Using Design Thinking Methods as Tools for Writing Program Administration

Scott Wible
University of Maryland, College Park

Abstract. This program showcase contributes a different dimension to our collective investment in envisioning how design thinking methods can enhance our work in professional writing programs, as it describes recent attempts to integrate design methods into the author's writing program administration at a large writing program at a Research 1 institution in the suburb of a major city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The author focuses on three different ways they have used design thinking methods in their WPA work over the past two years: (1) using empathy research questions to prompt storytelling from faculty about their experiences both inside and outside the classroom during and following the pandemic, then using design thinking analytical methods to synthesize data and compose Point of View statements that help them to understand needs and opportunities for faculty; (2) using design levers to prompt teachers to think like designers as they plan, implement, and analyze learning experiences for students; and (3) using appreciative inquiry methodology to examine how faculty have integrated new curriculum designs aimed at enacting program-, department-, and university-wise values into our general education professional writing courses. While these design-oriented WPA projects are in-process and, as such, the analysis is preliminary, this discussion nevertheless contributes to our collective thinking about how design thinking methods might usefully inform our professional practice teaching, researching, and administrating within technical and scientific communication programs.
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This special issue adds to the growing conversation in composition and professional writing studies about how and why to integrate design thinking methodology into writing courses (Bay et al., 2018; Leverenz, 2014; Marback, 2009; Pope-Ruark et al., 2019; Purdy, 2014; Tham, 2021; Wible, 2020) as well as how professionals are using human-centered design approaches to define problems and develop solutions in workplace writing contexts (Tham, 2022). In this article, I contribute a different dimension to our collective investment in envisioning how design thinking methods can enhance our work in professional writing programs, as I describe my recent attempts to integrate design methods into writing program administration.

I direct a large writing program at a Research 1 institution in the suburb of a major city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. In my role as director of our Pprofessional Wwriting Pprogram (PWP), I manage a program that currently includes 82 professional-track teaching faculty and who delivers general education writing instruction to more than 8,200 students each year. While there have been a few attempts to help WPAs learn how to use design within their administrative work—for instance, in the day-long workshop on design thinking methods delivered by Dominic Delli-Carpini and Scott Wible at the 2018 convention of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, and in Meredith A. Johnson, W. Michele Simmons, and Patricia Sullivan's 2018 *Lean Technical Communication: Toward Sustainable Program Innovation*—this article describes and analyzes how I have begun to use human-centered design methods in WPA work.

As design scholars P.H. Jones and G.K. VanPatter observe, design practice has greatly expanded beyond designing traditional crafts and interactive products to include organizational-level and social transformation design, which necessarily brings with it increasing complexity (182). Composition scholar Richard Marback explains that design thinking methods aim to address these types of complex, "wicked problems," which are highly contextualized, value-laden, and solvable in more than one way (W400-01). People use design thinking methods to approach and solve these types of complex, multi-dimensional problems in creative ways, such as those related to curricular advising ("How might we help students to make more informed choices about which of our 14 general education professional writing courses to take?") and human resources ("How might we help new faculty transition to their professional lives here in our writing program?").

Design thinkers embrace the wickedness of these problems by taking a human-centered approach. They work to deeply understand people's values by listening to stories about their experiences and to

create solutions that meet their needs and fit the contexts of their lives. More specifically, design thinkers creatively solve problems by moving iteratively through five distinct modes, which have been developed and promulgated in the following way by Stanford University's Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (the d.sSchool):

1. **Empathy Mode:** Designers immerse themselves in learning about the people who live, work, or play in the specific context where the designer perceives a problem or design opportunity to exist. Designers conduct ethnographic-style research, including observations and interviews, to understand people's everyday experiences as well as their physical, intellectual, and emotional responses to those experiences.
2. **Define Mode:** Designers synthesize this empathy research and craft a meaningful, actionable problem statement that reflects a particular user's or stakeholder's point of view and that defines the design challenge they will work to solve.
3. **Ideate Mode:** Designers engage in concentrated, semi-structured brainstorming, generating a wide range of ideas for possible solutions and then selecting those possibilities that have the greatest potential to solve the user's problem.
4. **Prototyping Mode:** Designers create artifacts that serve as rough representations of specific aspects of the solution.
5. **Test Mode:** Designers create situations that allow users to engage with the prototype. This testing gives designers the opportunity to generate valuable information and insights about how users perceive the solution would fit (or not) in the context of their day-to-day lives.

The entire design thinking process is purposefully recursive. For example, when working in the define mode, designers might determine they need to conduct more empathy research, and when testing a prototype, designers are conducting another form of empathy research as they learn more about a user's life and how the solution may or may not work well within it.

My approach to integrating design thinking methods into my WPA work is informed by my participation in the Stanford University d.school's Teaching & Learning Studio (TLS). The TLS programs focus on helping faculty to approach teaching as the practice of designing learning experiences. I participated in a week-long TLS course at Stanford in July 2017; a follow-up two-day session for TLS alumni at the University of Maryland in July 2018; and in TLS 2.0, a virtual eight-

week course in winter 2023. While my work in the first two TLS courses reshaped how I design and teach professional writing courses (Wible 2020), my participation in TLS 2.0 provided time and guidance to iteratively design, implement, and analyze the design thinking-influenced administrative practices I describe here.

In this article, I discuss three different ways I have used design thinking methods in my WPA work over the past two years, all of them focused on defining and solving wicked problems related to writing faculty's sense of engagement and agency. I first describe strategies for conducting empathy research with faculty as a means to define needs and opportunities related to professional development and connection with colleagues. I then analyze strategies for fostering a design mindset with faculty, as I explain how I use the concept of design levers in my one-on-one mentoring activities with faculty and prompt them to plan, implement, and analyze learning experiences for students. And third, I examine how we plan to use Appreciative Inquiry to deepen faculty's connection to and enactment of our program-, department-, and university-wide values related to inclusion and equitable teaching. All of these design-oriented WPA projects are in-process, so the discussion and analysis is preliminary, but nevertheless this discussion contributes to our collective thinking about how design thinking methods might usefully inform our professional practice teaching, researching, and administrating within technical and scientific communication programs.

Prompting Storytelling to Deepen Empathy With Faculty

Tom Kelley, general manager of San Francisco-based design firm IDEO, which is one of the foremost practitioners and proselytizers of design thinking, explains that empathy research is "the cornerstone" of the design thinking process (*Ten Faces* 16). Kelley defines empathy as "the ability to see and experience through another person's eyes, to recognize why people do what they do" (Kelley and Kelley 85). He contends that empathy research provides "the single biggest source of innovation at IDEO" (*Ten Faces* 17), for it helps them "to get at latent needs, the non-obvious ones that people aren't conscious of"; identifying these latent needs, he explains, allows a designer to articulate "better and sometimes surprising insights that can help distinguish your idea or approach" (*Creative* 90-91, 85). The Interaction Design Foundation similarly grounds design thinking processes on empathy research, stressing the need for design teams to develop "a holistic and empathetic understanding of the problems that people face" ("What is") such that they can build solutions "with a compassionate eye for their users"

("Empathize").

Empathy research can and should play a central role in writing program administration, for it can help WPAs learn "to see and experience" the program and it's courses "through another person's eye" (Kelley and Kelley 85). While Jennifer Bay, Richard Johnson-Sheehan, and Devon Cook were writing about professional engineers and about undergraduate engineering students, one could also similarly issue the warning that WPAs too often "retreat into figuring out how to solve their problems and not the user's problems" (183). Certainly I, like many WPAs, engage in activities aimed at helping me to understand the experiences and insights of faculty in our program. At the same time, many of those attempts at gaining insight come from surveys of faculty as well as written and oral comments gathered during large- and small-group meetings, where the conversations typically focused on clarifying policies, identifying preferences for professional development sessions, learning about faculty's desired teaching modalities, and so forth. Engaging in empathy research, Bay, Johnson-Sheehan, and Cook suggest, involves moving "beyond audience analysis and traditional [user experience]" and instead "immers[ing] themselves in users' worlds" (183). Empathy research does not involve going to stakeholders, "asking them what they want, and then giving them exactly what they asked for" (Kelley and Kelley 97). The problem with such an approach, explain Tom Kelley and David Kelley, is that "[p]eople often lack the self-awareness (or the vocabulary) to express their needs" (97). Engaging in empathy research methods such as immersion, observation, and interviewing works toward the end of "understanding latent needs, even if people can't articulate them to you" (97).

My decision to engage in empathy research came when I perceived there were latent faculty needs that we had to understand more deeply. I wi'll discuss two specific moments of focused empathy research here. The first moment of using empathy research questions came in our work in January 2022 in the pre-spring semester professional development session. First, though, I wi'll provide some context. After the mid-semester shift to online teaching in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, my university continued with fully virtual teaching through the entire 2020-2021 academic year. The fall 2021 semester then saw a voluntary return to campus for half of the 80 faculty in the professional writing program in which I teach. Through my own experience as well as my one-on-one conversations with teachers, the return to campus and the physical classroom did not prove to be a perfectly energizing experience for faculty. In office hour meetings with faculty during that fall 2021 semester, we heard requests for help

in dealing with challenges related to prolonged student absences when students tested positive for COVID-19 and needed to quarantine. We dialogued with faculty to define what participation looks like in the writing classroom and to create alternative online modes of participation for quarantining students. And throughout the fall 2021 semester, we helped faculty make adjustments to their classes or secure substitutes for their courses when they themselves tested positive for COVID-19, needed to quarantine, or take time to support a sick family member. Most of these conversations throughout fall 2021, however, happened in individual meetings, and they were focused on solving problems that faculty were facing in the immediate moment.

