Abstract:

This unit is designed to be taught during a Graduation Project seminar at the School of the Future, a public comprehensive high school in West Philadelphia. The seminar will be offered to 4th year or 12th grade students. During the course of this year-long Graduation Project, students will plan and implement independent service-learning projects, which must be research-based. As Graduation Project coordinator and a classroom educator, I have designed the project to include different research strategies as students develop their personal projects.

In terms of essential understandings, this unit is focused on exposing and exploring bias in research. It is critical that students understand that bias can affect both the collection of data and the interpretation of findings. Over the course of a two-week unit we will study specific instances of interview and survey research. Specifically, we will read and interpret WPA interviews with Ex-Slaves and we will look at the so-called Bradley Effect in election polls. We will examine the potential flaws in the data that was collected in these cases, and discuss the challenges of drawing conclusions from flawed data.

With regard to skill development, this unit will focus on mastering specific interview and survey strategies. To this end students will be exposed to various research methodologies. Throughout the unit, students will develop interview and survey protocols, while learning to recognize the fallibility of these research tools. In turn, these questions of the reliability of human sources of information will raise deeper questions about ways of knowing.

This unit works on multiple levels – skill-building and philosophical – to guide students to better understanding of their research topics and of research itself.