From the Director

**Education Is a Social Endeavor**

Remarkable! That’s what teachers, youth workers, and students said about the turnout of elementary school students at a recent ABL conference titled “Inside Out: What Are You All About?” (see story inside). More than 100 first- through fifth-graders dove headfirst into a Saturday afternoon of writing poetry and creating art. The joy, love, and creativity that characterized that gathering was unforgettable.

In these days of standardized tests and standardized curriculum, we were reminded of how wonderfully capable young children are as thinkers and writers, particularly when they are given agency, intellectual stimulation, and communal support. Teachers in the ABL network are quite used to strong turnouts. They know that children love to learn, especially when learning is made fun, and that among the greatest tools we have to enhance our students’ literacy and academic success is their innate love for writing and creating art in a supportive social context. Creativity and self-expression are human instincts that can be developed. Pedagogies that focus on these instincts not only improve our academic skills, but also develop a wonderful awareness of our shared humanity.

Kudos to the 25 writing leaders—all from area high schools—who worked closely with the younger students; they are a major reason the conference was so successful. The friendship, self-confidence, and connections created by their presence is deeply embed-

ABL educational communities often rely heavily on the dedication and energy of our writing leaders, who are trained to use their natural skills and distinctive personalities to teach and to serve as role models. These outstanding mentors encourage and inspire the younger students not only to write and create art, but also to share—and take pride in—their personal stories.

M. Andrew

Andrew is soft like a puppy in a feather nest.
Andrew is smart as a math book.
Andrew is kind as an angel.
Andrew is wonderful as a butterfly.
Andrew is civilized as a bunny.

Kelsey, 2nd grade
Lawrence, Mass.
Making Learning Fun
Writing and Arts Programs Hit Home

Joining forces in September with the Lawrence Arts House (LAH), ABL offered a writing and arts program for elementary school youth through the Manos Felices (“Happy Hands”) after-school and summer program at the Hancock Courts housing project, home to nearly 200 families.

With LAH staff taking the lead, ABL teachers and writing leaders worked with 25 students throughout the fall and winter, ably assisted by Manos Felices staff. With guidance from three ABL writing leaders, the children produced many types of art, from spirit animals to poetry, and even conducted their own open mic.

The success of this writing and arts program inspired ABL and LAH to create a similar program in January at Si Se Puede (“Yes, It Is Possible”), a neighborhood program serving residents of the Merrimack Courts housing project. This time, ABL partnered with Lawrence public school drama maestro Julia Perlowski and the young students focused on writing and drama. Once again, three amazing ABL writing leaders helped make the program fun and were critical to its success.

Both programs continued this spring, culminating with a joint open mic in May. Our hope is to embed writing and arts programs in all Lawrence housing projects and to have a unifying open mic event in the summer that brings all participants together to celebrate creativity in poetry, music, art, and theater.

High-Energy Conference Teaches and Entertains
Inside Out: What Are You All About?

ABL has hosted more than 100 ABL Teacher Network conferences in Lawrence during the past 30 years, but none comes close to what we witnessed—and the pride and satisfaction it generated—on March 25 at “Inside Out: What Are You All About?” This conference, geared for second- through fifth-graders, took place at the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence. Of the 100-plus youngsters who participated, 15 had traveled more than an hour by bus from public schools in Randolph, Mass. Twenty-five high-school-age writing leaders assisted, encouraged, and mentored the younger students—three of whom came all the way from Waterbury, Conn. In addition, nearly 30 area teachers, youth workers, and parents attended.

The conference was intense—the good kind; the children buzzed with energy and ideas. Jessica Filion, director of Movement City, an ABL partner organization, kicked things off with a writing prompt about emotions. Throughout the ensuing workshops, the mic was shared dozens of times for the presentation of poetry, prose, improv, painting, sculpting, drawing, and collage—all created that day. Several 4-year-olds also stepped up to add their voices and show their artwork.

Event collaborators included the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence, Lawrence Arts House, Elevated Thought, Movement City, Addison Gallery of American Art, Lawrence High Writing Lab, El Taller, Lawrence Dream Network, Youth Development Organization, Si Se Puede, and Urbanology. As with all ABL conferences, students partnered with ABL staff to plan and organize the day.
I Am
Bird
Sparrow: small and sweet
Flying to and fro
My chirping soothes you.

