

## **Caribbean and African Creole Languages and education: A CUNY Faculty Development Symposium**

The presence of large numbers of students of Caribbean background in all levels of the educational system in New York inclusive of CUNY colleges challenges us to a critical reexamination of the nature of English Language teaching and learning and the support needed for literacy skills mastery.

In many educational situations, the significance of language and identity, and language loyalty and ideology, are overlooked because achievement is often measured according to one's ability to conform to the standard, dominant language model. The population that is particularly overlooked in most educational contexts, especially in college-level language learning and literacy situations, are the speakers of a Creole variety.

Academic English is not the home-community variety for many students from the Commonwealth Caribbean, Francophone Caribbean and West African nations. Some members of this student population are now considered to be English as Second Dialect (ESD) learners. Until linguists, especially Creolists, discussed Creoles as structurally defined language varieties, they were considered adulterations of their lexifiers and low or inferior from a socio-cultural perspective. More recently a consensus has emerged among linguists that recognition of the autonomy of Creole language varieties as distinct systems from the lexically official languages is a basis for reform of educational policies and literacy practices.

A conference will be held at the York College campus on May 10, 2008 where linguists from the United States and the Caribbean, researchers and educators working with Creole dominant student populations will offer perspectives on language and identity, power and loyalty as important factors in understanding and explaining Creole language situations as well as effective language and literacy learning practices. There will also be the implementation of instructional approaches to enhance language and literacy skills development especially in the General Education courses at the college level.

