeworlds beyond school.

We use, the concept of lifeworlds to explore children's everyday lives at home, in school, and in their communities (Yelland et al., 2008). We also consider lifeworlds in the plural to explore the multiplicity and diversity of children's lives, extending on from previous writing about the singular lifeworld (see Lee et al., 2023). These everyday experiences include the taken for granted actions and activities that are socially and culturally embedded in their lives. We think that explicating them for study enables a holistic picture of children's lifeworlds and orientations to educational success that is more detailed than simply putting a numeric value on their performance in school in three curriculum areas (Mathematics, Science and Language) that are characteristic of high stakes tests content areas.

The learning dialogues and re-enactments were regarded as data where the children's voices about their learning experiences was collected directly with them. They also provided an opportunity to uncover aspects of children's lifeworlds which had hitherto only been considered in a minimal way, thus making them visible for analyses. We were not only interested in what they were doing out of school but how these experiences might connect with the processes of schooling in any way. For example, we pondered if children's everyday lives at home and in communities, were as closely structured into routines and timetable options as we saw in schools. By engaging in conversations with children around what constituted their everyday lives out of schools we were able to further build narratives of their lifeworlds that reflected the diverse nature and capacity of the children.

Pink and Leder Mackley (2014) emphasised that in order, "...to research everyday ethnography we need to be 'in there' and part of the very flow of life that we are researching" (p 146). Originally, Pink (2012) conceptualised re-enactments as an in-situ technique where (adult) participants were filmed as they explain their daily routines. We needed to modify the process since the young children needed a lot more prompting and structure to have conversations about what they were engaging in, supported by their parents. We trialled this approach in 2015 and this facilitated the documentation of the children's everyday lifeworlds that enabled us to describe their routines after school and at weekends by recording their descriptions and explanations about them. Pink and Leder Mackley (2014) contends such re-enactments 'bridge the gap between representation and action. It involves doing, imagining, and representing and thus invites us to ask questions about what it is then that we are seeking to access...' (p153)

## Overview

Children's lives outside of school are often considered in relation to time use and participation in particular activities (e.g., Mullan, 2020; Rees, 2017). These studies are useful in thinking about the key activities undertaken by children and the proportions of time allocated to them. However, more research is needed which considers children's lives holistically, paying attention to the flows of everyday life and

connections between activities.

Sarah Pink developed the video re-enactment methodology to explore everyday life, including in relation to energy use (e.g., Pink, 2012; Pink & Leder Mackley, 2014). The video re-enactment methodology asks people to literally re-enact their everyday routines, sparking memories and reflections, but also contributing more sensory experiences and understandings. We adapted this methodology to explore Year 4 (9-10-year-old) children's out-of-school lifeworlds at home, in school, and in their communities in the global cities of Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore (see Yelland et al., 2023, for a detailed description of the adapted re-enactments methodology).

Elsewhere we have written narratives drawing on the re-enactments and detailing a day in the life of children in Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore (e.g., Bartholomaeus et al., 2023). In this article we think differently with the re-enactments, exploring aspects of children's lives in more detail and in relation to each other. Importantly, we also situate these out-of-school lifeworlds in the context of each global city, while maintaining a consideration of diversity within each location. To do this we deliberately position city statistics and data next to our re-enactments, considering the broader contexts alongside individual children's lifeworlds. From our research we can see that children's out-of-school lifeworlds are made up of many overlapping aspects, such as family, homework, tutoring, enrichment activities, leisure activities, and local communities. In order to focus the scope of this article, we concentrate on family, enrichment activities, and local communities. These are three aspects that particularly interest us here when thinking within and across the three locations, and have arisen as focus points from our conversations in our international research team. Focusing on three aspects also allows us some depth in our discussions, rather than a broader overview focus of many aspects and activities.

There is limited writing about children's out-of-school lifeworlds in Hong Kong and Singapore, with attention often focused instead on homework, tutoring, and academic performance in high-stakes tests (some important work has been conducted in these areas, e.g., Tam & Chan, 2011; Tan, 2017, 2019). While these aspects are important in the context of these locations, there is much more to children's lives than these. In some ways there is more consideration of children's lifeworlds holistically in Melbourne, although school is also often a focus. Our work here then seeks to add more depth and richness to understandings of children's lives in the locations.

Here we first provide contextual information regarding each global city before exploring why re-enactments were a useful source of data and some of the themes from the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). We then focus on three themes in more detail and discuss family routines, the types of enrichment activities participated in, and the impact of local communities on the geography of the activities in the children's everyday lifeworlds. More specifically, we consider family in terms of the family members children spend time with (parents, siblings, and extended family members, particularly grandparents) and the things they do together, enrichment activities in terms of both extra-curricular school activities and organised activities outside of school, and local communities with a particular focus on mobility, considering travel to school and the location of their activities within their neighbourhoods and beyond.

