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Lifeworlds of nine and ten year old children: Out-of-school activities in three global cities.

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Lifeworlds of nine and ten year old children: Out-of-school activities in three global cities.

Abstract: There has been much discussion about the high performance of East Asian students in international high stakes testing, but little attention has been paid to their lifeworlds beyond school. In this article we explore findings from a survey of 627 Year 4 children (nine and ten years old) in three global cities (Hong Kong, Singapore, and Melbourne), focusing on their out-of-school activities as one aspect of their lifeworlds. The findings indicate that the most common activities in each location were comparable. Since the activities in the three locations were largely similar, the findings problematise East/West binaries which have been a feature of research and discussions in this area.

Keywords: children's time use; after school activities; lifeworlds; Australia; Hong Kong; Singapore

Introduction

Increasing trends towards globalisation has led to the emergence of networked global cities that act as hubs of international finance, impacting on political, cultural, social, and criminal domains (Sassen 2005). A dynamic education system forms part of this ecosystem, both producing and attracting participations and creating aspirational opportunities for citizens that are flexible and globally focussed. In the current global educational landscape there is a focus on what has become known as 'international high stakes testing'. Notably, there has been significant ongoing interest and commentary regarding the high performance of East Asian students in such international tests (e.g. Chen 2014; Jerrim and Choi 2014; Tan 2019). While there seems to have been a constant procession of studies aiming to determine the variables that contribute to success in high stakes international tests, they have tended to focus on isolated features of aspects of schooling that are thought to contribute to the persistently high performance levels of East Asian students for well over a decade (e.g. Barber and Mourshed 2007). They have, for example, focused on the length of school year (Cheung and Chan 2009), the impact of out-of-school tuition and homework quantity (e.g. OECD 2014), the quality and type of homework given to students (e.g. Zhu and Leung 2012), school quality (Ng 2008), the extent of local autonomy for schools (McConney and Perry 2008), and the impact of family variables (Ho 2010; McGaw 2010). However, little attention has been paid to students' lives, and the activities they participate in, outside of formal education.

In this article we use the concept of lifeworlds to consider aspects of children's lived experiences at school, at home, and in the community, where they are growing up in conditions of rapid globalisation, technological advancement and social transformation (Yelland, Muspratt, and Gilbert 2017; Yelland, Muspratt, Chan, and

Gilbert 2012). We explore the lifeworlds of students in three global cities (Melbourne, Hong Kong and Singapore), here focusing particularly on students' activities outside of school as one aspect of their lifeworlds.

The concept of lifeworlds has a rich history in social research as a framework for examining how people and groups experience the world. Drawing on cultural theories (de Certeau 1988/2002, 1997; Highmore 2006; Saltmarsh 2015a, 2015b) concerned with the interactions between everyday life, policy, institutions and systems, we extend the use of the term lifeworlds from the original (singular) meaning from Husserl (1970) and later Habermas (1987), who regarded the lifeworld as a context for taken-for-granted beliefs, attitudes, competencies and practices. Husserl's focus was on consciousness, whereas for Habermas, it was on socially and culturally linguistic meanings. For de Certeau, attention to everyday life requires analysis of the ways that individuals negotiate – often in creative or subversive ways – the institutions that structure their social worlds, producing new ways of being and doing that in turn reconfigure both institutions and cultural practices.

The broader body of research on time use studies and school students globally has contributed to knowledge of children's lifeworlds, particularly outside of school. Research tends to focus on North American and European contexts, although there are some exceptions. The existing Australian research suggests that screen-based activities (particularly watching television), homework, reading, and sports are common out-of-school activities for children aged approximately 9-11 years old (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013; NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2013; Redmond et al. 2016; Stanley et al. 2011; Yu and Baxter 2016). Our previous research (e.g. Yelland 2014; Yelland and Muspratt 2018; Yelland, Muspratt, Chan, and Gilbert 2012; Yelland, Muspratt, and Gilbert 2013, 2017) has documented the wide range of activities that

Hong Kong children aged from 6 to 12 years spend their time on out of school and found little support for the 'East Asian student' who spends a majority of time studying, which is particularly evident in academic and policy debates around high stakes testing. However, other studies of 'East Asian' students have argued that they spend more time on homework than their American and European counterparts (e.g. Karsten 2015; Larson and Verma 1999; Shih and Yi 2014), although Larson and Verma (1999) note that in their review there was little difference in time spent on schoolwork amongst those in elementary school in in East Asia compared to the US.

There are few children's time use studies which consider more than one location at a time, making it difficult to consider potential similarities and differences between locations. An exception is Newman et al.'s (2007) study with Grade 4 students which found that students in Taiwan spent more time on homework than students in Bulgaria and the US, but that rates of watching TV were similar between countries. It is also important to note that the studies which do consider multiple locations tend to specifically look for differences between locations, which creates the impression that there are more differences than similarities (e.g. Harkness et al. 2006). Other studies focused specifically on homework suggest that East Asian students have high workloads, but do not include comparisons with other locations. For example, Tam's (2009) Singapore study suggests that senior primary (Primary 4-6) students have 'moderate to high' homework loads (more than one hour a day).

Children's *enjoyment* of out-of-school activities is also often overlooked, perhaps due to the number of studies collecting data from parents rather than children. Overall, studies have found that generally children participate in activities that they enjoy (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2013; Özdoğru 2010; Rees and Main 2015). While the Children's Assessment of Participation and Enjoyment

(CAPE) scale has been used in several broader studies, this mostly focuses on children with a disability.