Our decision to engage in design thinking's empathy mode came through a desire to learn about faculty's experiences outside those moments where we were focused on solving immediate, pressing teaching concerns. Toward that end, we created time and space for~~designed~~ an empathetic listening sessions in our January 2022 day-long, virtual professional development workshop. Specifically, we ~~designed~~ crafted a 75-minute session to create time and space for faculty to process their experiences and to share stories about their teaching with colleagues. Toward these ends, we created five Google Docs pages, each with a distinct writing prompt and with tables for faculty to compose responses to those prompts.

Empathy research in design thinking demands a more probing inquiry than simply crafting surveys or asking people what they would change about their current lives. Listening to how people answer such a question might help a design thinker to "fine-tun[e]" aspects of a person's existing life (Kelley 33), but it rarely helps designers "unearth" a range of "human needs and desires" (23). Good empathy research questions, then, are open-ended and prompt people to tell detailed stories about their experiences; moreover, whether through the initial questions themselves or follow-up questions during an interview, good empathy research questions also prompt people to describe not just what specifically they're doing through these experiences but also how they are thinking and feeling about their experience. We crafted these empathy research questions, then, to gain insight on faculty's experiences both inside and outside the classroom during the fall 2021 semester:

A. Tell us about a time when you experienced a strong sense of community in your PWP class—or conversely, when you felt like it was a struggle to create a strong sense of community. Describe how you experienced it and how it manifested itself in the course.

Additionally, try to explain how and why you think that sense of community developed—or didn't—in your class.

B. Tell us about a time when you felt frustrated, discouraged, or deflated—or, conversely, energized and excited—after a class session over the past two years. Describe that experience. What was happening in that class session that generated those types of feelings and emotions?

C. Help us understand how you are feeling about teaching in the Spring 2022 semester.

D. Describe a challenging moment from your teaching or other professional experience over the past two years. What was the challenge, and how did you attempt to work through it? What was the result?

E. Analogous Situations: Think about a non-PWP / non-UMD / non-teaching context when you felt safe, respected, and/or cared about over the past two years. Describe that experience. What was happening in that context that generated those types of feelings and emotions?

We provided faculty with 12 minutes to write in response to one of the prompts, and then they took another 12 minutes to read around and use the comment function to respond to the experiences shared by their colleagues. We then followed this writing and reading with 35 minutes of open conversation.

The stories that faculty members composed in response to these empathy interview prompts gave us deeper insights into their thoughts and feelings about their experiences in the fall 2021 semester and their expectations for spring 2022. In particular, the prompt "Help us understand how you are feeling about teaching in the Spring 2022 semester" generated 20 separate responses from faculty, many of them stretching for a dozen or more sentences. Across responses to all the prompts, we read detail-rich stories of faculty's experiences feeling burned out and stories of successes and struggles to build community in their courses, both virtual and in-person. We heard from faculty who described themselves as feeling energized, excited, and enthusiastic about specific discussions or activities from fall classes, while we heard other faculty express anxiety about returning to campus and the classroom with the threat of the omicron variant that had emerged by that time. We saw some faculty request more focused discussion about how to retool their teaching for the classroom, and we heard other faculty describe how they simultaneously felt both mental fatigue from and immense pride in learning new digital technologies and develop-

ing strategies to integrate them into their teaching.

We received written and oral feedback from several faculty members who said that creating time and space for composing, sharing, reading, and listening to each other's stories helped faculty to feel more supported in their work and to begin reestablishing connections with colleagues. Equally as important, hearing these stories helped me in my role as PWP Director in bringing faculty's experiences to the conversations I had with administrative leadership in our department and across campus,. This empathy research helped me to bring the experiences and perspectives of faculty into conversations with administrative leadership in the department and across campus, centering their needs in policy discussions on matters related to teaching schedules, material and psychological support for faculty in a pandemic, and creating engaging learning experiences for students. Even without engaging in a full-scale design thinking project to develop these department and university policies, I came to see empathy interview questions as an important tool for professional writing WPAs to use in better understanding their faculty's perspectives on their experiences in the classroom, in the program, and at the institution.