### **The Contexts of Children's Lifeworlds in Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore**

The descriptions regarding the contexts of each global city constitute important background context information to think about children's lifeworlds in each of the locations. We also include mention of schooling as this has implications for the amount of time children have outside of school and impact on some potential connections between school and home.

#### ***Hong Kong***

Hong Kong has been a Special Administrative Region of China since 1997. The total land size of Hong Kong's islands is 1113.76 square kilometres (Lands Department, 2021). In the 2021 Census, Hong Kong had a population of 7.4 million (over 7.3 million Usual Residents and nearly 80,000 Mobile Residents – people staying outside of Hong Kong, including for work) (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). Children aged 5-14 years old made up 7.8% of the population (578,844 children) (Census and Statistics

Department, 2021), meaning it has the smallest percentage of children in our three focus locations. Statistics available at the 0-14 year age group show that 92.6% are listed as having Chinese ethnicity (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). Cantonese is the predominant language in Hong Kong, with 88.2% of the total population aged 5 years and over speaking Cantonese at home, although English and Putonghua (Mandarin) are also common as either usual languages or another spoken language used at home (58.7% English and 54.2% Putonghua) (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). Of the total population, 61.7% were born in Hong Kong, with this increasing to 91.6% for birth-14-year olds (Census and Statistics Department, 2021).

Most children in Hong Kong attend public sector schools for six years in primary school and six years in secondary school (GovHK, 2022). Whole-day primary schools in Hong Kong start at approximately 8:00am or 8:40am and finish at approximately 3:40pm. Children may have optional extra-curricular activities after school which are organised by the school. The school year runs from approximately early September to early July the following year, with schools required to offer 190 school days each school year.

### *Melbourne*

Naarm (more commonly referred to as Melbourne, which we use here) is located on the unceded lands of the Kulin Nation in the state of Victoria in Australia. Greater Melbourne has a land size of 9992.6 square kilometres (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022b), much larger than Hong Kong and Singapore. In the 2021 Census, Greater Melbourne had a population of 4.9 million, of which just over 600,000 (12.3%) were 5-14 years old (ABS, 2022a). 82.7% of 5-14-year-old children in Greater Melbourne were born in Australia, with others born in countries including India, New Zealand, and China (ABS, 2022b). Just over a third of the total population of Greater Melbourne (34.6%) had both parents born in Australia (ABS, 2022a). English only was used at home for 61.1% of the total population of Greater Melbourne, with other languages including Mandarin and Vietnamese (ABS, 2022a).

Schooling is compulsory for 6-17 year olds, where most children attend primary school for Preparatory to Year 6, then secondary school from Year 7 to Year 12. Primary school generally runs from 9-3:30pm weekdays. The school year follows the calendar year and consists of four terms of approximately 10 weeks each.

### *Singapore*

Singapore is an island city. It has the smallest land size of the three locations at 728.6 square kilometres (Singapore Land Authority, 2021). The Singapore population in the 2020 Census was 4.04 million, consisting of 3.52 million citizens and 0.52 million permanent residents (there were also an additional 1.64 million non-residents) (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021a). Children 5-14 years old made up 10.0% of the population (405,130 children) (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021a). The ethnic composition of 5-14-year-old children as described in the Census was Chinese (68.1%), Malays (15.9%), Indians (11.8%), and others (4.2%) (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021a). Most children (86.4% of 349,975) were born in Singapore, with others born in places including Malaysia, Mainland China, and India. The most frequent language spoken at home for 5-14-year-old children was English (74.5%), with most also speaking another language at home, such as Mandarin (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021a).

In Singapore, school consists of 6 years of primary and 4-5 years of secondary school, where students can participate in the Express Course, Normal (Academic) Course, or Normal (Technical) Course (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2022a). Primary schools in Singapore start at 7:30am or later, and tend to finish at around 1:30pm or 1:40pm. The school year follows the calendar year and runs for four terms of 10 weeks each. After school Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) are organised by schools and are viewed as a key part of children's holistic development. CCAs are 'strongly encouraged' by the Ministry of Education at the primary school level, and are compulsory at the secondary school level (MOE, 2022b).

## Method

### Researching Children's Out-of-school Lifeworlds Using the Video Re-Enactment Methodology

As stated in the introduction and overview, we draw on Sarah Pink's (e.g., Pink, 2012; Pink & Leder Mackley, 2014) video re-enactment methodology to research children's everyday lifeworlds outside of school (see Yelland et al., 2023). Thinking with the concept of lifeworlds allows for a more holistic and nuanced understanding of children's lives, which includes (but is more than) everyday practices, activities, and experiences, drawing connections between different aspects. Re-enactments allow for a consideration of the everyday practices in children's lifeworlds. They also help to consider what makes activities possible and desirable for children, thinking through sociological, geographical, and cultural perspectives.

Discussions during re-enactments prompt the recollection of memories and details which may not be available in more conventional talking methods, such as interviews. People are then filmed as they re-enact their everyday activities, in a process where the research is co-created by participants and researchers as a re-presentation of their everyday lives (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2014). While Pink developed the re-enactment methodology for use with adults, we have found this useful to adapt for our research with children exploring their everyday out-of-school lifeworlds (for a more detailed discussion of this, see Yelland et al., 2023). However, Leder Mackley, Pink, and Moroşanu (2015) conducted some research with children as part of their work on home energy use, where children's re-enactments of their energy use helped them to explore in sensory ways their practices and experiences. Apart from this, to our knowledge, the video re-enactment methodology developed by Pink has not been used in research with children, although we are familiar with child-led tours and 'walk along' interviews with children (e.g., Loebach & Gilliland, 2010). The video re-enactments allow for further reflection as children literally re-enact their everyday routines and activities, sparking memories and sensory experiences.

### Participants

Teachers who participated in the classroom ethnographies were asked to identify possible children whose families might be agreeable to allowing us to conduct the re-enactments with them. We had originally sought to include four children in each of the locations (two from each school involved in the ethnographies), although it proved to be difficult to find families who were willing to participate, due to privacy concerns associated with filming. Depending on the individual schools and locations, we also suggest this may have been related to the distance families lived from the school, whereby lengthy journeys on public transport were evident in Hong Kong and Singapore. Ultimately, a total of seven children were involved, all of whom were given pseudonyms: Siu Keung, Mei Mei, Andrew, and Charlotte in Hong Kong (from two schools), Madison and Seb in Melbourne (from the same school), and Ashley in Singapore. Parents were asked to discuss participation in the re-enactments with their child prior to taking part, to ensure they were happy to be involved in the research. All children participating had written parental consent. The day of the week was chosen by parent(s) in consultation with the researcher(s), to allow for the re-enactments to fit in with the children's lives.

The re-enactments were conducted in slightly differently forms in each of the three locations, due to a mixture of local conditions and specific family requirements. This reflects other research with children and young people that occur in different locations (e.g., Burningham et al., 2020). The re-enactment methodology as detailed above was largely followed in Hong Kong, where children were filmed as they re-enacted their regular activities after school for that day. The children in Melbourne did not re-enact each activity they participated in, as they often became more interested in discussing their activities and views in conversation with us. We view this in the context of their individual lifeworlds but also it became evident that children growing up in Melbourne may have been more familiar with being asked about their views. Finally, in Singapore still photography was used when re-enacting activities due to parental concern over privacy when videoing. The need for this modification potentially limited the depth of this re-enactment, as we were not able to record the full process of the re-enactment or our discussions in relation to the activity log for later analysis.

The re-enactments were conducted by local members of the research team in each location: the first and third author in Melbourne, the second author in Hong Kong, and another researcher on the project in Singapore. The language used reflected the locations and specific families, with English used for the re-enactments in Melbourne and Singapore, and Cantonese in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong video and audio recordings were translated into English, and English captions were added to the edited re-enactment videos for sharing within the research team.

## Results and Discussion

### Family Composition

Family was central to the children's out-of-school lifeworlds in each location. Parents were highly involved in their children's lives, as might be expected of children at this age and in these locations. In this section we reflect on the family composition and their routines and interactions. This includes between the children with their parents and siblings, as well as ritualised family time and connections with extended family. We explore these through examples from our re-enactments with children in each location, as well as the broader contextual literature. Rather than being explicitly focused on differences between children in the locations, we are interested in considering children's family lives in each location.

For contextual background, it is useful to briefly consider some of the broader data around children and families, as well as living arrangements, in each of the locations. Hong Kong has an ageing population and low birth rate, with the 2021 Census indicating that 78.9% of households included no children under 15 years old (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). 13.1% of households had one child, 7.1% had two children, and 0.9% had three or more children (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). 1.4 was the average number of children in domestic households with children aged under 15 (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). In terms of housing, flats and units are most common, in the form of occupied private residential flats (45.0%), public rental housing units (30.1%), and subsidised sale flats (15.4%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2021). The median floor area of domestic households was 40m<sup>2</sup> and just under half of households were owned by their occupants (Census and Statistics Department, 2021).

In Melbourne, the 2021 Census showed that 39.0% of family households had children under 15 years old (family households do not include single person households) (ABS, 2022b). Of those family households with children under 15, these were mainly two parent families (83.3%), with fewer one parent families (16.7%) (ABS, 2022b). The average number of children per family with children in Greater Melbourne was 1.8 (ABS 2022a). Data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) indicates that in Australia, the participating 8–11-year-olds were most likely to live with one sibling (over 40%) or two or more siblings (just under half), with few not living with siblings (under 10%) (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2017). In Australia, most children live in detached houses, with mortgages and home ownership high (Warren, 2018). The average floor area of new houses built in Greater Melbourne was 247m<sup>2</sup> (in both 2012 and 2021) (ABS, 2022c), with no clear statistics for total houses in Greater Melbourne.

