RETHINKING COMMUNICATIONS: USING STORYTELLING TO UNDERSTAND SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN IN SODO, ETHIOPIA

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Storytelling as form of communication acts as universal tool that has the potential to transcend messages across cultures and places value, meaning and significance into the individuals and communities being represented. Traditionally, scientific knowledge has been communicated as logical ideas with very little cultural context to diverse communities. However, this approach has become more scrutinized for the lack of community participation, which in turn creates inequitable solutions. The purpose of this study was to understand how the use of storytelling can reveal a person’s sense of place and how understanding that can contribute to effective environmental communication. I interned with Connect 3 in Ethiopia and framed my research around culturally sensitive approaches, which focuses on building trust with the community and understanding cultural values. I taught weekly English classes to children ages 8-16 and incorporated storytelling activities that experimented with mediums such as creative writing, illustrations and oral stories to better understand the children’s sense of place in the environment. As a result, the children were able to create stories that expressed their place meaning and place attachment through landscape imagery and symbolic representations in Ethiopian folktales. Members in the community actively create meaningful places through conversations and interactions with others, and the best way to understand another’s place is to listen and validate their existing perspectives. This helped me understand the best ways to begin conversations on identifying issues and working together to create sustainable, culturally relevant solutions for the community.