Reflecting upon this empathy research activity, though, I perceive a missed opportunity with this data. From my perspective as a WPA, at the time the value came simply in creating a moment to listen to faculty share stories of their experiences. In a significant way, listening and understanding faculty's experiences and feelings about teaching were important, and listening without judgement and without a need to respond with policies is significant. At the same time, we did not in any focused way analyze the data as one might do in the design thinking method, and I wanted to dig deeper with empathy research and analysis to understand faculty experience.

A focused purpose for this type of human-centered design WPA work had started to emerge midway through the 2022-2023 academic year. By the time we arrived to in the spring 2023 semester, there was a sense among my administrative staff that while many professional writing faculty had expressed their desire and energy to engage more deeply engage in the program's curriculum and pedagogical experimentation, we nevertheless had seen a noticeable decline in the number of faculty who attended our traditional in-semester professional development events. We turned these observations into a design challenge: How we might we better support faculty in envisioning, articulating, and designing plans to meet their professional development desires?

To begin work on this design challenge, we returned to empathy

research interviews in the spring 2023 semester. Here my administrative team engaged in 30-minute empathy interviews with five separate groups of 2-3 faculty in our program. Using that design challenge question as our inspiration, we composed this script of empathy interview questions:

A. Opening

We're exploring how we might better support and engage PWP faculty in their professional development goals, and we're hoping to talk with you for 30 minutes about your experiences as a teacher in our program as well as your thoughts on what professional support, and professional development means to you.

B. Rapport Building

Tell me us about your teaching experiences? Before arriving at Maryland, what positions have you worked in and/or what positions besides UMD do you currently work in?

C. Evoking Stories & Exploring Emotions

1. Tell us about a moment when you experienced a challenge in your teaching (or other aspect of your professional life) or when you identified an opportunity in your teaching. What resources did you seek out or draw on to meet that challenge or to seize that opportunity?

—or—

Describe a moment of success or celebration related to your teaching? What did you attribute that success to? What enabled you to achieve that success?

2. The University of Maryland is an institution that provides lots of opportunities to engage in professional development activities, including the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the English Department's Center for Literary and Comparative Studies, the Academy for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and the UMD Libraries, among many others. What kinds of professional development opportunities have you pursued or sought out?

—or—

What kinds of information, resources have you found yourself seeking? Where do you / How do you seek it out? What determines if you decide to go and if you find it useful?

3. When I say "professional support" / "professional development" / "professional engagement," what else comes to mind?

D. Thank You & Wrap-Up

> Thank you for taking time to talk with us about your professional experiences teaching in PWP. Your insights will be valuable for us as we continue to explore how we might better engage and support PWP faculty in their professional development goals, and we hope you might be open to talk with us later about some of the potential solutions we develop.

What's significant here, from a design thinking perspective, is that we did not ask them directly, at the least at the outset of the interview, what specific types of programming they wanted us to create. Instead, we used these empathy interview questions to prompt faculty to share stories and present specific details from their professional experiences. Our approach here was consistent with design thinkers' belief that solution development will be more focused and effective if it comes later in the process, after the problem has been defined more precisely on a foundation of detailed insights from the users' stories about their experiences.

Following Wible's description of methods for design thinking's problem definition mode (2020; "Problem Definition" 2022), my administrative team and I then analyzed and synthesized the empathy interview data in order to make meaning and articulate specific descriptions of faculty's desires and needs related to professional development. Our first step involved textualizing the empathy data, transcribing or visualizing the data in a way that makes it analyzable. Here we engaged in a practice called Story Share & Capture (Interaction Design Foundation, "Story"). In this practice, one WPA team member reread our detailed interview notes—not simply summarizing the notes but rather reading them line-by-line—while I the rest of us jotted down key words, phrases, and quotes. Textualizing our empathy research notes this way helped us to visualize and identify relationships between the empathy research data.

We talked through our notes from the interviews in detail and followed strategies for developing a User Empathy Map, arranging keywords and phrases from the interviews according to these different categories:

- What the person *says* (that is, memorable quotes)
- What the person *does* (or says that they do)
- What the person *thinks*
- What the person *feels*

After we analyzed each individual interview this way, we identified

clusters of concerns or problems that different users encounter in a similar way, particularly in terms of how they think or feel about their experiences.

We used this analysis and synthesis of empathy research data to compose one-sentence definitions of faculty needs, or what design thinkers call Point of View (POV) statements. Each POV statement contains three key points:

- An empathetic description of the user
- A phrase explaining description of the user's need or desire
- A relevant insight about the user's experience generated through the empathy research

What's particularly important when composing POV statements is to define faculty's needs in terms of the types of experiences they desire to have. In other words, POV statements describe what a user desires to achieve or experience but doesn't present specific solutions for making that happen. a POV statement should not contain a specific solution but rather should be framed in terms of a result that any potential solution could help them to achieve. This framing opens a design team to generating a broader range of solutions during the ideation, prototyping, and testing phases of the design thinking process. Our POV statements, then, included the followed:

a. Faculty needdesire ways to discover paths to meaningful, engaging, sustainable professional development work that both contributes to the program and helps them to feel as if they're developing their careers and working toward promotion.
b. Faculty need ways to build meaningful peer-to-peer relationships within the program outside of the established Professional Track Faculty mentoring program, which they feel has taken on a formal character grounded in hierarchical relationships and become focused on evaluation, not mentoring.

Each of these POV statements is a composite from several interviews, but they enable us to stay focused on designing solutions that fulfill the desires of faculty emerging from their fit into the contexts of faculty's lived experiences.

That's where the story ends for now. This summerCurrently, we a're planning an Ideation session for the start of the fall 2023 semester that will involve both the administrative team members as well as a select number of faculty. We wi'll select solution ideas with significant poten-

tial to meet teachers' needs in innovative, delightful ways. Throughout the fall semester we will then design and test prototypes—most likely storyboards and role-playing—that enable us to get feedback from faculty, and we wi'll use this feedback to develop and refine these solutions to enhance faculty's experiences with professional development, mentoring, supporting, and program engagement. We hope to pilot one or more of these solutions in the spring 2024 semester.

The value of empathy research in design thinking, Bay et al. argue, is "to reduce the 'detachment' between designers and users, gaining a holistic understanding of what the users are struggling to do" (183). Engaging in empathy research as a WPA, I contend, has helped me learn how to understand more deeply faculty's actions, thoughts, and emotions as they move through their day-to-day lives both inside and outside the classroom. Developing and applying these empathy research skills and adopting this empathetic mindset has, in turn, helped me and my administrative team learn how to define problems and opportunities from teachers' perspectives—and ultimately, we hope, to design and deliver solutions to support their visions for their professional lives.

Teaching Faculty to Become Designers of Learning Experiences

Beginning in the fall 2018 semester, the Professional Writing Program implemented Performance Improvement Plans (PIP), which support faculty whom program leadership identify as needing performance improvement. In most cases, faculty receiving PIPs have end-of-semester student evaluations that show concerning patterns, whether those appear in significantly low scores or students' detailed written comments; in other cases, these determinations about faculty who need to improve their performance come in the form of student complaints filed with me or the PWP Program Coordinator.

PIPs aim to provide focused training to faculty whom program leadership, namely, the PWP Director as well as the English Department Associate Chair, determine need to improve their teaching. We believe this program signals an investment in our faculty—an investment of the PWP Director's time and energy in faculty development rather than simply not renewing faculty contracts. The PIP activities involve only the faculty member and the program director, as opposed to a colleague or an assistant WPA, and they entail .The PIP program involves the creation of a written document to the faculty member outlining areas for improvement as well as a plan of activities (e.g.,

meetings, class observations, development and discussion of teaching materials) for working to improve those aspects of the faculty member's teaching. The PIP activities involve only the faculty member and the program director, as opposed to a colleague or an assistant WPA.

In several respects, the PIP has been a positive development for participating PTK faculty, as most (although not all) faculty who completed a PIP have expanded or sharpened their repertoire of teaching strategies and have developed materials documenting the work they did in the PIP, materials they can also display in their teaching portfolios. Nevertheless, the program understandably generates anxiety for the faculty whom we identify as needing a PIP. Even more concerning are two related dynamics: first, how the PIP frames the relationship between the teacher and the director, and second, how the PIP seemingly focuses the teachers' attention on end-of-semester student evaluations as the main criteria for assessing the effectiveness of their teaching and their performance improvement activities. To address these concerns, in the spring 2023 semester I leveraged a set of design thinking theories and methods to address these two concerns, with the goal of framing the relationship between the teacher and director and to focus the teacher on generating and gathering different types of qualitative data to gain insight on their teaching practice.

I grounded my work on the concept of "design levers" for teachers, as developed by the Teaching and Learning Studio (TLS) staff at Stanford's d.school. The TLS staff generated this "design levers" concept in part through thinking about a metaphorical relationship to the levers that a DJ might use to modulate different aspects of an experience within a dance club, such as lighting, rhythm, volume, songs—each lever slightly or drastically altering the experience of people at the club. In the same way, TLS's "design levers" are different aspects of teaching and learning that could be tweaked in order to create different learning experiences for students (Raz et al., 2017). The TLS staff also think about parallels to the scientific laboratory, where researchers adjust variables as part of designing and conducting experiments and gather empirical evidence to see what changes result. Within the teaching and learning design space, the TLS staff suggests that teachers conduct small-scale experiments in their classes to see how the learning environment changes for students when they make adjustments to one or more of these "design levers":

- Communication, including the language, the methods, and the frequency
- Ritual, which refers to habits or protocols that influence rela-

tionships between people
- Role, including people's positions or power relationships
- Space, namely, the location, the scale, or the images and sounds in the immediate environment
- Object, involving the introduction of new or changes to the existing type or arrangement of clothes, furniture, and devices

The idea here is that a teacher identifies a specific goal for modifying students' learning experiences, selects one or more levers as a means to affect that type of change, designs an experiment applying that lever, and then gathers empirical data to assess how it effects students' learning experiences in the course. Put more succinctly, the aim here is to prompt teachers to think like designers—designers of learning environments.

I myself drew on the design levers in my PIP meetings with three different teachers in the spring 2023 semester, with the goal of changing the dynamic of the mentoring relationship and shifting teachers' focus to other performance measures besides end-of-semester evaluations. Specifically, I used the design levers of Role and Object to modulate these two dynamics. In previous semesters, PIP mentoring meetings involved conversation about the teacher's practice as well as relevant scholarship from the field of writing studies and composition pedagogy, with faculty members taking written or typed notes when they felt the need to do so.; PIP meetings also typically included review and discussion of faculty members' teaching materials—say, for example, samples of feedback on student writing or sample lesson plans, depending on the specific nature of the desired performance improvement. For the most part, the dynamic felt like one in which I, in the mentoring role, made recommendations for the teachers to implement; this relationship seemed to take agency away from teachers.

I used the Role and Object levers to see if we could change that dynamic. Specifically, I used the object lever by creating a Google Slide with designer-like prompts for conversation during each of our meetings. (These prompts, I want to note, are similar to ones the facilitators used in the Stanford d.school's TLS 2.0 sessions.) The slides and the prompts enabled me to move into the notetaker Role while the teacher talked through the prompts to design a small-scale teaching experiment. For example, after an initial conversation about what specific aspect of students' learning experiences they'd like to focus on enhancing and why, teachers talked through these four prompts to design a specific teaching experiment aimed at achieving that goal.

  a. To help . . . to . . .
  b. I'm going to try . . .
  c. As (or after) I try it, I will take notice of . . .
  d. Ultimately, I will know if this experiment was a success if . . .

Again, while I facilitated the conversation here by explaining the prompts, I primarily stayed in the notetaking role while the faculty members used these prompts to plan a teaching experiment. These prompts ask the teachers to develop a specific learning goal for a specific group of students (a), to develop a specific pedagogical experiment (b), and to attune to specific student behaviors in order to generate data about (c) and evaluate the effectiveness of (d) that teaching experiment.

While I did stayed in the notetaker role and allowed the prompts to guide faculty's design of their teaching experiments, I did introduce them to the Design Levers as tools for (b), that is, the prompt "I'm going to try . . ." For example, one teacher wanted to help students perceive links between class activities and the rhetorical strategies they needed to employ for the major writing projects, so she used the Role and Object levers to design an in-class activity in which students, using the whiteboard, would collaboratively map and draw connections across the learning they were doing in class activities, homework writing exercises, and textbook readings. Another teacher wanted to heighten students' awareness of her "presence" in their asynchronous online writing course, so she used the Communication lever to outline a statement for students in their online asynchronous writing course about their her rationale and strategies for providing feedback on student writing to establish instructor presence in the online course.

Here, then, the goal was getting faculty to see themselves as designers by working iteratively, building small-scale teaching experiments and feedback loops that help them to make decisions about next steps. In effect, these teachers were applying the design thinking methods of prototyping and testing, where they were working quickly to design new classroom activities for students and—most importantly—to generate valuable information and insights about how these prototype designs shaped students' learning experiences. Equally as important, these feedback loops help teachers learn to look for, gather, and analyze a broader range of data to gain insight on their teaching practice, as opposed to simply relying on end-of-semester student evaluations.

In follow-up meetings three weeks later, I used the Google Slides and discussion prompts once again to assume the notetaker Role, as

teachers described the empirical evidence they gathered and analyzed it to assess the effectiveness of their teaching experiments. For example, one teacher brought photosscreenshots of the white board from their her classroom, which showed student contributions to a class-wide exercise visualizing the connection between class activities and the researching and composing they needed to do for an upcoming writing project. Another instructor brought student responses to the statement she had just composed for their asynchronous online course, "When, Where, How, and Why I Provide Feedback on Your Writing." During our meetings, I used the Google Slides space to taketook color-coded notes to distinguishing between the empirical evidence the teachers noted, the insights they generated from this evidence about the effects of the teaching experiments, and additional questions or teaching ideas that emerged through those insights.

As we progressed through in the semester and teachers worked iteratively through one more loop of designing, delivering, and analyzing a teaching experience, faculty also planned strategies for showcasing these experiments in their teaching portfolios. The goal here was using those portfolios to showcase evidence of how they improved their teaching performance iteratively and showcasing different forms of evidence—not simply end-of-semester student evaluation scores— for articulating their teaching effectiveness. Even more importantly, having been prompted in prompting teachers to think and act as learning experience designers, they expressed feeling a greater sense of agency in advocating for and documenting the efficacy of their teaching practice.

Posing Generative Questions to Assess Implementation of Curriculum Designs

My third approach to using design methods in WPA work has emerged as part of our program-wide effort to integrate attention to Positionality, Power, and Privilege in every one of our fourteen different types of general education professional writing courses. Our focus on issues of positionality, power, and privilege in professional writing practice and pedagogy has been informed by Natasha Jones, Kristen Moore, and Rebecca Walton's *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn*. In the 2020-2021 academic year, we piloted curricular materials such as readings and discussion questions, topic selection activities and heuristics for major writing projects such as proposals and recommendation reports, and prompts for students' ePortfolio projects. We then expanded this roll-out to all PWP courses in 2022-2023, and we held

two four-hour professional development sessions to prepare faculty for this work, including deepening their understanding of what these three concepts mean; reflecting on their own positionality, power, and privilege in the classroom and related professional contexts; and integrating at least one curriculum piece into their courses. Through this work, we have explicitly aligned our program's pedagogical mission with the university's values statement, which centers equity & and social justice as well as inclusive excellence.

As we move into the third year of this curriculum initiative, we are using appreciative inquiry as a methodology to inform our professional development programming and our informal assessment of this curriculum redesign. Appreciative inquiry is "an asset-based approach to organizational and social engagement" that aims to help the organization's members "uncover existing strengths, advantages, or opportunities in their communities, organizations, or teams" (Organizing Engagement). Appreciative inquiry complements design thinking methods because it involves the design of organizations, with the aim of working to create a culture where its members' day-to-day activities and decision-making support and advance the organization's mission and vision statements. As education scholars Jeanie Cockell and Joan McArthur-Blair explain, though, appreciative inquiry stands in contrast to designers'—and many WPAs'—tendency to start with "problem-solving" and "a focus on deficits in a system"—that is, "what is wrong about or lacking and the root causes of the problem" (14). Instead, a design thinking-oriented WPA using appreciative inquiry methods would instead begin "by examining the strengths and successes" within the organization, "focus[ing] on the root causes of success and build[ing] on these to create future successes" (14).

In our specific case, this work means creating time and space in professional development sessions for faculty to identify where they've already been teaching professional writing in ways that consider issues of positionality, power, and privilege—even if they've not been naming it as such—then examining what's working well in those instances and identifying how to build on those successes elsewhere in their curriculum. Working from Cockell and McArthur-Blair's work, then, we are "beginning with what is wanted and finding out where it already exists, however small," as a way to get "people [. . .] grounded in their successes" and, in turn, help them to "become more confident that they can do more and build their ideal futures" (15). More specifically, we are using this appreciative inquiry methodology to frame the questions that will guide our pre-semester professional development activities in the fall spring 20243 semester. Drawing from Cockell and

McArthur-Blair's work, we will be using these two questions to guide two different 90-minute sessions:

> a. What is one thing that you have done to help advance the program's mission of teaching students to see professional writing rhetorical situations through the lens of positionality, power, and privilege?
> b. What is one thing you'll do in the coming semester to continue advancing that pedagogical mission?

Within the first session, prompts will guide faculty to share curriculum materials they have developed and integrated into their courses and describe and analyze empirical data from their classes that help them to gain insight into how those curricular designs are working. In the second session, faculty will sketch plans for a new curricular piece they will integrate into their courses either in the spring 2024 semester, as well as to identify help or support they need from colleagues or the administrative team in order to carry out and stay true to this commitment.

Design Thinking 101 podcast host Dewan Stanford suggests that this type of generative inquiry "has the power to close the gap" between where teachers are in their day-to-day practice and the pedagogical mission and vision statements that guide their institution or program. In some or even many cases, he suggests, people maybe "weren't part of the original design and they just think of the vision as *that thing over there*" (emphasis added). Asking the types of generative questions at the heart of appreciate inquiry, Stanford contends, "allow them to cuddle up to that vision and say, 'Oh, this is something that I actually work in the service of and that I'm proud of.'" Using the design orientation at the heart of appreciative inquiry, then, prompts our faculty to see our pedagogical vision not as something that's written and then simply exists in our minds as an abstract idea but rather as something that we enact. This approach, we believe, will help us to strengthen teachers' sense that this vision is something that's connected to and guides their individual behavior—and that their teaching activities bring that vision to life.

Conclusion

In many respects, my discussion here is preliminary, in-process, and anecdotal. In this sense, I do non't have formal, definitive conclusions to offer by way of formal research results. At the same time, I hope readers find value in learning about various strategies for implementing design thinking methods into professional writing program administration. In

my conclusion, I want to highlight five lessons that I a'm learning as I move from applying design thinking in my teaching and research to using this methodology with my WPA work in a professional writing program.

First, empathy interview questions can help WPAs to gain deeper insight on faculty members' thoughts and feelings about their experiences and desires. The stories faculty share, whether in one-on-one and small-group interviews or in larger settings, have value in and of themselves, as they enhance the likelihood that the faculty see themselves valued as people and as professionals. These stories benefit WPAs as well simply in learning more about and connecting with faculty. From a design thinking perspective, however, empathy research can also help WPAs to use data from faculty's stories about their experiences as a means to define problems or identify opportunities that could lead to significant improvements in faculty's experiences within the program and in the classroom.

Second, WPAs can find value in using design thinking methods to design with faculty themselves, engaging faculty in the design thinking process not only within the empathy research stage but also in the work of ideation, prototyping, and testing. At the time of writing this article, we have only scheduled this work and not yet enacted it, but we believe that generating and selecting and then testing prototypes of potential solution ideas with faculty will lead to solution ideas that not only will be more likely to address their needs but also will be more likely to be accepted and adopted by them. WPAs, then, should find opportunities to design with, not simply for, the faculty in their program. (As a side note, there undoubtedly are tremendous opportunities for designing with the programs' students, as well, from new assignment design to learning outcomes assessment design.)

Third, WPAs can help their faculty learn to be designers themselves, particularly in terms of designing learning experiences for students. My work with faculty in the Performance Improvement Plan program involved short yet focused engagements with faculty that prompted them to articulate a learning goal for all or a specific group of students, design a specific learning experience, and gather empirical data to gain insight on how that design effected affected student learning. While I didn't have faculty explicitly use the design thinking process here, the prompts I used to focus our conversations helped faculty to develop an empathetic perspective; to define specific learning needs from the students' point of view; and then to quickly prototype and test, gathering various forms of empirical evidence from students' engagement in that learning experiences and then iterating

and deciding where to go next in their learning experience design. Helping faculty learn to develop a design orientation to their teaching practice can help them learn to create more frequent feedback loops from students, generating insights about student experiences in the course throughout the semester, not only in end-of-semester course evaluations.

Fourth, linking a design orientation with appreciative inquiry can help WPAs find ways to implement, integrate, and enact those designs into the day-to-day teaching and learning activities of faculty and students. Based on our interactions with faculty in small-group workshops and one-on-one office hour consultations, our initial piloting and professional development work around the Positionality, Power, and Privilege curricular materials proved to be successful in terms of building faculty's confidence in integrating these materials into their courses. At the same time, we believe the generative questions that will focus our professional development activities in the spring 2023-2024 academic yearsemester will strengthen faculty's sense of connection to this pedagogical mission and vision for professional writing education. Faculty responses to these questions will help us to take stock of where we are, as a program, in terms of integrating these curriculum designs into respective courses. These responses will create opportunities for faculty to share their teaching strategies with colleagues, something that we identified as a need in the empathy and define modes on our design project focused on professional development. And these generative questions will prompt faculty to share their visions about how to continue deepening their enactment of this pedagogical mission statement in the coming year, and faculty responses to those questions will help us as a WPA team to identify strategies for creating supports faculty need to do that work.

Fifth and finally, WPAs need to learn how to tell stories about their design thinking work as a rhetorical strategy for earning buy-in from program faculty. Of particular importance here are integrating the voices of faculty wherever and whenever they engaged in the design thinking process, whether that be with empathy interviews, insights that shaped the problem definition work, or feedback during prototype and testing modes. Rather than focusing only explaining a particular policy, program, or curricular design, telling a human-centered story of how it was designed can help program faculty to better understand the empirical evidence on which a policy or program was developed, how faculty engagement shaped its design, and how its design will impact their professional experience in the program or in the classroom.

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Author Information

Scott Wible is an Associate Professor of English, Director of the Professional Writing Program, and Faculty Fellow in the Academic Academy of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Maryland, College Park.