In this article we draw on data from a larger project entitled *Global Childhoods: Lifeworlds and Educational Success in Australia and Asia*, an international project situated in the global cities of Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Singapore which aims to investigate how everyday lifeworlds of Year 4 students shape their orientations to educational success. This project includes qualitative and quantitative methods with children exploring their lifeworlds inside and outside of school. We selected Year 4 because that is the year that the high stakes testing (TIMSS and PIRLS) in primary schools begin, and much of the current literature focuses on secondary students. The study builds on from the earlier *Millennial Kids Learning* project mentioned above, which explored the lifeworlds of Hong Kong students in Kindergarten, Primary 1, and Primary 5 (Yelland 2014; Yelland and Muspratt 2018; Yelland, Muspratt, Chan, and Gilbert 2012; Yelland, Muspratt, and Gilbert 2013, 2017). In this article, we focus on the findings from an online survey that children in Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Singapore completed in the presence of researchers. We explore the activities that they participated in after school on weekdays and at weekends, and whether they enjoyed these activities. We focus on these here in order to illuminate aspects of lifeworlds outside of school and to consider the similarities and differences between the locations, given that the children are the same age, in the same year at school and living in global cities with similar economic development, yet with different social, political and cultural contexts.

Materials and methods

The project is a collaboration among researchers located in universities in Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Ethics approvals were gained from the relevant university

and education ethics bodies.[1] The project uses a range of methods focusing on children's perspectives in order to explore their lifeworlds. In this article we focus on the findings from our survey which related to children's activities outside of school.

Survey instrument

A quantitative online survey was developed by the researchers to explore what Year 4 students do outside of school and their feelings towards school. The survey was derived from a longer survey used in the *Millennial Kids Learning* project (Yelland and Muspratt 2018; Yelland, Muspratt, Chan, and Gilbert 2012). As the survey was substantively similar to the previous survey, it was not necessary to conduct a pilot study. The survey was designed so that it contained both direct (factual) and indirect (attitudinal) measures (Sapsford 1999) about students' lifeworlds; that is, their lives in school and in out-of-school contexts. Following design of the survey questions, the survey was constructed using the online survey program Qualtrics. The questions were translated into Chinese for the students in Hong Kong. The translations were checked by two members of the research team for accuracy and relevance for the Hong Kong language context. Students selected their preferred language on the first screen of the survey. Melbourne and Singapore students completed the survey in English, Hong Kong students completed the survey in Chinese.

The survey contained a range of questions dealing with out-of-school activities, enjoyment of school, school subjects and activities, and students' perceptions of themselves as students and their grades. In this article we focus on the out-of-school activities. Students were asked how much time they spent doing each of 18 activities after school over a week on weekdays, and over a weekend. These activities were reduced from a much longer list included in pilot studies conducted in Hong Kong and Melbourne. The number of items was reduced in order to make the survey more

manageable for the students and to focus on those activities they were most likely to participate in. Students responded on a four point scale: No time at all (I don't do the activity); A little bit of time (less than 1 hour); Some time (1 to 3 hours); A lot of time (more than 3 hours). Students were also asked if they liked doing the activities. They responded on a four point scale: It's great; It's okay; I don't like it; I don't do it. The activities are listed in Figure 1.

Participants

The schools were selected in order to represent the diverse student populations in each of the cities. They were recruited via the researchers' existing relationships with schools and additional networking and professional contacts. It has become increasingly complex and time consuming to conduct research in situ in schools. Access to schools is rigorously controlled by government departments in Singapore and Melbourne, while in Hong Kong each Principal was the ultimate arbiter, and while several were keen to participate their teachers were not. The final sample was made up of three schools in Hong Kong, two schools in Singapore, and four schools in Melbourne. Principals approved the research in each of the schools.

Following the recruitment of each school, information sheets and consent forms were sent out to the parent/caregiver of each Year 4 student (in English in Melbourne and Singapore, Chinese in Hong Kong). The majority of students invited to participate in Hong Kong completed the survey, largely due to two of the participating schools having existing agreements with parents and the Education Bureau to allow research in their schools. This was compared to two thirds of the students invited to participate in Singapore and just over half of the students in Melbourne. The primary reasons for not completing the survey related to not returning the consent form and absence from school on the day of the survey. While students with parent/caregiver consent were

invited to participate in the survey, we recognise that children's agreement to participate was impacted by existing adult/child power relations, particularly in the school setting, which are difficult to disrupt (Bartholomaeus 2016).

A survey 'script' was developed so the research would be explained in a consistent way to students in all of the locations. This included contextualising the study for the students, explaining that the researcher(s) were working with a team of researchers in the three locations to learn more about how Year 4 students spend their time in and out of school. Several students expressed an interest in what the survey might find, and were excited to be participating in an international study. In each student group, members of the research team introduced the survey, explained the survey questions, answered any questions from students, and helped students who were having any difficulties with the survey. Approximately 30 minutes was taken with each student group to explain the survey and for students to complete it. All students completed the surveys during class time. The presence of the researchers benefited the quality of data collected as they could explain questions as they arose, unlike conventional surveys which are completed remotely. For example, sometimes students asked for clarification on items, such as whether watching TV included watching programs on their tablets (we asked them to classify these under 'Using tablet, iPad, or smartphone') and what 'tutoring' was as this was often not a familiar term to students in Melbourne. At the same time as benefitting from being able to discuss the survey, students could still complete the surveys anonymously online without having researchers or teachers view their individual responses.

Analysis

We present summaries of response patterns in graphic form. We highlight the most common and least common weekday and weekend activities, and point to

commonalities among the most common and least common activities. Similarly, we point to commonalities among most common and least common activities between the cities. We assess 'common' according to the percent of students who do an activity, regardless of how much time they spend doing the activity. For instance, *Doing homework* is the most common weekday after-school activity because more students do homework than any other activity. Similarly, *Tutoring - language* is the least common weekday activity because fewer students do language tutoring than any other activity. In addition to highlighting common activities, we also point to activities that the students like doing and do not like doing.