The 2020 Census in Singapore indicated that just under half (47.7%) of households were married couple-based families with children (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021b). Families are most likely to have two children (measured as number of children born per resident ever-married female = 2.04 children) (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021a). Most homes are owner-occupied (87.9%) and Housing Development Board (Housing Development Board, nd) flats are the most common form of housing (78.7%) (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021b). The floor area of household residences varies, where in 2021 three quarters of households had a floor area larger than 60m<sup>2</sup> (including 24.0% of households having a floor area of more than 120m<sup>2</sup>) (Department of Statistics Singapore, nd).

### *Family Composition: Parents, Siblings and Routines*

All the children participating in the re-enactments lived with their mother and father, and at least one sibling (one child in each city had two siblings: Siu Keung, Seb, and Ashley). In Hong Kong, the children in the re-enactments lived in a flat in a private residential housing estate (Andrew and Siu Keung),

a four-storey house (Charlotte), and a public housing estate (Mei Mei); in Melbourne they lived in detached houses, one in a one storey home (Madison) and the other in two storeys (Seb); and in Singapore in condominium housing (Ashley).

Andrew in Hong Kong, lived with his mum, dad, and younger sister in a private residential flat which the family owned. Andrew followed a well structure regime planned by his parents which focussed on academic activities. His father directed him back to his homework when he got distracted and also revised the content of the homework with Andrew for about 15 minutes every night, with the reason being given that this would strengthen his learning. At the same time, they also showed that they were able to relax in leisure activities as he was allowed to spend a significant amount of time on electronic devices over the weekend, and watched various types of shows on his mobile phone on the car journey home from school. While Andrew had previously played traditional (non-electronic) games at home with his sister, and occasionally his parents, his leisure interests were focused on his mobile phone where he had the choice of what he was doing. Andrew's family had two family rituals. One was watching a Hong Kong sitcom together after dinner each weeknight from 8pm-8:30pm. The other was a bedtime talk routine where Andrew and his sister spoke with their parents on their parents' bed for about 15 minutes each night. This event seemed to be intended to foster their close relationship with each other and they indicated that they would talk about anything that the children brought up in conversation. Originally, they played games and riddles but they indicated that more recently it had shifted to conversations about what happened at school.

The three other children in Hong Kong also ate dinner together as a family, and Siu Keung and Mei Mei played games with their siblings, although Siu Keung often spent time by himself. Mei Mei and her family went out for yum cha for two hours on Sundays and spent the rest of the day shopping and walking around the city, while Siu Keung's family had yum cha with the grandparents, similarly on Sunday for two hours. Siu Keung's family sometimes went out for a walk or to visit the library or the club house, and Charlotte also often went for a walk with her parents around their neighbourhood. Mei Mei sometimes went to the market to shop for food with her mum and brother after school, walking around, eating snacks, and playing in the park. For Siu Keung, his father was away for work most of the week, so Siu Keung enjoyed watching television with him on Saturdays when he was home. Finally, Siu Keung and Charlotte attended church with their families at weekends.

In Melbourne, Seb's family had a regular Friday night dinner at the local pub, watching Australian rules football there during the season. On Saturdays they also had family dinner night at home and accompanied this with watching a movie. During the week there was less routine associated with eating dinner. His mum said they tried to eat with as many family members as possible, depending on who was home at the time and not playing sport. They also needed to walk their puppy so this was also a common activity for the family to do together. Both of Seb's parents travelled for work and his dad was often away from home. Seb shared a bedroom with his younger brother, but had his own 'playroom' where he built Lego models and displayed his sporting medals, which he proudly shared during the re-enactment. While Seb had two siblings, he spoke mostly about engaging in leisure activities alone (frequently building Lego models, reading books, and playing Minecraft on his iPad). This may partly be because Seb and his siblings participated in many sporting activities and were not always home at the same time. Seb also spent a lot of accompanying his siblings to sports, spending time travelling in the car and waiting at the different venues.

Also in Melbourne, Madison's family similarly had a regular Friday night dinner with her family (take out) and a family dinner and movies on Saturdays or Sundays, and dinner during the week was also eaten together. Weekends were for family time, and included a drive, or a weekend away. Madison also watched and discussed the nightly news with her parents, and had a snack and chat after school with family members. She was close to her older brother and she spoke about doing different activities with him. She also sometimes walked the dog with her family.

