

The Pedagogy of Dr. William R. Maples

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to convey an appreciation of the teaching and training style of Dr. William R. Maples, and recognize his contributions in educating his graduate students in forensic anthropology. In a time when university learning is often characterized by large introductory, undergraduate lecture courses, with the occasional senior seminar course, the opportunity to study one-on-one with Dr. Maples as a graduate student was stimulating. It was also a rare event, since Dr. Maples was not one to accumulate numerous students. This paper discusses Dr. Maples' unique teaching style. His methods were akin to the days of the apprentice's acquisition of the technical skills and theoretical knowledge of a master.

Examples of Dr. Maples' rigorous yet highly effective teaching approach will be shared through a presentation of some of his daily oral teachings, and anecdotes of past human identification cases. While Dr. Maples made many significant contributions to the field of forensic anthropology through his research and phenomenal service, it is his teachings that will be most remembered, as the knowledge he passed on is his true legacy.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, forensic anthropology, William R. Maples, teaching, education

On this occasion of the Maples Symposium, I would like to share with you what I believe to be Dr. Maples' philosophy on teaching. I can only speak from my own perspective, as each of his students surely absorbed and processed his teachings in different ways. Nevertheless, there are those commonalities and shared experiences that bind us today as friends as well as colleagues.

I first heard about forensic anthropology while reading an obscure paragraph in my introductory physical anthropology textbook, just before my senior year at the University of Florida (UF). I next learned that we had a forensic anthropologist at UF. I anxiously called Dr. Maples, wanting to make an appointment to visit his laboratory. I was to learn later his method of screening various students such as myself. He kindly administered the first of his battery of tests on the telephone. I failed. But I did not fail miserably. I knew I failed when I responded to the question of what my major was by replying, quite happily, "psychology, with an anthropology minor." This response was followed by the next logical question by Dr. Maples: "Are you normal?" My gut reaction to this question was: "He's asking *me* if I'm normal, in light of what *he* does for a living down in that lab?" To my benefit, instead of verbalizing this gut reaction, I meekly replied: "Yes . . . I . . . believe I am quite normal." I knew I redeemed myself because at that moment I was granted my meeting with him.

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Upon first meeting Dr. Maples in person, I was intimidated by his professional conservatism and traditional demeanor. Dr. Maples' personal appearance immediately distinguished him from the other anthropologists with whom I was acquainted. He wore slacks, an oxford shirt, tie, and jacket. He was not a man to don blue-jeans or Save the Whales t-shirts. I could never imagine Dr. Maples with long hair, fashioning peculiar hats, or adorning himself in southwest-style jewelry. I was to realize later that this formality of dress and demeanor was a mild ruse—although he never admitted it—which served as an agent in a sort of student-style natural selection.

After greeting me outside, Dr. Maples gave me a wonderful tour of his facility. During this tour I was casually subjected to the next "test." I failed. I failed miserably. I heard myself responding "no" to many questions such as: (1) "Do you have a background in chemistry, biology, genetics, or anatomy and physiology?"; (2) "Are you proficient with computers?"; (3) "Are you familiar with micro- and macro-photography?"; and (4) his classic question, "Are you able to drive a stick shift?"

It was not until six months later, after I had graduated with my bachelor's degree, that I returned for another visit to Dr. Maples. It was at this visit that I asked for permission to volunteer in his human identification laboratory. This is one test I passed. From the time I was a volunteer, to graduate student, to former graduate student, to a professor myself, I learned from Dr. Maples the skills, methods, techniques, and politics of forensic anthropology.

Dr. Maples often employed the Socratic Method in relaying his lessons. Students would often have to arrive at answers to problematic cases and osteological uncertainties through a mode of self-discovery. Thus, a portion of one's osteological knowledge was often acquired through work experience in the human identification laboratory. The ability to apply this osteological knowledge to forensic cases came primarily through keenly observing Dr. Maples' consultation style. By watching him work, one would learn how Dr. Maples systematically analyzed bones, how he arrived at his conclusions about identity and trauma, and how he determined what or what not to include in his written case reports.

In his own way, Dr. Maples taught me not simply what to do, but how to know what to do. Knowledge of this sort is almost certainly limited at best in textbooks or reference books. With Dr. Maples, inasmuch as the use of textbooks and workbooks was not greatly emphasized, there were no written tests. Yet, his students were tested daily. We were routinely tested on essential osteological knowledge, and our skill in the forensic application of such knowledge. By having one's knowledge put to the test daily, one may also have reluctantly become aware of an underlying feeling that one's character was also being continually tested, perhaps molded, and ultimately refined.