We test for significant associations between Gender and whether or not students do an activity. We use the Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel (cmh) test, a test similar to the conventional Pearson χ^2 test but one which allows for blocking - in this case, blocking by City - that is, the analysis controls for the effects of City. We set the alpha level of significance at 0.05, but for each of Weekday and Weekend activities, there are 18 activities. That is, there were 18 tests of significance. To keep the alpha level at approximately 0.05 for the family of tests, all reported p-values are Holm adjusted p-values. We run similar analyses to test for significant associations between City and whether or not a student does an activity after school on a weekday and on the weekend.

For all statistically significant effects we also report the odds ratio, a measure of the size of the effect. An odds ratio of one means there is no effect. Odds ratios greater than one mean that the odds for one group, say girls, doing the activity are greater than the odds for the other group, boys, doing the activity. Odds ratios of less than about 1.5 are small effects; odds ratios between 1.5 and 5 are moderate effects; odds ratios greater than about 5 are large effects.

All general data processing was done using the R statistical environment (R Development Core Team 2019). The association tests were obtained using the *coin* package (Hothorn, Hornik, van de Wiel and Zeileis 2008; Hothorn et al. 2019), a package written for the R statistical environment. Graphical output was produced using the *ggplot2* package (Wickham 2016, 2019), also a package written for the R statistical environment.

Results

Background information about students

A total of 627 Year 4 students from schools located in the three cities completed the survey: 270 (43.1%) in Hong Kong; 165 (26.3%) in Singapore; and 192 (30.6%) in Melbourne. Overall, 303 were girls (48.3%) and 324 were boys (51.7%): in Hong Kong, 123 (45.6%) were girls and 147 (54.4%) were boys; in Singapore, 77 (46.7%) were girls and 88 (53.3%) were boys; and in Melbourne, 103 (53.6%) were girls and 89 (46.4%) were boys. The mean age of the students was 9.9 years (with a standard deviation of 0.54). The Singapore students were, on average, the oldest (mean age was 10.3 years), while the Hong Kong students were the youngest (mean age was 9.5 years). The age of the Melbourne students was mid-way between the other two cities (mean age was 10.1 years).

Out-of-school activities

Figures 1 and 2 show summaries of response patterns for the sample for after-school weekday and weekend activities respectively. The numbers within the bars show the percent of students who responded in each response category. The activities are arranged down the page in decreasing order of the percent of students who do the

activity; that is, more common activities are to the top of each graph, and less common activities are to the bottom of each graph.

[Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here]

On weekdays, after school, nearly all of the students in the three cities reported spending time *Doing homework* (96%), and over half spent some (1-3 hours) or a lot (more than 3 hours) of time (see Figure 1). In each city, the percentages who did homework after school were similar: 97% in in both Hong Kong and Singapore, and 94% in Melbourne (further, these differences were not statistically significant: $\chi^2 = 3.38$, $p = 0.80$). On weekends (Figure 2), *Doing homework* dropped to ninth in the list, but a large percentage of students still spent time *Doing homework* (74%). However, the percentages vary in each city, from Melbourne where 54% did homework, to Hong Kong and Singapore where 82% and 84% respectively did homework. These differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 57.87$, $p < 0.0001$), and the effect was moderately large (the odds of *Doing homework* was 4.13 times greater in Hong Kong or Singapore than in Melbourne).

After *Doing homework*, the five most common weekday after-school activities were: *Playing indoors* (91% of students did the activity), *Reading books* (91%), *Watching TV* (88%), *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone* (87%), and *Talking and sharing with your parents* (86%). On the weekend, the five most common activities were: *Playing indoors* (91%), *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone* (90%), *Watching TV* (88%), *Outdoor sports or activities* (85%), and *Shopping* (84%). Whether after school on a weekday or on a weekend, there were no statistically significant differences in the percentages of students who did these activities across the three cities.

There is a degree of similarity in the most common activities on the weekend and weekdays – three activities were common to the two lists above (*Playing indoors*,

Watching TV, and *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone*). Further, two activities that appear on the five most common activities for the weekend list but not on the weekday list were nevertheless reasonably common weekday activities (*Outdoor sports or activities* - 78%; and *Shopping* - 73%). Similarly, the two activities in the weekday list but not in the weekend list were reasonably common weekend activities (*Reading books* - 83%; and *Talking and sharing with your parents* - 83%).

Considering the most common weekday and weekend activities in each city (see Table 1), there were many similarities among the cities. As well as homework as discussed above, for weekdays, four of the five most common activities were the same across the three cities (*Playing indoors*; *Watching TV*; *Reading books*; and *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone*). Similarly, on weekends, four activities were in common across the three cities (*Playing indoors*; *Watching TV*; *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone*; and *Outdoor sports or activities*).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The most common activities weekday and weekend activities were ones that occurred as part of everyday life. They involved materials that would seem to be an integral part of 21st century life (e.g. technologies, books and games) and did not require additional resources. In addition, they were mostly not organised activities. However, there were some exceptions. For instance, *Outdoor sports or activities* became more common on the weekend possibly because outdoor sports were more likely to entail an element of organisation, and thus to be held on a weekend. As noted earlier, *Doing homework* as a weekend activity was more likely to be done in Hong Kong and Singapore than in Melbourne; and indeed it was the third most common weekend activity in Hong Kong. We also note that *Shopping* was among the most common weekend activities in Singapore and Melbourne.

The least common after school weekday activities (see Figure 1) were: *Tutoring - Language* (31% of students did the activity), *Being read to by someone else* (31%), *Tutoring - English* (37%), *Tutoring - Mathematics* (38%), and *Classes for dance/drama/singing/music/art* (43%). On the weekend, the least common activities were: *Tutoring - Language* (27% of students do the activity), *Tutoring - English* (29%), *Being read to by someone else* (30%), *Tutoring - Mathematics* (30%), and *Classes for dance/drama/singing/music/art* (33%). Thus, the least common after school weekday and weekend activities were clearly the tutoring activities, classes in artistic activities, and being read to by someone else.