Ashley in Singapore also spent time with her family. She particularly spent time every day with one of her sisters, eating lunch, playing card games, reading books, and watching television. As with most of

the other children in the re-enactments, Ashley ate dinner with her family every night and the family spent time together at weekends.

### ***Connections with Extended Family***

Frequent connections with extended family are common in Hong Kong and Singapore. In Hong Kong, although multi-generational co-residence is uncommon because of the small living spaces, grandparents are an important source of informal social support to families, especially in childcare (Chen et al., 2022). Research in Singapore also indicates close intergenerational relationships (Narayanankutty & Dommaraju, 2023) and Singapore has a Proximity Housing Grant available to people buying a resale flat to live with or near their parents/child (Housing & Development Board, nd). Such frequent connections with extended family are less common in Australia, although this varies, with some grandparents providing childcare and a small number of grandparents living with grandchildren (Baxter & Warren, 2016).

In Hong Kong, Andrew had close connections to his extended family. They used to visit his maternal grandmother several times a week for dinner as they live close to each other, but this has reduced to two dinners a week (Monday and Saturday) due to Andrew's increasing academic load. One of these dinners is on Saturday night where they also see his mum's siblings and their children, where he mostly plays video games and phone games with his cousins. They visit his paternal grandmother each Friday for dinner. Mei Mei's family visited their grandparents about twice a month (on Sundays), and Siu Keung's family had yum cha with the grandparents on Sundays. Perhaps rather than spending time with grandparents or extended family, Charlotte spent extensive time in her community with her neighbours, which we discuss further in the local communities section below.

In Melbourne, Seb was looked after by his grandmother after school on Mondays, and was picked up from school on the other days by a 'nanny' (relative), which is unusual in Melbourne. This meant he saw extended family due to care arrangements. Otherwise, his mum said they generally had little time for extended family due to their involvement in sports, even though her parents and her partner's family lived in Melbourne. She indicated that they would have more time for extended family now that Seb's football season had finished. Madison and her family in Melbourne did not mention extended family during our visit. Similarly, Ashley and her family in Singapore also did not mention extended family, which is unusual in the context of Singapore.

Our discussions here indicate that the family routines that children experience is of primary importance at this age. Families often had regular routines of eating dinner together and engaging in activities such as watching television, going for walks, going shopping and/or going to church. All the children had siblings, although some seemed to spend more time together than others. Connections with extended family was particularly important in Hong Kong as shown in the re-enactments process, reflecting the broader literature regarding the topic.

### **Enrichment Activities**

Enrichment activities are generally considered to be organised activities for children which are related to cultivating social and cultural capital and developing skills. This framing is common in Hong Kong and Singapore, but in Melbourne such activities are more likely to be viewed as leisure. However, the concept of enrichment is well established in Western countries, for example, in the well-known work of Lareau in the US (2011). Enrichment classes may also involve practise at home outside of lessons, as well as competitions and events. Academic tutoring is generally not viewed as enrichment as it more explicitly relates to academic improvement. Importantly, these activities may be enjoyed by children regardless of how they may, or may not be categorised by adults, and may be 'chosen' by parents or children. Which activities might be possible or desirable also needs to be considered, with opportunities differing not only by location, but also by class and cultural orientations, finances, and other factors.

In Hong Kong, enrichment activities constitute a prominent part of children's everyday lifeworlds outside of school, with children potentially trying out multiple activities to build their portfolio of



experiences. Middle-class parents, in particular, seem to be keen to enroll their children in English-speaking, competitive, public or private schools (Karsten, 2015). Many parents are eager to cultivate valuable social and cultural skills in their children, and hence increase their competitiveness in a globalized economy (Choi, 2016; Karsten, 2015). Parents are likely to enroll their children in multiple enrichment activities to develop them broadly, rather than focusing on excelling in a smaller number of activities.

In Singapore, parents are also often keen to enroll their children in many non-academic enrichment activities. Tan (2017) suggests that while children who have parents with higher incomes have more access to these activities, regardless of class status most parents desire their children to participate in enrichment and tuition activities, in order to have a 'competitive edge' (p. 324). Some parents may also view participation in enrichment activities as important to help their child gain acceptance into elite schools (Tan, 2017).

In Melbourne, and Australia more broadly, the term enrichment is less common, as organized out-of-school activities such as sports and music tend to be viewed as leisure. However, as Skattebol and Redmond (2019) write, in the context of Australia, such out-of-school activities still 'have positive benefits for the development of the kinds of soft skills and longer-term aspirations that are valued in neoliberal society' (p. 77). Children are likely to participate in fewer, more focused activities, which are generally things they enjoy and choose, and which are related to the contexts of their families and neighbourhoods (including access to opportunities and financial limitations, see Skattebol and Redmond, 2019). However, it would seem that some families may be more purposeful in enrolling their children in these and some children in Melbourne/Australia may participate in activities due to parents' desires.

