Congratulations to the 2010 mini grant award winners!

Kathleen Coyne for her proposal to take her class from Central Catholic High School in Lawrence to the MFA or Peabody Essex Museum.

JoAnne DelGreco for her proposal to create a "Multicultural Holiday Celebration" for her students at Elm Middle School in Nashua, NH.

Holly St Jean for her proposal to develop a "Community Voices Project" for her AP students at Tantasqua Regional High School in Fiskdale, MA.

Common Core of Standards Adopted by most New England States

From June to August of 2010, all of the New England states have adopted the common core of standards with the exception of Maine.

The aim of the common core is to ensure student readiness for college and career.

Teachers, administrators and experts created the common core of standards through a series of reviews across the nation. This was a state-led effort in the creation of these core standards. Both the teacher’s unions AFT and NEA endorse the standards.

In a briefing issued by the state of Connecticut, State Education commissioner Dr. Mark McQuillan says, “Connecticut’s standards are already high compared with many states. However, the National Standards Project provides an opportunity for all states to raise the bar, refocus instruction and to ensure that students are prepared to compete with students throughout the world.”

What does this mean for English Teachers?

The common core of standards is meant to serve like other Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) in order to guide planning and instruction.

Another aim is for districts to develop curriculum that ensures these standards are being met across the country.

Editor's note: Maine adopted the Common Core standards in April 2011.
Poetry Contest Winners

And the winner is... WILLIAM BIDDLE

Congratulations!

Second Prize went to Dr. Jim Bronson.

Honorable Mentions:
Brenda Aspelund, Gordon Lang, Mary Ellen Redmond, & Michalene Hague

Inez Dover given Marian Gleason Excellence in Teaching Award

Inez Dover, 37-year veteran of teaching at Newton North High School in Massachusetts wins the 2010 Marian Gleason Award. Dover has been an English teacher, Director of the Office of Human and Civil Rights, Education consultant, Trainer for Diversity Mediators, Drama teacher, and mentor for Newton public schools. She is considered a mover and a shaker in her community who works not only to teach the material, but also to shape the minds and hearts of the teachers, students and community.

If you know a teacher who, like Dover, exemplifies what it is to be a great teacher, please take the time to nominate him or her for this award. See the NEATE website for details. Teachers must have 7 years or more experience in teaching.

Mariissa Bortone given Promising New Teacher Award

Marissa Bortone is teaching at Wilmington High School, where she graduated not so long ago.

She was nominated for the award by a former teacher, now colleague, Joseph Kleponis who recognized her hard work, even as a student.

Bortone has an overall concern for success for the well being of her students and the success of her school. In addition to teaching, she runs workshops on issues confronting young women, serves as speech coach for the drama club, and is a class advisor.

If you know a new teacher who, like Bortone, is a potentially masterful teacher, please take the time to nominate him or her. See the NEATE website for details. Teachers must have 3 years or less experience in teaching.
Why I joined NEATE
(Despite no time, new house, new marriage, and grad School)

It gets around this time of year, I can come up for air for a little while and reflect on the whirlwind of the last few months, catch up on some reading for pleasure and not the grad school books that truth be told I may never open again. I reflect on myself as an educator and think, “What else can I do?” I don’t mean that in the sense that I was meant to be the next great YA lit author or teaching English in a remote village in Uzbekistan. No, I am, for the most part (aside from testing and grading papers and irate colleagues) satisfied in my chosen path. What I mean is: how can I do a better job and not lose my mind?

When it comes down to my commitment to teaching, I am often faced with the conundrum of time management. For me, it is usually mismanagement of that ephemeral balance between work and home, school family and love family. We are all trying to keep our heads above water just to maintain, nevermind succeed. This year, I bought a house, got married and went back to grad school again. Both my mom and my brother had bouts of cancer. It was challenging to find the balance. When I am in my classroom with the phone turned down and email alerts off, with my students, a new world opens up. If only I can do that the other 19 hours of the day.

I teach in an urban school district in Connecticut. People outside of New England often wonder if that really exists, but it does. All of my students are on free and reduced lunch; we have an 85% Hispanic population, 15% African or Caribbean American and a negligible amount of other (i.e. Caucasian) students. Those statistics don’t mean much, and they didn’t really to me, until I put names and faces to the statistics. Never has an experience shaped my whole outlook on life. I have 8th graders, some 14 years old who cannot read. I mean they can basically sound out, but when it comes to putting the whole thing together, something falls apart. I have students whose lives are torn apart by poverty and lack of education, drugs and bad choices. Then I have those students who succeed despite all those hardships. I signed up to teaching because I loved books. What do I do with a kid who can’t read? All these questions and more led me to look outside my experience and my comfort zone. I wanted to connect other teachers like myself to resources, ideas and most of all, the conversation about what we can do.