Though few students did tutoring activities, there were nevertheless statistically significant differences in the percentages of students who did these activities across the three cities on weekdays: *Tutoring - English* - $\chi^2 = 49.76$, $p < 0.0001$; *Tutoring - Mathematics* - $\chi^2 = 22.12$, $p = 0.0003$; *Tutoring - Language* - $\chi^2 = 18.50$, $p = 0.0006$. Students in Hong Kong and Singapore were more likely to do these activities than students in Melbourne, and the odds ratios were moderate (3.68, 2.44, and 1.98 respectively). With respect to *Tutoring - English*, there was also a small effect favouring Hong Kong students over Singapore students (odds ratio was 1.78). Similarly, there were statistically significant differences in the percentages of students who did two of the tutoring activities and the classes in artistic activities across the three cities on weekends: *Tutoring - English* - $\chi^2 = 32.03$, $p < 0.0001$; *Tutoring - Mathematics* - $\chi^2 = 16.22$, $p = 0.0026$; *Classes for dance/drama/singing/music/art* - $\chi^2 = 22.83$, $p < 0.0001$. As was the case for weekdays, students in Hong Kong and Singapore were more likely to do these activities than students in Melbourne, and the odds ratios were moderate (3.32, 2.20, and 1.97 respectively). With respect to *Classes for*

dance/drama/singing/music/art, there was also a small effect favouring Hong Kong students over Singapore students (odds ratio was 1.98).

Table 1 also shows the least common activities by city. Among the least common activities in Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore were the three tutoring activities (in Language, English, and Mathematics) and *Classes in dance/drama/singing/music/art* for both weekday and weekend activities. In addition, few students reported *Being read to by someone else*. That is, the lists for each city are much the same as the aggregated list given above. The one exception is that *Activities with a club* was less likely to be undertaken in Singapore (28% of students do the activity during the week and 25% during the weekend) than Hong Kong or Melbourne. There were statistically significant differences (Weekday - $\chi^2 = 52.74$, $p < 0.0001$; Weekend - $\chi^2 = 42.68$, $p < 0.0001$). The odds of doing *Activities in a club* were greater in Hong Kong than in Singapore on both weekdays and weekends (odds ratios were 4.41 and 3.50 respectively).

Out of the 18 activities, there is only one for which there was a statistically significant difference for Gender - *Classes in dance/drama/singing/music/art* (Weekday - $\chi^2 = 40.05$, $p < 0.0001$; Weekend - $\chi^2 = 32.76$, $p < 0.0001$). When considering each city separately, the effect applied only to Hong Kong (Weekday - $\chi^2 = 44.72$, $p < 0.0001$; Weekend - $\chi^2 = 34.03$, $p < 0.0001$). In Hong Kong, the odds of doing *Classes in dance/drama/singing/music/art* was greater for girls than for boys on both Weekdays and Weekends (odds ratios were 5.70 and 4.48 respectively).

Enjoyment of activities

Figure 3 and 4 show summaries of response patterns for enjoyment of the activities but in different ways. Figure 3 shows all response categories (*Don't do it*, *It's great*, *It's okay*, *I don't like it*), while Figure 4 shows, of those children who reported doing the

activity, the extent to which they enjoyed doing the activity (*It's great*, *It's okay*, *I don't like it*).

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

In Figure 3, the activities are arranged down the page in increasing order of those who did not do the activity. It is difficult to directly compare 'No time' for the questions about how often the activities were performed (Figures 1 and 2) with 'Don't do it' for the question about liking the activity (Figure 3). But it is noted that a large percent of students reported that they did not do tutoring activities (ranging between 57% and 51%), *Classes in dance/drama/singing/music/art*, *Activities with a club*, and *Practice a musical instrument* (ranging between 39% and 46%). In addition, 47% reported that they were not read to by someone else. These activities are largely the same as those that were reported as having 'No time' spent with respect to Figure 1 and 2. For the remaining, more common activities, only small percentages of students claimed not to do the activities, ranging between 17% for *Going to the library* and 2% for *Playing indoors*. Again, the activities that most students did (towards the top of Figure 3) are largely the same activities that students did with respect to Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 3 shows that relatively small percentages of students reported that they did not like doing the activities - typically the percentage ranged between 2% and 15%. The exception was *Doing homework* where 38% of children reported that they did not like it. However, these percentages are probably not a good reflection of the extent to which students enjoy doing the activities because they are out of the whole sample; that is, students who do not do the activities were included in the calculations. It is better to exclude these students, and to calculate the percentages out of those who actually did the activities. These are the percentages presented in Figure 4. The activities are

arranged down the page in decreasing order of those who said it was great to do the activity.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

In Figure 4, *Doing homework* is the least favourite activity: 41% said they did not like it, and only 15% said it was great. The three tutoring activities (English, Mathematics, and Language) were also among the least favourite activities, with large percentages reporting that they did not like doing them (close to one third). Thus, the tutoring activities are among the least common activities, but of those who did them, they are among the least popular activities.

There is a large number of activities that the overwhelming majority of students did (as shown towards the top of Figure 3) and of those who do them, the majority (half to three quarters of the students) said they were great (Figure 4). These include: *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone; Outdoor sports or activities; Going to the movies; Visiting friends or relatives; Watching TV;* and *Playing indoors*.

