



Growing Up Boulder's Report on Child Involvement in Open Space and Mountain Parks' Master Planning Process

Summary of findings Spring 2017
Report produced May 2017 by Jacqueline Cameron



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Overview

Growing Up Boulder (GUB) is a child and youth-friendly city initiative established in 2009 as a formal partnership between the City of Boulder, Boulder Valley School District, and University of Colorado. Housed in the Environmental Design Program, GUB is a program of the Community Engagement Design and Research (CEDaR) Center. GUB aims to make Boulder an exemplary child and youth-friendly city by empowering Boulder's young people with opportunities for inclusion, influence, and deliberation on local issues that affects their lives.

In March 2017, GUB partnered with the City of Boulder's Open Space & Mountain Parks Department (OSMP) to gather feedback on whether and how children want to be involved in the OSMP Master Planning process. The Master Planning process will determine key values and action strategies for upcoming years. In spring 2018, there will be a public outreach component where OSMP hopes to involve young people in explaining what open space means to them and shaping future priorities for open spaces and mountain parks in Boulder. For the GUB-OSMP sessions, OSMP was looking to find out what ways children like to give input in order to guide the format of their 2018 outreach efforts. This complements work that GUB conducted with OSMP's Junior Ranger program in summer 2016 to learn whether and how the older range of young people, ages 14-18, want to be involved in the OSMP Master Planning process.

GUB coordinated and ran a two-day series with a 4th grade classroom at Foothill Elementary School. These sessions were structured around both a learning component, where students learned about OSMP, and a time for the students to develop and share their ideas for the best practices for involving children. Overall, students wanted multi-modal, open-ended formats that take place in three primary locations: home, school, and outdoor spaces.

This report summarizes all outreach activities and outcomes and was produced May 31st, 2017.

“I like how they [OSMP] help animals and nature to live and be safe
from mankind. This definitely matters.”
- 4th grade Foothill Elementary student

By the Numbers

- 30 4th grade students (23 attending both sessions)
- 2 Foothill teachers
- 2 OSMP staff
- 2 GUB staff
- 5 CU undergraduate and graduate students
- 3 classroom hours

Project Description

During March 2017, Growing Up Boulder asked 30 Foothill Elementary School class students to share their ideas of how children could participate in the OSMP Master Planning process. Growing Up Boulder staff, interns, OSMP staff, and ENVD undergraduate volunteers worked with the class for two 1.5-hour sessions to implement a customized curriculum.

The first session was aimed at building student expertise prior to engaging their input. Three main objectives were identified: 1) build student understanding of what open spaces are, 2) familiarize students with different habitats that fall under OSMP, and 3) provide a timeline of the Master Planning process. Engaging students' prior knowledge was key to this day. The second session focused on gathering student input on how children prefer to give their input to OSMP. The sessions included a mix of small group work, presentations, group discussions, and share-outs.



The following table outlines the daily schedules and activities for the two sessions.

| Session 1 | Session 2 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GUB Pre-Survey ● Introduction to GUB ● Introduction to OSMP ● OSMP Ecotone Activity* ● Brain Break ● Introduction to Planning* ● OSMP Master Planning ● Closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experiences with Sharing Voice ● Where/How Brainstorming* ● Brain Break ● Rate and Synthesize Ideas* ● Share Out* ● Closure and Remaining Questions ● Lasting Visual Reminder* ● GUB Post-Survey |

* activities where student ideas/input were collected

Summary of Findings

We engaged students around both “where” and “how” they prefer to share their ideas and, specifically, with OSMP. We found that students preferred to be engaged in familiar and community-oriented places and by formats across 5 themes: multi-modal, creative/open-ended, cooperative, formal structures, and trusting.

Themes in “Where” Students Would Like to Participate

Students brainstormed a wide range of ideas, but when given their preference, three key locations emerged across almost all small groups: home, school, and parks/outdoor spaces. These were all spaces that the students visit frequently, are familiar with, and often already share their ideas.



Beyond the three main places, students preferred spaces that already had a community focus, rather than those where they were mostly focused on performing another activity. Afterschool activities were frequently raised, but programs like Destination Imagination were preferred over sports and play times (never at recess!). Similarly, for public spaces, students were positive about Pearl Street, the library and community centers, but not the bus, restaurant or pool, where getting input would be a distraction. Formal community events, such as City Council and public meetings, were also well rated.

Themes in “How” Students Would Like to Participate

Students were broadly interested in different ways to share their ideas with OSMP. We did find five major themes within student ideas for format.

Multimodal: Student ideas went beyond typical forms of participation to include artistic, playful, and inquisitive modes. While single students had specific ways they preferred to be engaged, there was little group consensus around which formats were preferred. This suggests that future engagements with children should be multi-modal or have lots of choice. This strategy will result in a high level of engagement for all students.

Student ideas included: song, music, dance, photos, making models, drawing, acting/plays, board games about voice, stories, banners from a plane, posters, protest/march, writing, letters,

phone calls, talking, asking questions, reading, speech, painting, approved graffiti/murals, website, Powerpoint, make a video (youtube), and Skype.

Creative and Open-Ended: Students supported forms that were more open-ended, allowing them to freely express themselves, rather than forms that were limited. Surveys (where choices are limited) was not suggested at all and tests were rated negatively.