Who I am to sit by in my cozy, newly-purchased home and watch reruns of Law and Order, attempt to cook, go to the gym way too early (and way too infrequently), rather than better my teaching life? It’s like the National Guard time commitment of one weekend a month, without the threat of being carted away. I think my husband and dog can fend for themselves for a day to help myself and others become better teachers.

I joined NEATE not because I want to improve my resume because I am not going anywhere soon. I joined because I wanted to continue that conversation about education. It’s great to read, but I know I am the kind of person that without talking about things, I’ll never be truly inspired to make a change.

Maggie Stevens Lopez is a member of the board of NEATE

The Leaflet is looking for innovative teacher writers like YOU!
Conference Brings the New Faces of Teaching Diversity

The Middle East Comes to Massachusetts
Mohammed Defaa, French and Arabic teacher at Merrimack High School in New Hampshire, opened eyes and hearts to literature and art of the Arab world. Defaa gave an informative presentation about the history of Islam, as well as the progression of art, film and literature from the Arab world.

Len Cabral Honors Teachers
Len Cabral, whose stories have captivated audiences all over New England, gave a rousing lunchtime performance that had all the teachers laughing. Cabral’s distinct Rhode Island accent makes all of us feel at home.

In his stories, “Mezzi Gallo” and “It’s How You Say It,” Cabral brings stories to life with masterful comic timing and storytelling techniques. The physicality of his storytelling, as well as command of his voice makes the experience fulfilling.

His performance reminds one of the reasons why we teach: to create new storytellers and love of literature. Cabral mentioned several times about how grateful he was for his teachers who encouraged him to read and write more, despite being a ‘jock.’

Cabral does storytelling workshops for students young and old across New England.

Paul Magoon Receives Award
Paul Magoon, former board member and past president of NEATE, is named the Charles Swain Thomas award recipient for exemplary service to NEATE. Before retiring from the board, Magoon served as the hospitality chair for the conferences. Magoon was greeted with a standing ovation and shared a collection of stories that captivated the crowd at the president’s reception.
“She be crazy!” is yelled across the lunch room. Our English teacher instincts kick in, and we want to correct the error in grammar. Too often when I moved to the city and started teaching in an urban district did I want to correct the grammar of my students. If they weren’t going to learn it from me, where are they going to learn it?

As teachers, and more specifically an English teachers, it becomes our responsibility to teach kids the proper way to speak and write. The conflict comes when teaching students who speak different languages or different dialects. When it comes to African American Vernacular English (AAVE), it gets more complicated because it sounds so similar to Standard English, but when we examine the structure, we realize there is a complex grammar of its own emerging. This is not even mentioning the social and emotional implications of one’s own home language.

Dr. Lisa Green, professor and researcher at UMASS Amherst took a few moments at the NEATE conference to show the English teachers that our students are indeed grammatically correct, but they are just working with a different grammar. Dr. Green went through a multitude of examples to show the AAVE has its own grammar, even more complex at times than Standard American English. Often times, students have been so denigrated about their own language, they know it is bad or wrong, and don’t see the beauty in the linguistic basis for the way they speak.

This negative attitude towards AAVE has once again caused a separation between blacks and whites, except in the younger generations. In a city classroom of teenagers where language is the focus, new explorations of how to use that language is imminent. It is in those decisions, some ingrained and other conscious, that teenagers are blurring those racial lines.

Once we have accepted the fact that AAVE is a real language, or at the very least a real dialect with its own grammatical structure (see Dr. Green’s new book *African American English, A Linguistic Introduction* if you would like further examples), we need to figure out what to do with that information. To be successful in this world, students need to learn to use Standard American English effectively in speech and writing. However, we still must honor the fact that the students will use their home language to express themselves in class and out.

When considering the use of the varied languages or dialects, we should address the topic from the asset point of view, and not the deficit model. Students have a way to communicate across communities and cultures with multiple languages. It strengthens the ability to make cognitive decisions, such as when to use what language. Try acceptance before correction.

That is not to say that Standard English grammar should not be taught. In fact, it is all the more reason to teach Standard English structure and form. It is with these tools that our students who do speak AAVE will go into the world armed with a diverse vocabulary and approach to language.
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Join us for the conversation,
up to the minute.

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