Within each city, there is a common group of activities that, for those students who did them, large percentages said they were great: *Going to the movies*; *Outdoor sports or activities*; and *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone*. But there were also some notable differences. For instance, in Melbourne and Singapore, 78% and 65% respectively said it was great to visit friends and relatives, whereas only 47% of Hong Kong students said it was great. Also, in Hong Kong and Singapore, 61% and 68% respectively said it was great to watch TV, whereas in Melbourne, only 40% said it was great. Within each city, the activities with the smallest percentages of students who said it was great was, again, *Doing homework*, and the three tutoring activities. In addition, a small percentage in each city said *Being read to by someone else* was great, but in Hong Kong a smaller percentage of students said *Practice a musical instrument* was great.

Discussion

The increasing focus on international high stakes testing results, particularly the high results of East Asian students, has been the impetus for our study which goes beyond academic results to more broadly considers children's lifeworlds. In this particular article, we focus our attention on children's out-of-school activities, which is rarely considered in studies of children in East Asia beyond a focus on homework, tutoring, and 'enrichment' activities. Our study across three global cities has allowed for a comparative consideration of activities that Year 4 students are participating in after school and at weekends. By using the same survey instrument we were able to directly consider the similarities and differences between activities undertaken by students in Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Singapore. It was clear that students reported participating in a wide range of activities after school and on the weekend, and that the most and least common of these were strikingly similar between the cities. Our findings complicate previous findings that all East Asian students engage primarily in homework, tutoring, and 'enrichment' activities outside of school (e.g. Karsten 2015; Shih and Yi 2014), with students reporting to engage in a wide range of activities. Nearly all students in the three cities reported spending time *Doing homework* after school, with other most common activities also being similar across the cities for both after school and at the weekend. As we noted, the most common of these were *Playing indoors*, *Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone,* and *Watching TV*, although *Outdoor sports or activities* were also common on weekends. The least common activities for each of the three cities were organised activities: the tutoring activities and classes in artistic activities. Such similarities between children's participation in these out-of-school activities in the different locations perhaps highlight the significance of age influencing which activities are undertaken, with the similarities being higher than might be expected of three

distinct locations.

It is important to note that tutoring was amongst the least common activities (i.e. it was not undertaken by the majority of students) in all three locations. However, while it was not undertaken by the majority of students, it was undertaken by more students in Hong Kong and Singapore than students in Melbourne. Tutoring has been found to be more prevalent in East Asian contexts, like Hong Kong and Singapore (e.g. Tan, 2017). However, the influences of international and national high stakes testing regimes as well as an increasing use of academic benchmarks to compare country's educational performance, have also seen tutoring become a growing business in Australia (Davis 2013; Watson 2008). The increase has been linked to the rise in the number of migrant families from East Asia (Dooley, Liu, and Yin 2020; Sriprakash, Proctor, and Hu 2016), but it is also evident that pressure on performance has led to an increased uptake in tutoring more broadly. It is also important to note that while broader literature has focused on tutoring in terms of East Asia, tutoring is a global practice (e.g. Bray, Kwo, and Jokić 2016).

Previous studies examining time use outside of school have often found many more similarities between genders in terms of activities undertaken than differences (e.g. Newman et al. 2007; Nordbakke 2018; Yelland, Muspratt, and Gilbert 2013, 2017). Our findings support these studies, as there was a statistically significant difference for gender in only one of the 18 activities – *Classes in dance/drama/singing/music/art*. Indeed, when considering each city separately we found this effect only applied to Hong Kong, with girls more likely to take part in these classes on both weekdays and weekends than boys. We note that the activity categories we used were broad and there may have been differences between students within these (e.g. what kind of indoor play the students did), including in relation to gender, as well

other factors such as socio-economic status, culture, and location. Future research would be useful to explore the content of these activities in more depth, while avoiding simplistic dichotomies and comparisons.

It is notable that children's enjoyment of activities is not given significant attention in the broader literature on time use. An exception is Özdoğru (2010) who found that Year 4 students in Bulgaria, Taiwan, Turkey, and the US enjoyed most of the activities they engaged in, particularly when the activities were self-chosen rather than adult-chosen. In our study it appeared that students enjoyed many of the activities they participated in. As might be expected, homework and tutoring were the least enjoyed activities, as well as *Being read to by someone else*. However, it is important to note that while these were the least enjoyed activities, the majority of students described them as 'great' or 'okay'. It would be useful for future research to explore children's attitudes towards homework and tutoring in more depth, as these activities are not necessarily (and need not be) unenjoyable or burdensome. This research could extend the work of Tam and Raymond (2011) who found that Hong Kong primary school students generally preferred there to be some homework, although there were differences in perceived homework functions. The finding that *Being read to by someone else* was one of the least enjoyed activities is surprising considering studies that have found that primary school-aged children generally enjoy being read aloud to at home, often due to it being a time of connection with their parents (Merga and Ledger 2018; Scholastic and YouGov 2016).

It is important to note there are several limitations to the survey reported on in this article. The students who participated are a specific sample of students from particular schools in three global cities. We have not been able to consider potential differences between students within the same cities beyond gender, such as socio-

economic status and culture, which would likely offer further complexities and nuances to the activities children undertake out of school. We also note the survey was limited to 18 activities for students to choose from and students are likely to engage in additional activities outside of school. We chose to ask students to report on the time they spend on activities and their enjoyment of them. We note there are potential limitations to this method but argue it is important in order to consider how students themselves viewed their lives inside and outside of school, and allowed for an exploration of their enjoyment of the activities. Finally, we note that our analyses are exploratory, and the data could have been analysed and presented in a number of ways.

This article has contributed to understandings of children's lifeworlds with a particular focus on out-of-school activities, both children's engagement in activities and their enjoyment of them, to provide a context for their learning experiences. The findings highlight that more attention needs to be paid to the wide range of activities in children's after school lives and to consider the ways in which they might impact and influence school performance and aspirations. Future publications from the larger study will continue to provide a broader picture of Year 4 children's lifeworlds in the three global cities.

