

# **Writing in the Margins: Indigenous Literacy, Childhood Socialization, and Rapid Modernization in a Vietnamese Village**

**Dave Paulson**

Department of Anthropology, Temple University

Since the 1986 Đổi Mới economic reforms, language-education policy in Vietnam has undergone unprecedented change in the interest of “developing the nation” by 2020 (Taylor 2001). Robust financial and institutional investments have been made in support foreign languages, while far less have been devoted to the indigenous languages of ethnic minorities (Djité 2011). As a result, ethnic Cham minorities have been left to contend with maintaining their spoken language and literary traditions as they are routinely devalued in the ideological climate of “modernity.” Drawing on ethnographic observations of Cham-, Vietnamese-, and foreign-language literacy classrooms, as well religious temples, homes, and other spaces where these languages are used, the present research examines the socialization experiences and everyday language practices of Cham ethnic-minority children as they transition into mainstream Vietnamese education. Through an investigation of both informal and institutionally organized interactions, this study analyzes how participation in indigenous, national, and international literacy practices index different senses of cultural citizenship (Rosaldo 1997), which, in turn, inform Cham minority children’s complex sense of belonging within, and their meaningful intergenerational engagement with, the language and culture of their parents amid Vietnam’s post-socialist transformation. This investigation reveals how indigenous children cultivate fluency in the culturally organized use of multiple literacies in this context, and how the Vietnam’s rapid development informs experiences of childhood, transforms everyday language practices, and affects the vitality of minority languages in the 21st century.

**Dave Paulson** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Temple University. Beginning in 2016, he will be conducting 18 months ethnographic fieldwork in Phan Rang, Vietnam for his doctoral dissertation research, supported by Temple University Global Studies and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Dave did his undergraduate studies at Southern Connecticut State University in anthropology, with minors in Asian studies and psychology, as well as master's studies in Bilingual, Multicultural Education & TESOL. Dave's previous research has included ethnographic fieldwork in the Dominican Republic, investigations of drifters in San Francisco, and examinations of English-language education in Shaoxing, China and the Ho Chi Minh City University of Education in Vietnam.

**Wednesday, January 20**

**12:00 Noon**

**Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue**