

## TRANSCRIPTION

**Dr. Stone:** Hello, my name is Dr. Jamie Stone and I am an associate professor at Black Hill State University in Spearfish, South Dakota. I am a Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Fellow and today I am going to host an interview with Ms. Gloriana Underbaggage of Little Wound High School in Kyle, South Dakota. Ms. Underbaggage will speak further into the benefits of using service-learning as a means of engaging students. In this VodCast, Ms. Underbaggage will share some successful service-learning stories and also provide a framework for other school districts that might be interested in implementing service-learning.

**Ms. Underbaggage:** Thank you for the opportunity, first of all Dr. Stone; I love to talk about service-learning so this is a great opportunity. Um, I think one of the things I want to share about service-learning here in South Dakota is that I was a privileged to be invited to be on the committee that formed the standards for service-learning for the Department of Education so that all high schools would include it – either, uh, have service-learning or with a, um, senior project. So, you might be acquainted with that as the requirements that they have now for graduation for the 22 credits, um, that, um, some of the elective credits would include service learning or doing a senior project. So it was really exciting, um, to have that discussion some years back. It's been um, going, on six years now.

**Ms. Underbaggage:** So, um, what I can tell you about myself is that I'm, uh, trained untraditionally as a as a teacher. First of all, my background has to do with legal training and so that gives you just an entirely different perspective about things. And I work with students doing online coursework so I have to be a generalist as a teacher, which keeps you on your toes [*laughter*] in a wonderful way. And to find how to engage your students because that every student approaches online learning as something that they necessarily are attracted to. Uh, their online experience tends to be with social media and not necessarily with, um, intentional learning on academics. So that's a little bit about myself. I'm going I'm starting my sixth year with Little Wound. And prior to that I was two years with another school that was entirely a virtual high school. And prior to that myself and my husband ran a program for students, um, so that in one year they could complete the requirements for high school diplomas and build a house. That to us was the epitome of doing service learning. Where you actually build something, had tools in your hand, knowledge, and created something to the benefit of another. So.

**Dr. Stone:** Nice, so was that your journey, was that how your journey into service-learning began?

**Ms. Underbaggage:** You could say so because as a Native woman, I am very accustomed that we work communally on projects and that we think about others before we think of ourselves necessarily. And what we're doing. So, in teaching, in

sharing in-in my past, we came to the natural place where we would look for activities and projects to do that would benefit our learning, our skill, our knowledge, enhance our abilities. And we would leave it there we would leave what that project was for our community, or for our family. So that that began early on; and then I-I got involved in service-learning in a much more formal way, uh, when I went to Washington DC and was part of the movement of what service learning was. And because of that, got involved with service learning with Eagle Rock School in Colorado and partnered with one of the professor's there so that we started doing things between schools here on the Pine Ridge Reservation and Eagle Rock. And that really was a wonderful experience to bring students that came from all over the country that attend that school to do service-learning here on the reservation. And so we did everything from, um, combining our students our classes, with their class that traveled and we've done things like service learning around peacemaking, service-learning, service learning around helping 0 to 5 year olds and young, um, young mothers that were in high school, young fathers in high school, creating an um, what we called "Ashley's Closet" to provide brand-new items for these young families that were in high school as they struggled to be parents and learning. We did projects around elders - visiting elders that might be in, um, in the hospital setting or in long term skilled care setting - a variety of things. So, what was really beautiful about it was here we had a young people coming from Harlem, Phoenix, LA, San Francisco - all over...Coming to the reservation to learn about culture - about some of the values - Lakota values - but about how they also were bringing something of value, as well. And we really emphasized that each person brought something of value. It wasn't that they were empty and they were coming to receive...uh, uh. It was that we all have something to offer and how can we bring then those gifts together and make something valuable. Before they would arrive, they would come with their— I think it would be about a trimester of class instruction; about, um, you know social issues, equity, peacemaking, restoration, a variety of things... So they would come with that knowledge. And then they would come with some introduction. I gave them a list of books that they might want to read about the reservation. Then they would come and we'd have a specific project we would work together. And that really went on for several years. It was a wonderful experience. Um, the last large one that we did was around gifted and talented and so we had gifted and talented students that were coming through from that school and with our school, and our school we had middle school and high school gifted and talented. It was a one-week intensive that we did. With students - there was Marlborough College out of Vermont with our students where we did an intensive all-day long. So they were pulled out of the classroom; I'm sure teachers love that...