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Notes

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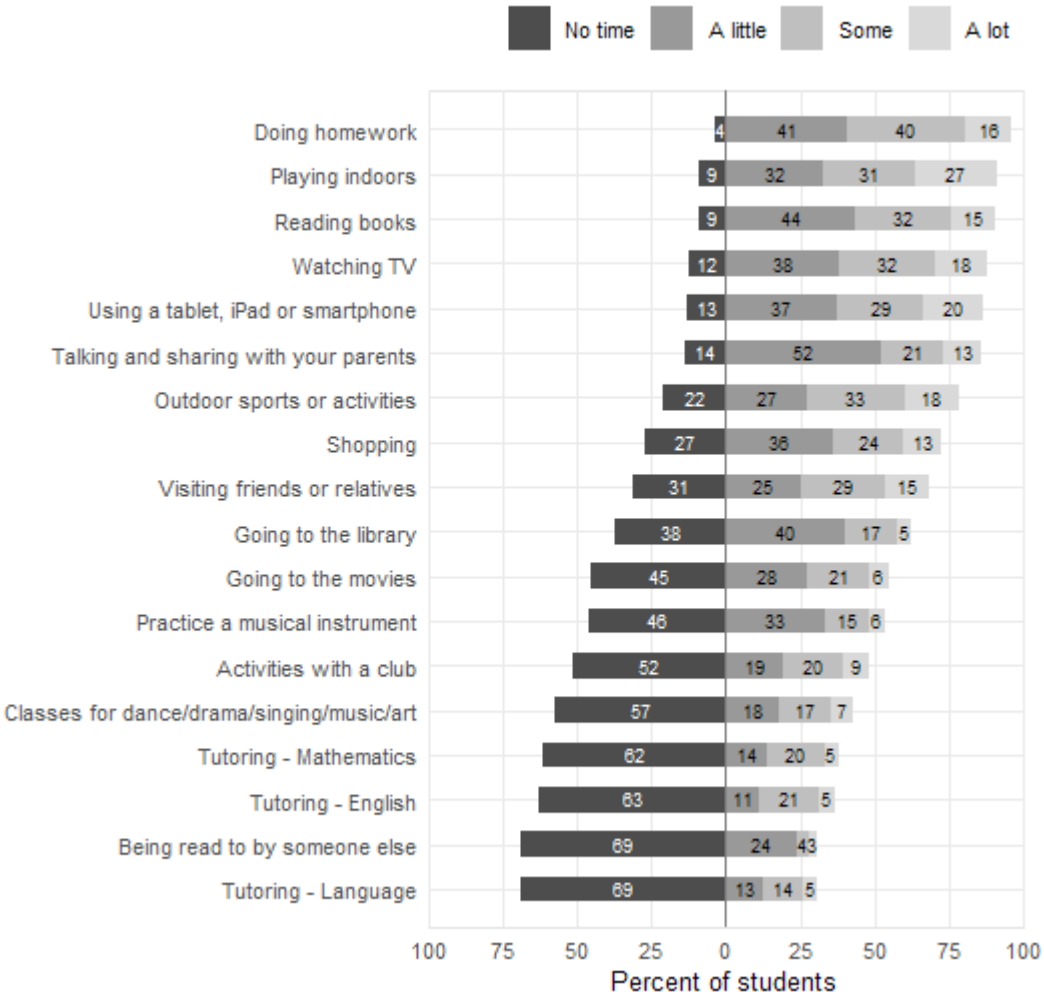
[1] The project was approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Australia), the Department of Education and Training (Victoria, Australia), NTU Institutional Review Board (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), and Ministry of Education (Singapore). In addition, the project was approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee when the head of the project transferred there from Flinders University. Hong Kong does not have the same formal ethics requirements and therefore additional approval there was not required.



Footnote: Figure 1 (and Figure 2) are in two sections: the percent of student who do not do the activity - the dark section to the left; and the percent who do the activity - the different shadings to the right.

Footnote: In all figures, totals might not always add to 100% (or to totals given in the text). This is because of rounding error in the percentages shown in the figures.