### *Extra-curricular Activities*

In Hong Kong and Singapore, primary school students frequently participate in extra-curricular activities or what might also be called enrichment activities organized by schools and taking place at the schools. Hong Kong schools provide optional extra-curricular activities, in association with clubs and groups which are classified into five types: academic, sports, art, interest, and social services (Education Bureau, n.d.). In Singapore, students can choose CCAs from four groups: Clubs and Societies, Physical Sports, Uniformed Groups, and Visual and Performing Arts (MOE, 2022b). These classes are held for 2-3 hours once a week, although students may participate in more than one. Melbourne does not have such a structured approach to extra-curricular activities, although schools may provide some optional activities. One Australian study indicates that nearly a quarter of 10-11-year-olds participated in art/music/performance and/or team sports run as extracurricular activities provided by their school, although this was less common than participation in similar activities outside of the school (Rioseco, Baxter, and Warren, 2018).

In Hong Kong, Charlotte had two extra-curricular activities at school for one hour each: English Drama (Tuesdays 3:40-4:40 pm) and creating technology (coding) (Thursdays 3:40-4:40 pm). Andrew, who attended the same school, had football on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and ping pong on Wednesdays (all from 3:40-5:45 pm). Siu Keung, who attended a different school, had extra-curricular activities of school choir (Monday 3:40-4:30 pm), Olympic Maths (Thursday 3:40-5:00 pm), and occasionally athletic training (Friday, finished by 5:30pm). Finally, Mei Mei had leadership training (Tuesday 1:45-5 pm) and study club (Thursday 3:45-4:45 pm)

The narrated photo re-enactment with Ashley in Singapore showed that she had CCA at school on Tuesday and Friday from approximately 2:30-5:30 pm (i.e., 3 hours each), one of which was for music. Neither Madison nor Seb in Melbourne mentioned extra-curricular activities related to their school.

### *Out-of-school enrichment and organized activities*

Alongside their school extra-curricular activities (as discussed above), the children in Hong Kong participated in several out-of-school enrichment activities. Charlotte participated in Boys' Brigade Hong Kong (Saturday 2:00-4:30 pm), piano and drum lessons (Sunday 9:30-10:30), and church activities, including coding (Sunday 1:00-1:30 pm). Along with this, there may also be practice and homework

required, although Charlotte only did this occasionally, practicing piano and drums on Wednesdays for 15 minutes before dinner if she had finished her homework. Andrew, who attended the same school as Charlotte, had only one enrichment activity outside of school (tennis class on Sundays from 6 to 8 pm), although participated in other sports in school extra-curricular activities.

Outside of school Siu Keung had a piano lesson (Tuesday for 30 minutes) and he practiced piano on other days (Monday free time might include practicing piano and 15-30 minutes practice before lunch on Sundays), and a swimming lesson (Sunday after lunch for 1 hour). What might be taken from this example is that Siu Keung was enthusiastic about playing and practicing the piano, and excitedly showed us this activity during the re-enactment. Mei Mei, who attended the same school, had two one-hour swimming lessons (Thursday and Saturday), a community-based activity (cooking, handcraft, community service) (every second or third Friday until 8 pm, and Brownies (Saturday) 2-4 pm).

In Singapore, Ashley's out-of-school enrichment activities included a ballet class (1 hour on Mondays) and she practiced playing the drums for half an hour on Wednesdays and Thursdays, a musical instrument she chose to play (she initially was learning piano).

As previously stated, in Melbourne, organized activities such as those outlined above are generally not thought of in terms of being enrichment activities but instead are more likely to be viewed as leisure. Seb had swimming training and competitions on a regular basis throughout the year and also played Australian rules football in winter (games on Sundays). He mentioned he would like to add another sport (cricket) to his summer schedule but his mum's comments seemed to indicate that she was less keen for him to do this. Seb also had a one hour weekly piano lesson on Sundays and practiced alone for ten minutes a day. Madison similarly had sport and music interests, although these were more hobbies and ones she had not spent much time undertaking. She had basketball training and matches once a week each (Monday and Saturday respectively) and half hour swimming lessons (Wednesdays) and guitar lessons (Tuesdays).

Our overview of the approaches to enrichment activities in the three locations provides examples of what the specific children were engaged in from the re-enactments conversations. It highlights important contextual information about what is encouraged within each city as well as provides some reflections on the diversity in the activities of children in the same city. School-based enrichment activities are essentially compulsory in Singapore and are often regarded as an extension of the offerings in the school curriculum. Children in Hong Kong tend to participate in a broad range of enrichment activities, trying out different activities to seek what they like and might be good at before. The children in the re-enactments highlight some of the different forms these enrichment activities may take, where they are chosen in collaboration with parents but may be organized by their school or outside group or organization. Children in Melbourne are more likely to participate in such organized activities and regard them as being for leisure. Overall, sports and music seemed to be the most popular across the cities.