Rose
Flower: it's beautiful and attracts attention
You need to handle it with care or it can hurt
Brings a smile when gifted.

River
Ganga: no boundaries
Absorbs impurities and gives the rest back
Calm and soothing.

Food
Dal and rice: healthy, makes you lean
Takes less time to cook
Readily available.

Renewing Connections
Middlebury President Visits ABL and BLTN in Lawrence

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Andover Bread Loaf, a partnership between Phillips Academy and the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College’s graduate school. On December 22, 2016, Laurie Patton, Middlebury president, visited ABL and the Bread Loaf Teacher Network (BLTN) in Lawrence to learn more about the program’s impact.

Patton and three colleagues, including Emily Bartels, director of the Bread Loaf School of English, met briefly with John Palfrey, Phillips Academy’s head of school and an enthusiastic ABL supporter. The entourage spent the rest of the day in Lawrence, speaking to a group of teachers, youth workers, parents, and students who are actively involved in the BLTN’s educational and social justice work. (Numerous BLTN teachers and community organization staff members have earned a master’s degree at the Bread Loaf School of English, thanks to generous scholarships.) Patton also toured the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence, Elevated Thought, and El Taller Bookstore and Café.

The highlight of her trip, said Patton, was speaking with ABL’s youth writing leaders. A published poet herself, Patton and the students discussed their love of poetry, the students’ feelings about their schools and their two-year-old “What Is Education?” campaign, and the power of poetry and the arts in advancing social justice.

A Lawrence kindergartener shows pride in her artwork and writing.
Support Andover Bread Loaf!

Help us make a difference in the lives of ABL students and teachers who participate in ABL activities. Please visit www.andover.edu/ablfgiving to make your gift today.

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“Despite dramatic cultural and geographic differences, urban public school students have a great deal in common with their Navajo sisters and brothers,” says ABL Associate Director Rich Gorham, pictured at right.

Navajo Conference Inspires Youth Leaders

“So wrote one participant in the ABL Youth Writing Conference conducted April 8–10 at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Arizona. For several years, ABL has partnered with the Navajo Community Health Organization (NCHO) to develop youth leaders as advocates for health issues in the Navajo Nation. This year, ABL and NCHO came together for a pair of mini-conferences: “Youth as Writers: Writing for H.E.A.L.T.H.” (Helping Everyone Achieve Liveliness Through Healing) and “Teachers as Writers: Writing for H.E.A.L.T.H.”

The conferences served more than 30 participants from ages 4 to 65 and included youth, parents, community leaders, and teachers from the Navajo Nation. ABL staffers Ceci Lewis (Sierra Vista, Ariz.), Ummi Modeste (Brooklyn, N.Y.), Richard Gorham (Andover, Mass.), Mery Lizardo (Lawrence, Mass.), and Tim O’Leary (Ripton, Vt.) traveled to Window Rock to conduct workshops such as Nature Writing, Theater, Recovering the Lost Art of Letter Writing, Teachers as Writers, Best Educational Experience, and Breaking Down the Walls.

The conferences were the brainchild of NCHO director Rex Lee Jim, who is a former vice president of the Navajo Nation, ABL graduate, and published poet. Jim began the conference with a Navajo prayer, then invited participants to introduce themselves and honor their clans and ancestors in the traditional Navajo way. Participants enjoyed a nature walk into the high rock formations overlooking the Window Rock valley, and the youth conference culminated in theater performances and a final showcase of writing. “It really brought my voice and thoughts to life,” proclaimed one participant.

ABL has pledged to continue this collaboration with the Navajo Nation and hopes to make this conference an annual event involving young people from ABL sites across the nation. “I learned so much about Navajo history, culture, and challenges—though I know I barely scratched the surface,” says veteran ABL staffer Ummi Modeste. “I can’t wait for next year’s conference.”

Lee Krishnan (center), who has been active in the ABL network for 20 years, recently won two major teaching awards in India: the Parisar Asha National Teacher Award for the Soul in Education and the Zonal NDTV Educamp Award for Excellence in Teaching English.