**Dr. Stone** Uh-huh.

**Ms. Underbaggage** To be with us. And we covered a multitude of subjects... And the idea was leadership. Was how could we learn more amongst each other and

take on personal commitments and projects that we would set out to go do in our own communities, but with the understanding that there was support from each other. You could call us, talk to us anytime, how we could support your individual endeavor. And that was just such a wonderful thing because developing young leaders like that – that were so talented - so gifted - and so giving - was wonderful. Since that time, we don't have formalized service learning at the high school - which is an area that I'm going to be working on. We do now have a gifted and talented coordinator and they're going to be developing the program of gifted and talented. But specifically for service learning, um, I've been looking at different things that we can do. So, one is around developing a garden of traditional plants so that our students learn more about our traditional plants - that's one. Um, there's also a new component of-og the high school that's called Extension high school and they will be doing equine therapy - and so we're looking at ways that we could do service learning efforts around that with-with our youth. We're going to be developing projects on, uh, teaching the traditional way of making quilts and making things like that...So that our young people can make those and just gift them. And once again, um, teaching others, inviting others to come to learn alongside with our students. So our interpretation of service learning is a little different - it's to couple them with-with other students from other schools to help that. Because we're isolated in many ways on the reservation - but we're still exposed. Our youth are still exposed to MTV, Facebook, to, you know, What's App, - to Snapchat – to all of that, which doesn't necessarily highlight positive aspects of dominant culture... So trying to think of ways to introduce them to other students, from other areas, and they can share an experience. So the benefit is a little different; the benefit is of that connection. The benefit is of learning about other cultures and sharing about their own culture, and have pride. But it also requires them to learn more about it. So they can, you know, voice in a knowledgeable way about their culture so it's, it's a balancing you know, how to do that. Um.

**Dr. Stone**

I appreciate well that you embed the Lakota values.

**Ms.  
Underbaggage**

And but also, asking them, “What do you recall about values that you were taught at home?” And then they see similarities. They see similarities about the language because many of them have in it with their grandparents, other languages... And understanding, “Ah, you know, what-what would you know about that?” What celebrations do you have that are a part of your culture? Maybe they hadn't thought of themselves as having another culture, right?

**Dr. Stone**

Sure.

**Ms.  
Underbaggage**

Yeah. So, the more we learn about ourselves and our own ancestors and the more vision people learn, we understand, we can understand each other. We need to create a strong vibrant youth, about their, their values, about citizenship to their communities, to their states, to this nation, the more they learn, the better they can do them. We're looking for creating those bonds amongst them. Civic education is so critical. So the way we experienced it here, when I was with Oglala Lakota College, I used to do the new projects for service-learning. And it was a three-year project - and the, um, teachers weren't familiar with service-learning. So, there was introducing it to them, introducing it to the classroom, and then developing the project. What might it be? I always try to include the project being college students, or the high school students within a community with a non-profit. So I try to have four components always. And so some things that have developed were wonderful. One that has continued is *Hanwachipi*, which is the "Night Dance." And, um, he's since passed away but Wilmer Mestas was a wonderful man and professor that had a Lakota culture, a Lakota history, and language classes at OLC (Oglala Lakota College).

And so he would, through the support of our service learning project, have that evening dance that would occur, um, twice a year, [*phone ringing*] excuse me, and it would bring together the youth and the discussion of culture the foods and it was a wonderful thing. But it brought young people that never would have gone otherwise that wouldn't have thought of it. And so it's that kind of thing so and that continues even now.

Um, the other thing that we did, we did a project with OLC, the high school, the middle school, elders in the community, and that one was around; this one but really excited me, was around math. it was a Math Academy we did. Where we did a multi-generational classroom instruction, and, um, today we have a principal in the middle school that participated in that in algebra. And she was so excited when she was in that program because she had, I think it was-it was a middle schooler, that was showing her some approaches in algebra. It was like okay, I can't believe this! You know I'm getting it! She was saying. But if it's doing things like that and so after our initial year that we did that; and I had teachers from Brooklyn that came out to help to co-teach. And I had teachers from OLC, I had students from OLC; so we were all working

together on that and then OLC decided to take that one over - they liked it! So now in the summer they do a Math Academy. But that first one, there was something about that first one that was so unique. We had grandma's sitting in the classroom learning from younger students and enjoying it! We did rocket making to show you know, on geometry, on trajectories. You know we had a variety of things so that was service-learning the way we do it on the reservation - our style... of service learning, so...

**Dr. Stone**

So, um, what recommendations do you have for school districts on reservations? To adopt service-learning as contextual learning that helps bridge the academics to being, um, to civics?

**Ms.  
Underbaggage**

I would say number one the things that the school boards should make sure that they adopt, that service learning is part of their expected requirements for graduation.

You know they should look at it as one of those things and highlight it. And they should provide a budget for it as well. Those are just really critical. Another is they should have a teacher who's interested in service-learning, whether they've ever done it or not. You should have a teacher that is willing to commit to learning about it so they can provide then, the, um, service learning opportunity. If it's made like in high school, if it's made as an elective, then make it a spring elective or a fall elective, that they know students can say, "Oh I know, this fall, I can do a half a credit of service learning. Okay. So you build it in.