### **Local communities**

In this section we reflect on children's out-of-school activities in relation to their local communities, with a particular focus on mobility as this arose as a major topic discussed in each of the re-enactments. Here we focus on travel to school and location of activities.

#### *Travel to school*

Travel to school, and the distance lived from school, are important aspects of children's being able to establish connections in their local communities. In Hong Kong the public primary education system is divided into 18 school districts, which can be further sub-divided into smaller school zones, which are known as 'school nets'. The Primary One Admissions System prioritises students with specific tiebreakers (such as children of school staff and siblings of school) and district residents over those with no tiebreakers and non-district residents. However, parents and their children could also apply for 'discretionary places' in competitive, popularly sought-after schools in other districts which might be a considerable distance from their homes (Wu, 2020). Entry to these schools is completed by interview (Wu, 2020). The 2021 Census shows that 66.1% of primary school students attended a school in the same district in which they lived

(Census and Statistics Department, 2021). 35.7% of primary school students primarily walked to school, indicating these were at a close distance from their homes, while others travelled using various forms of bus or railway, with few travelling by private car/passenger van (8.5%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2021).

In the state of Victoria where Melbourne is located, government schools are zoned, meaning children often attend schools in their local neighbourhoods, although private schools may require further travel. Parents may base their choice of school on aspects relating to convenience, whether other family members already attend the school, and academic and/or religious reasons (Warren, 2016). Despite school zoning, children in Victoria are most often driven to school by car, even when living within 2km of school (Department of Education and Training, 2019).

Singapore has a complex primary school enrolment system, based on factors including distance from school and alumni status of family members, as well as whether children are Singapore Citizens, Permanent Residents, or international students. Census data indicates that 43.0% of pre-primary and primary school children did not require transport to school, whereas 22.0% travelled by car/taxi/private hire car, 20.1% by public transport (train or bus), and 14.9% by other modes (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021b).

For the children in the re-enactments in Hong Kong, the two children at the subsidised public school, were driven to school. Andrew's journey took 25 minutes by car, with his father driving. Charlotte's journey took 40-45 minutes with her mum doing the driving. The long travel time being due in part to having to drop off other children from the neighbourhood, although their house was still situated some 25km away from the school. Siu Keung took the bus with his grandmother most days (which she said was for safety), and this took almost 20 minutes, while Mei Mei had a 6-7 minute walk with her mum, but was increasingly walking by herself now she was in Primary 4. In Melbourne, both Madison and Seb had a short 10 minute walk home, Madison walking with her older brother or a parent, and Seb walking home with his younger brother from the same school and older sister from the nearby high school, along with an adult (most often a 'nanny' who was a relative). Finally, in Singapore Ashley took a 15-20 minute bus ride home by herself or with her sister.

### *Location of activities*

In thinking about children's local communities, we also explore the locations of their enrichment and organised activities, tuition, and leisure outside of the home. Karsten's (2015) research with middle-class families in Hong Kong highlights that children access activities in a range of locations and settings – with school, the local neighbourhood, and other neighbourhoods seeming to be prominent. Research in Australia has highlighted the importance of neighbourhoods for access to activities, where some children miss out on due to lack of suitable activities in the communities in which they live (Skattebol & Redmond, 2019).

We are particularly interested in Charlotte's frequent engagement with her neighbours in Hong Kong. While Charlotte attended a school some distance away from her home, her out-of-school activities were based in the local neighbourhood and she had many social connections with neighbours. Charlotte lived in a gated community where, to enter the housing estate where she lived, cars had to go through a security check. Charlotte's parents thus viewed this as a safe community for her to visit her neighbours, often riding her bicycle around the neighbourhood and dropping in on friends. As mentioned earlier, Charlotte's family did not seem to spend time with their extended family and their social circle was more centred on their neighbours. Charlotte's other activities were also close to her house, such as attending church in the neighbourhood, going to Boys' Brigade on Saturdays which was 3 kms away, and attending Sunday piano and drum lessons at teacher's house which was a 5–10-minute drive away.

Also, in Hong Kong, Andrew attended a variety of activities, some close to home (such as English tuition at a centre nearby) and others relatively far away (such as private tennis tuition with a friend on Sunday evenings). Andrew's father often drove him to activities, such as his extra-curricular school sports,

with his father noting that attendance at some of these activities was only possible if parents can transport their children. Siu Keung's activities were more focused on the local neighbourhood (perhaps partly because the family did not have a car), such as attending 'Sunday School' and mass service at the church at his school and attending private piano lessons in a shop near his home. His knowledge of his neighbourhood was well demonstrated when his mum asked him to take the second author to the train station after the re-enactment. Similarly, Mei Mei's family did not have a car and she walked to places or travelled by bus. She went to swimming lessons nearby, although this required a short bus ride which she sometimes took with her brother without their mum, although other children also travelled there. Mei Mei had keys to the family's flat and knew how to open the front security doors. She also attended community activities, including Brownies and community classes, as mentioned above.