Figure 1: Time spent on after-school activities during the week on weekdays

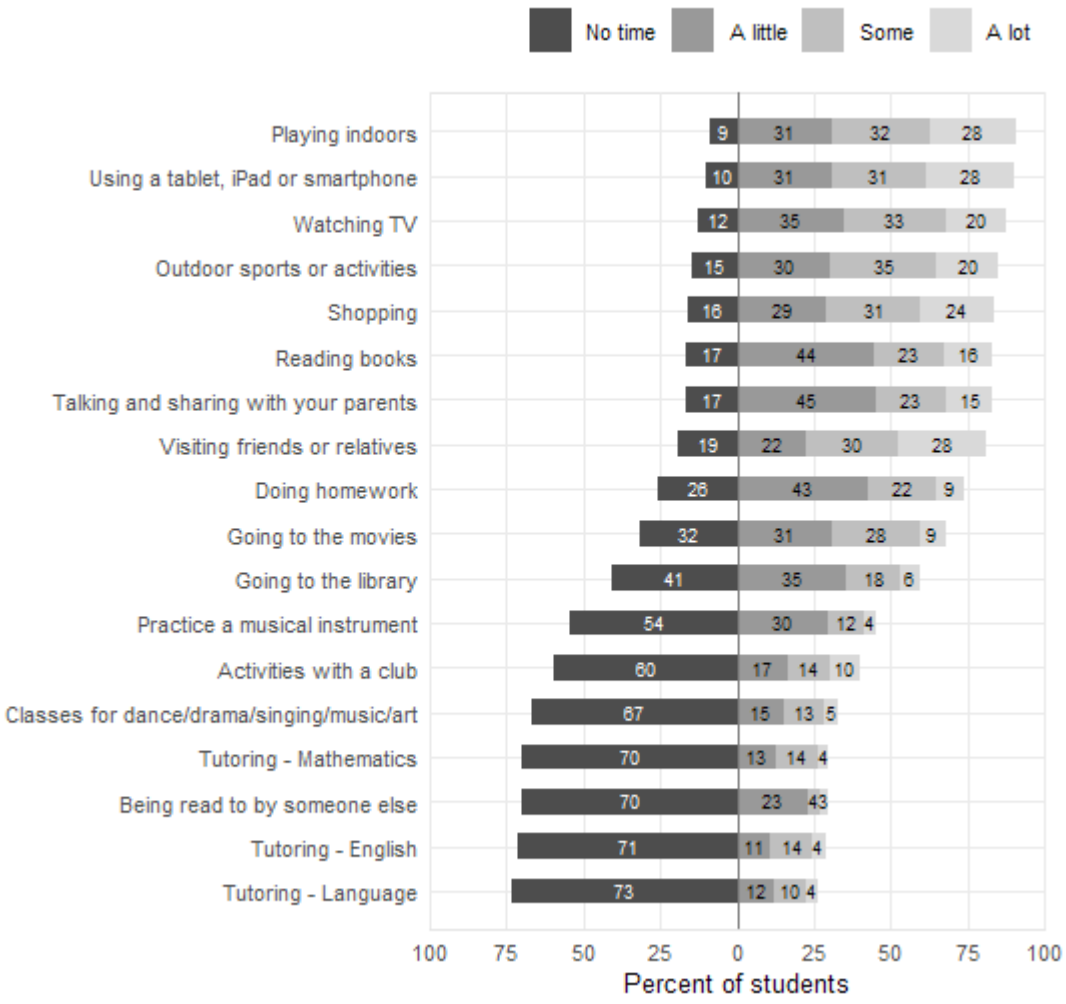
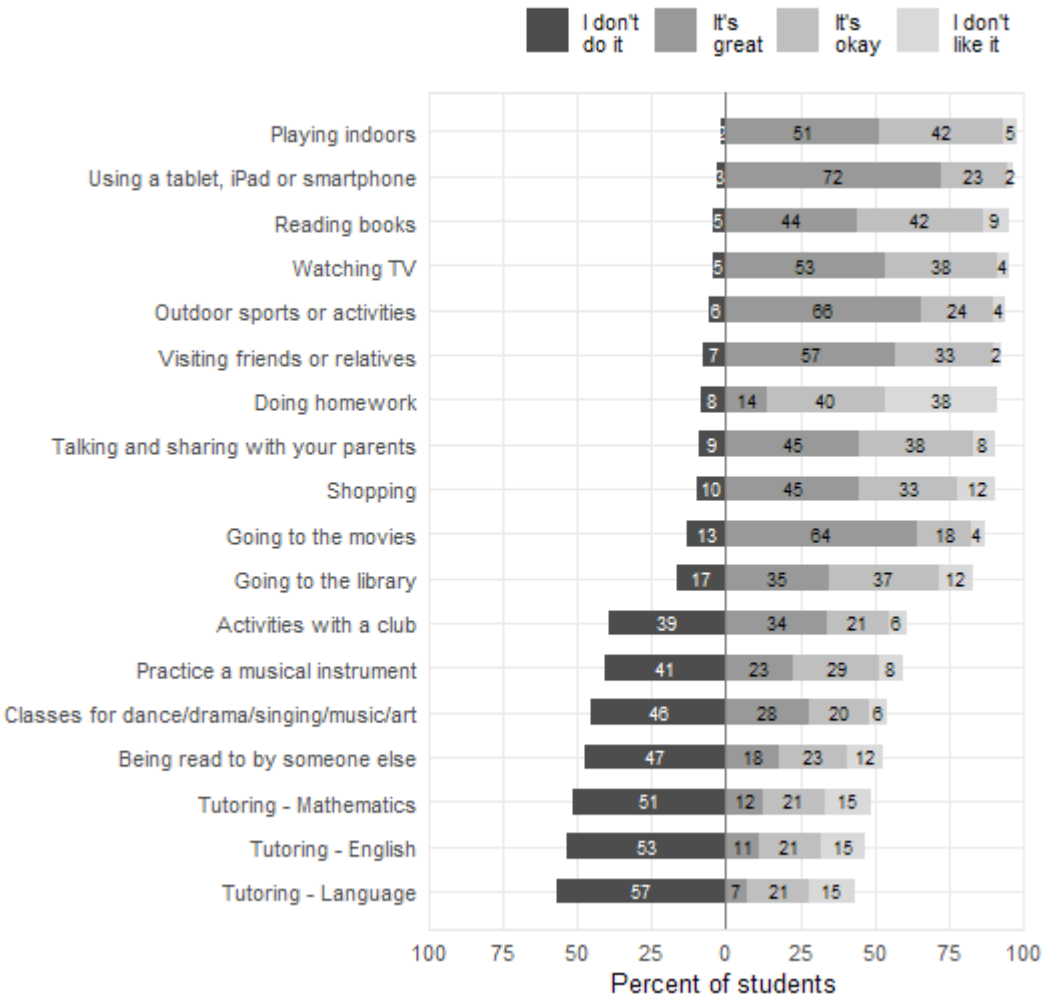
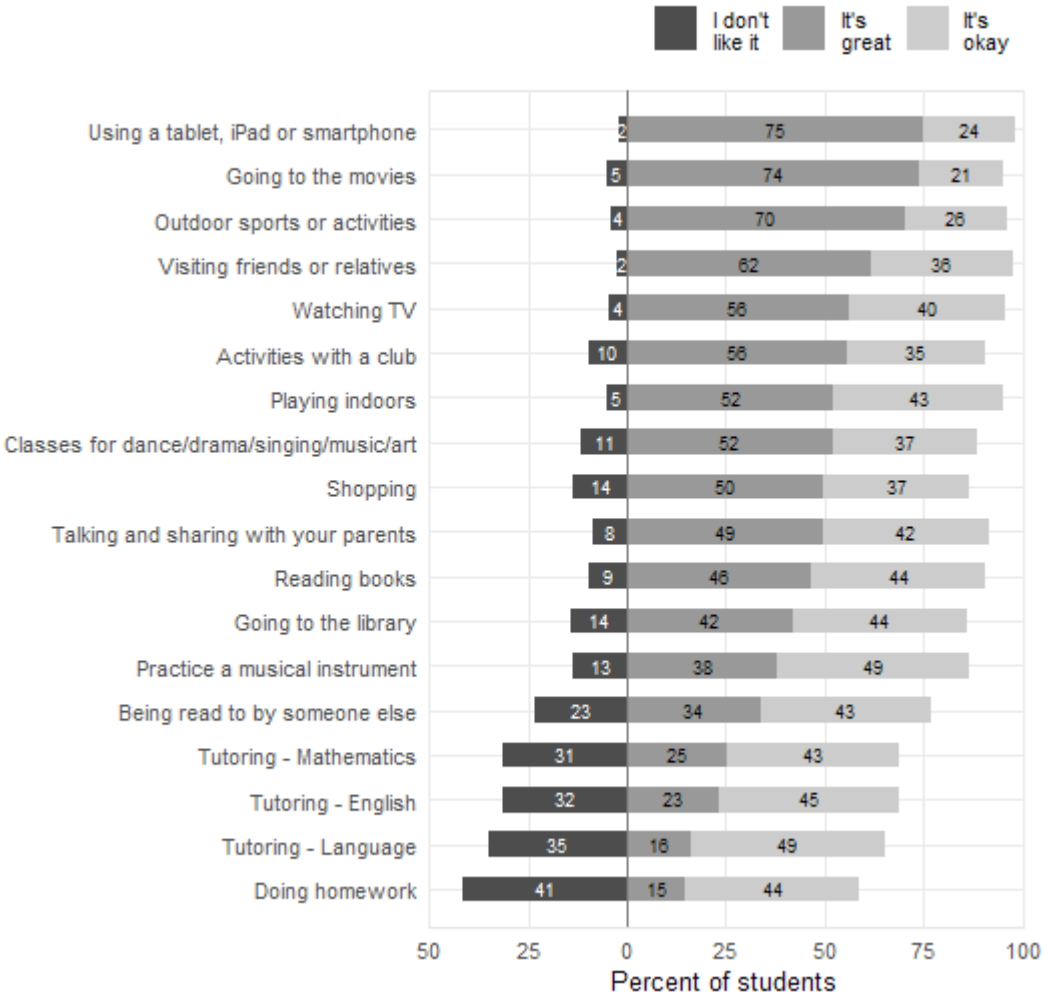