Dr. Maples took his students on the road to various medical examiners' offices in Florida, where we quietly assisted, watched, lis-

tened, and processed all. Later, over lunch—at places like the Truck Stop, Shoney's and Guadala-Harry's—we would discuss aspects of the case and hear stories of Dr. Maples' other cases. We would hear stories of his wild ambulance rides in Texas, and of his experiences with Dr. Thomas McKern, his mentor. I learned through Dr. Maples' anecdotes, which I liked very much. I learned more from Dr. Maples' tests, which I did not like very much.

Each day in the laboratory or on the road to a medical examiner's office, or out to the field was a test. I never took a typical lecture class or seminar with Dr. Maples. He did not teach them by the time I knew him.

One day Dr. Maples dropped a tubular bony-looking object about 3 cm long on the table. "What is it?," he queried. He then scurried back to his office to let us postulate. It looked like no bone I had ever seen. Was it a diseased first metacarpal, hollowed out? I wondered if it could be some strange bird bone, since it was very light in weight. Maybe it was a fish bone. Finally, after a series of trips to Dr. Maples' office and back to the laboratory, a correct answer was found. The mystery item was an ossified portion of plastron, where the first rib articulated.

Another test involved a tooth with a small crown, three roots, that had fallen from its place next to a premolar. "What is it?," Dr. Maples asked then stood by three of us students, smiling, as we discussed the possibilities. Of course, all of our possible answers were wrong, until an advanced graduate student declared "a primary molar that never fell out, since the permanent molar was missing congenitally." Both of us remaining students in the group were impressed.

Dr. Maples' teaching style reminds me of the old school of martial arts. One was a white belt until after years of practice, sweat, tears of frustration, and everlasting dedication the white belt turned black—by dust, dirt, and grime—signifying an entry into the realm of those who possess the fundamentals of their art while pursuing mastery. No colors marked our progress with Dr. Maples. No lavish praise oozed over us. Rather, if Dr. Maples was not solemn with us, we knew we students were doing a *good* job. In retrospect, I see now how this kept us humble. It kept us from being over-confident, and discouraged us from wandering dangerously outside the domain of what we were qualified to do. In this way, not only did Dr. Maples

teach us to teach ourselves with regard to forensic anthropology, but he socialized us as well. It is now that I am aware that the Ph.D. is no zenith. Rather, this degree represents a place where deeper learning and greater research can begin, since it can be assumed that the basic skills and theories have been acquired. Thus, it is now that I can truly appreciate Dr. Maples and all that he taught me in a way that made me believe I was discovering things on my own.

In a day when university learning no longer possesses a small professor to student ratio, I feel honored to have had the chance to acquire knowledge from a man who worked diligently to ensure funding and a quality education for his students, and who endlessly coped with allaying student insecurities regarding future job availability. Thus, by devoting much of his time and energy to a relatively small number of students, Dr. Maples was practicing what he jokingly called "academic birth control."

I miss Dr. Maples' sayings, his wit, his wry sense of humor . . . his quips, such as one of a colleague in forensic pathology: "I dislike riding in a car with that Michael Baden, he's been in so many accidents he must have vehicular narcolepsy!" I miss debating about the need for much of the professional equipment Dr. Maples carried on his person, debating about how long it must've taken him to get ready in the morning to be sure he had all of his gear with him—things like the pocket flashlight, the ABFO ruler, the unique pocket-knife that resembled a miniature Ginsu knife (that he would whip out to slice open his mail), the stylish and sleek Mont Blanc pen that I had the *rare* privilege of writing with once, and other oddities and or useful items, depending on your perspective. All of these things I have missed this past year but never will forget.

I think of Dr. Maples often when I begin a new research paper, when I get a new idea for data collection, when I too screen students who want to become "lab groupies." I think of Dr. Maples every time I assign his book in my introductory forensic anthropology course. I think of his consulting, his testifying, his contributions to our field. All of this will be remembered. Most of all, however, it is his form, his pedagogy that I embrace since this is something I experienced *with* him. I believe I approach my own teaching, research, and service with a philosophy that Dr. Maples taught me. Inasmuch as Dr. Maples' teachings incorporate aspects of research and service, I believe his rare pedagogy *is* his true legacy.