Both children in Melbourne appeared familiar with their neighbourhood and attended activities which were close to home, and walkable by themselves. For both children this may have reflected the relative privilege of their neighbourhood and being able to have other activities nearby. Seb's family usually had dinner at the local pub on Friday, with Seb pointing in the direction of the pub as we walked home from school during his re-enactment. He also attended piano lessons which were a five-minute walk away, although travel to sports were often by car. Madison also had activities in her local community, attending a 'Fun Club' at the local library and an after-school care at her school, both for an hour once a week. Seb and Madison also sometimes accompanied a family member when taking their dog for a walk around their local community.

Ashley's activities in Singapore were more home based, including her Chinese tuition on Sundays when the teacher came to her home, which is common in Singapore.

Our consideration of local communities and children's physical mobility offers some interesting points on which to reflect. All of the children spent some time in their neighbourhoods, whether it was walking to school or other places, attending local enrichment or tuition activities, and/or visiting neighbours. However, access to transport impacted on what they could do beyond their local neighbourhoods. For example, in Hong Kong Andrew and Charlotte were driven to school and other activities by their parents. In contrast, Siu Keung's and Mei Mei's families did not have cars and therefore their activities were generally based closer to home. Children generally had little independent mobility, with only Mei Mei and Ashley mentioning travelling to school without an adult or older family member, and Mei Mei also taking public transport to swimming lessons with her younger brother and others without a parent. Most of the children demonstrated knowledge of their local communities, able to point things out to us on their journeys home from school or sharing other local knowledge of the areas in which they lived.

### **Conclusions and Reflections**

In this article we have offered a broad (literature based) and more focussed (video re-enactments) consideration of children's out-of-school lifeworlds in the global cities of Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore. In particular, we have focused on three aspects of children's lives (family routines, enrichment activities, and the role of local communities in their activities) in order to consider the nuances and reflect on the complexities of thinking about children's everyday lives in each location. We suggest the use of the modified video re-enactments methodology, alongside the activity logs, have been useful to extend the existing time use research about what children do outside of school, as our focus enables a more detailed and nuanced consideration of individual children's lives in their communities. We also note the usefulness of including contextual data to situate the lifeworlds of the participating children. This is particularly important when considering what is possible and desirable within each location, such as what might be the expectations around enrichment activities and the contexts of children's local neighbourhoods. While our re-enactments were with a small number of children, including only one in Singapore, they were able to illuminate some aspects of children's lifeworlds in ways that other research approaches have not. This is particularly important in the context of Hong Kong and Singapore, where research more often focuses on children in terms of their academic activities.

We have offered a consideration of the three locations and explored the lifeworlds of children within them, rather than starkly comparing and contrasting. By drawing on both broader data and the re-enactments, we have been able to show some common themes and patterns within each location. While children in Hong Kong and Singapore may generally lead more 'scheduled lives' (Karsten, 2015) than children in Melbourne, this is clearly related to the socio-economic contexts in which they live, and it was evident that they took different forms for individual children. The ways in which school, extra-curricular activities, and enrichment activities are set up and made available are also important when considering children's lifeworlds, as we have demonstrated throughout the article. We have also tried to retain a consideration of diversity *within* each location. Sometimes this diversity can be lost when discussing multiple locations, as information is reduced to more simple explanations. The children in the re-enactments in Hong Kong attended two quite different schools, and this has already highlighted some potential differences in their out of school lives, such as access to activities, car travel, and the CCAs that may be available in different schools.

Importantly, we have also noted several similarities between locations. For example, all of the children spent considerable time with family members including their siblings, although some more than others. Most of the children engaged in activities relating to sports and music, although these differed in terms of time spent on them and intensity (e.g. competitiveness). While not wanting to suggest a universal childhood, these findings do highlight the significance of age with regard to what shapes children's lifeworlds, and how age is considered within each of the locations.

Finally, what our project has also shown is that it is invaluable to have an international team of researchers situated in each location being investigated when conducting a project like this (see also Yelland and Saltmarsh, 2013). An international team is essential for understanding context and for local knowledge, including language and cultural nuances. Within the research team we were able to have many conversations about interesting similarities and points of difference amongst the locations, often sparked by the contents of each re-enactment. Such discussions have also enabled each of us to reflect on our own assumptions about the locations in which we live and are most familiar with, when we have found it necessary to look at research to support (or counter) our generalisations and claims about what is 'common' in our city. We suggest continuing conversations such as these, extending thinking about children's lifeworlds within and across locations.

## Declarations

### *Authors' Declarations*

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