Figure 2: Time spent on activities during the weekend



Footnote: Figure 3 is presented in two sections: the percentage of students who did not do the activity - the section to the left; and, for those who do the activity, the extent to which they enjoyed doing the activity - the different shadings to the right.

Figure 3: Extent to which students like doing the activities



Footnote: Figure 4 is in two sections: the percent who did not like doing the activity - the section to the left; and those who said the activity was great or okay - the two shadings to the right.

Figure 4: Extent to which students like doing the activities, of those who do the activities

Table 1: The five most common and least common activities (after 'Doing homework' on a weekday) in each city, with the percent of children who do the activity.

City	Weekday	Weekend
Most common activities		
Hong Kong	Playing indoors (91%)	Playing indoors (91%)
	Watching TV (89%)	Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone (88%)
	Reading books (87%)	Watching TV (87%)
	Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone (84%)	Doing homework (82%)
	Talking and sharing with your parents (83%)	Outdoor sports or activities (81%)
Melbourne	Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone (93%)	Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone (93%)
	Reading books (93%)	Playing indoors (92%)
	Playing indoors (91%)	Watching TV (89%)
	Outdoor sports or activities (90%)	Shopping (87%)
	Watching TV (89%)	Outdoor sports or activities (86%)
Singapore	Reading books (94%)	Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone (90%)
	Playing indoors (91%)	Playing indoors (90%)
	Talking and sharing with your parents (88%)	Outdoor sports or activities (90%)
	Watching TV (84%)	Shopping (89%)
	Using a tablet, iPad or smartphone (84%)	Watching TV (88%)
Least common activities		
Hong Kong	Tutoring - Language (30%)	Tutoring - Language (27%)
	Being read to by someone else (37%)	Tutoring - Mathematics (34%)
	Tutoring - Mathematics (45%)	Being read to by someone else (37%)
	Classes for dance etc (49%)	Tutoring - English (38%)
	Tutoring - English (50%)	Classes for dance etc (43%)
Melbourne	Tutoring - English (18%)	Tutoring - English (14%)
	Tutoring - Language (21%)	Tutoring - Mathematics (19%)
	Tutoring - Mathematics (24%)	Tutoring - Language (20%)
	Being read to by someone else (34%)	Classes for dance etc (23%)
	Classes for dance etc (42%)	Being read to be someone else (28%)
Singapore	Being read to by someone else (18%)	Being read to by someone else (21%)
	Activities with a club (28%)	Activities with a club (25%)
	Classes for dance etc (33%)	Classes for dance etc (28%)
	Tutoring - English (36%)	Tutoring - English (30%)
	Tutoring - Mathematics (42%)	Tutoring - Language (33%)