The other is: you encourage the developing of relationships between the different institutions on the reservation to the school, to see the value of service-learning. Because you could have a class of twenty students and what you have is 20 different service-learning projects right there. Because every student is encouraged to pursue something that interests them academically; to strengthen that, and to then seek out who they would partner with in the community. And if we've got the different agencies and nonprofits that are open to it, have heard about it, and they want to engage in it - that's I think - really important. Good citizenship really is looking with your eyes but looking with your heart and seeing what is

needed and in knowing that you are part of that answer. Whether it's going and helping out because you understand there's a need; and all it requires is your hands and your eyes and go. Go and say, "Hey I'm here, assign me something, show me." You know? But it's that generosity of heart that that is good citizenship. It's how do we encourage that? And the way you encourage it is you don't say to someone, "No, we've tried that - it doesn't work. You don't encourage it by telling them, "We haven't got time for you; we can't supervise you." No. So it's finding the right person in those agencies that are receptive to someone coming and saying, "I'd like to do something. I'd like to help out."

So that teacher at that school and then at the tribal level who is the person then that's going to be communicating that this is an initiative of the tribe's, of the reservation. Service-learning is an initiative to engage our youth.

So that's, that's kind of my thinking on it.

**Dr. Stone**

Well I agree and going back to what you said at the very beginning – the Lakota way, the Native way of learning, you do it as a community. So service-learning and helping seems like it should be what's at the forefront, you know. And then we can embed the math, the science, the English in it. And, um, going back to the South Dakota Department of Education document that you helped on; I really like that document and I like how it shows the difference between what service is, what learning is, and then what service learning is. Because community service is not service-learning, you know. You have to have the academics embedded within it as well, so.

**Ms. Underbaggage**

In having those academics and typically in college or in the high school, you could pick any class and you could sit down with a student and they could identify for you, in time, what it is that they could do in service-learning that would strengthen those skills or the newly acquired concepts that would benefit the community. Because it must be a benefit. That the and that's really critical you know? The benefit that comes from that engagement. So we need, we need to have more of that. But, yeah,

**Dr. Stone**

I love that you're doing this work and that you're looking at the equity that that balance and that service and I look forward to seeing where this is going to take you. Well, I'm hoping that other people will watch our recording here to see that yes, we can do this and the benefits...um, it's just, it's something I didn't, I did some service-learning when I was a high school teacher; however, not as much as I espouse it now as a university professor, as this is the way that we need to be educating our young children to again to be functioning members in a Democratic Society. And to make to make our world better, rather than looking at the negative. And as you mentioned, "We can't do this, we've tried this, it doesn't work." To get that negative mindset, put it away, and just say, "What if?" And try to go forward.

**Ms.  
Underbaggage**

We did one project with one class, I remember, where our students at from OLC went to test wells. And now it needed to be done. There wasn't sufficient staffing at the tribal level and you know, just delays. So here we had able-bodied, interested college students that wanted to go and do some things and we had some students at the high school that wanted, that were in biology and some that were in chemistry that wanted to learn, but didn't know exactly what it involved. So we just partnered them up and they went off with their little chart and they went to testing and they learned so much. One just being out there and then going to the well, collecting the water and figuring it out. It was of value to the tribe; but what happened, but it was really a value to those high school students that went. Their eyes as big as saucers because they included in something with college students.

The college students were so determined and they had their charts and everything. And they were working and here they were trying to show these younger ones "Well this is why we're doing it this way." and it was lovely. Also testing water in the wells, making reports of that. That was of value and then becoming more aware about clean water, [Dr. Stone: Right] protecting our water, the sources so many things flowed from that, you know?

The discussions alone are a value, you know just the discussions and awareness.

**Dr. Stone**

Absolutely. We do so much more by doing than by reading or hearing someone else, you know.

They're talking about, but you have to do it yourself, so. Well, thank you very much, Gloriana, for taking time out of your busy schedule and to share with the listeners and myself about service learning. And I hope that our conversation will pique the interest of other educators that are in schools –it does not have to be reservation schools. Service learning is about community everywhere and it shouldn't be an extra project, it should be something that's embedded as a something that takes place yearly rather than occasionally. Do you agree?

**Ms.  
Underbaggage**

Oh absolutely! And I would say to any teacher, you don't have to come up with a project. Your students, if asked, you know are a wealth of information and they'll tell you what interests them. What interests them and they'll have a much greater commitment to it.

**Dr. Stone**

Absolutely, thank you. That's a great point to end on because that's what it's all about. What's interesting and relevant to our youth and they are going to be much more invested in being an active participant if it's something that is informational and useful to them. Well thank you so much, Gloriana. I really appreciate you taking time out. And, again, I was so excited to see you were featured as a Chapter in the book, "School," so which is an excellent educational resource about, you know, making change in education at this time. And equity is where it's at. We need to think of everybody on the same level, have the same supports, and that we are all community, that's how we're going to survive. All right. Thank you so much! Bye-bye.