Cooperative: Throughout their ideas and rating, students preferred cooperative forms of interaction. Specifically, they mentioned sharing, compromising, discussion, and voting. They valued knowing what others thought (including adults), suggesting a community box for letters, or interviewing people to see if they agree with you. They rejected those forms that were one voice overpowering others (e.g. “hooting and hollering” and calling out to get attention).

Formalized Structures: Several groups thought about having a more formal structure for child voice. A child council was one such idea. A second was that “youth ambassadors could help adults collect other kids' ideas”.



Students were also open to existing formal structures, such as going to City Council meetings, other public meetings, and protests.

Trusting: Trust was raised as an issue for children as some students specifically brought up wanting to interact with people they trust. This suggests that students may be more willing to share information with people close to them versus with strangers.

“At the top of the hike draw what it looks like now and what you want it to look like.”

“Communicating through dance”

“Community box you can put letters in”

- 4th grade students on “how” to share their ideas with OSMP

Share Out

In small groups, students were asked to put together their favorite ideas for where and how, and then to share the top two (shown in the table below):

| Where | How |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| neighborhoods | drawing & showing others |
| park | speak to people in community |
| library | drawings, games, letters |
| YMCA | youth council, games |
| Destination Imagination | photos |
| coffee shop | talking to people |
| public marches | peaceful protest |
| hiking trails | just by being there |
| house | just tell family |
| school | talk to principal |
| school | drawing |
| Pearl Street | banner with plane |
| on a hike | draw murals, make story with pictures |
| at a fair | make and show models |

Student Use of and Attitudes towards OSMP

Although the major focus of the GUB sessions was on collecting ideas for how to engage children's voice, throughout our activities students shared experiences of and attitudes towards OSMP that represent an informal sample of the types of information OSMP may aim to collect in their master planning process.

"It is always so peaceful and relaxing. I love to jump and play around."

- 4th grade student on OSMP spaces

Student Use

In one activity, students were asked to engage their prior knowledge of OSMP and reflect upon their previous experiences in those areas. The table below contains a series of activities that students have done in the various regions:

| Riparian | Foothills | Montane | Grasslands | Multiple Regions |
|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Stand up paddle boarding | Tree climbing | Rock Climbing | Watch the full moon | Dirt ATV |
| Fishing | Hiking | Camping | Walk dog | Bike |
| Kayaking | Nap | Ski/Snowboard | Play/work with farm animals | Paint/Draw |
| Tubing | Fishing | Snowshoe | Farm field trip | Collect Rocks |
| Swim | See animals | | Play Tag | See animals |
| Boating | Find feathers | | Play camouflage | Hike |
| Jump in the water | Live (have house) | | Cross-country ski | |
| Fly fishing camp | Sledding | | Girl scout trip | |
| | Ski/snowboard | | | |

Attitudes

As a closing for our sessions, we asked students and adults to share their "favorite part of OSMP". Their responses reflected several themes (with example quotes) below:

- Appreciation and love of plants and animals: "I like all animals in open spaces. My favorite is a blue jay."
- Peacefulness, quietness, and relaxation: "I like to be in the mountains because it is peaceful and quiet and you can see an amazing view of Colorado."
- Place to play: "My favorite part of open space is there is a lot of space to run around in and play."
- Beauty of the areas: "Fresh air, beautiful places."
- Activities: "My favorite part of open spaces is hiking and camping."
- Love of non-living features: "The quiet peaceful mountains and the running rivers."

Reflections: Impact of Involving Children

Engaging children is an important part of public participation as children are active members of the community. Sessions like these play a key role in helping students understand dynamics of city decision-making in addition to contributing valuable ideas to the city from key users.

Before and after our sessions, students participated in pre- and post-surveys about their perceptions of city issues and the role of children in the community. Across all questions, students showed a positive shift after being involved in the GUB-OSMP sessions. Students' understanding of OSMP increased as did their general attitudes towards child involvement in

city decisions. Students were very positive about sharing their ideas, especially for community goals. The students especially felt that they had a voice in city issues that matter to them and that child involvement was important.



"We got to use our ideas to help the city."

- 4th grade student when asked their "favorite" part of the sessions

Conclusion

Through Growing Up Boulder's sessions at Foothill elementary, we developed a series of ideas and characteristics for future strategies for incorporating child voice in city matters, both for OSMP and GUB's future work. It is recommended that methods be more exploratory than what is usually done for adults, incorporating elements that are multimodal and cooperative, and that embrace playful and creative means of communication. When possible, engagements should happen in familiar or community-oriented spaces, such as schools, houses, and parks.

While students valued qualities such as nature, peacefulness, and play, GUB ascertained this information indirectly in these sessions. For future work, we recommend engaging children to share their values directly through a "why" component. By asking "why" for all ideas, we can gain richer information as to child motivations and develop city actions that better meet child beliefs and values.

We hope this report will support OSMP and other city departments to better involve children in future projects and to view their unique voices as worthy contributions to city planning decisions.

Partners and Appreciation

This project was the result of a truly collaborative process. Several institutional partners made this possible including City of Boulder's Open Space & Mountain Parks Department, Foothill Elementary School, and the University of Colorado Boulder. GUB would like to especially thank the partners who directly gave time and energy to make this engagement possible, and especially to the students of Kim Kleinman's 4th grade class for sharing their wonderful ideas:

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