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As he prepared to give his speech at Antioch College, Horace Mann thought back in time, reflecting on how schools in *his* early years were rare:

- Most only operated a few months of the year;
- Pay for teachers was low;
- School buildings were often cold and old;
- In some areas of the country, minorities were excluded from school;
- Only about 50 percent of children even attended school at that time;
- Southern states prohibited the education of enslaved African-Americans;
- Teacher qualifications were up to local school boards;
- Schools were small, requiring students of all ages to be taught together in the same space.

Among the results, of a school system we would not recognize today, were these:

- Older students often mentored younger students.
- Such mentoring often caused the same lessons and techniques to be passed down from student to student.
- Few people questioned the effectiveness of the lesson or the learning.

Enter a young Horace Mann who wanted to change this situation.

Horace, however, had his own problems—like issues relating to bad weather (which, on occasion, negatively impacted his education).

He recalled a powerful Nor'easter storm, accompanied by huge winds and a massive snowfall, which added more snow to the annual average of 50 inches. This made life even more rugged for farmers—not to mention the lives of farmers' children.

All of this made Mann want a different career from that of his father. He realized that school and reading were among the best ways to attain his goal. Reaching his goal would also provide him with a way out of poverty.

As a student, Horace was tutored in Latin and Greek by Samuel Barrett. That knowledge, plus his "book learning," enabled him to enter Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island where he excelled.

Now, as an older man, he considered the speech he was about to give at Antioch College. Mann thought about the irony between his valedictorian speech in 1819 (at the beginning of his career) and the speech he would make in 1859 (at the end of his career). Although he had personally achieved much, during those four decades, his focus had never strayed from the main theme.

Indeed ... the title of his first speech, "The Gradual Advancement of the Human Species in Dignity and Happiness," linked the success of government with education. Horace reminded himself that today's speech, at Antioch, carried the same theme even though it was four decades later.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Early-Years-in-Education-Horace-Mann-Father-of-Public-Education>

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