



Kishan Lara, PhD in education

First in her tribe to earn a doctorate

Having grown up in a Native American community where “research” was a dirty word, Kishan Lara had seen the plundering of her ancestors’ burial sites and the insensitive probing by researchers, archaeologists and university students. She was the last person who expected to study her own people, the Hupa/Yurok tribes of northern California.

But she wanted to protect the inherent rights, beliefs and concepts of her people, and she realized the best way to do this was through education. She saw the feelings of exploitation and sadness on the part of the tribe.

When Lara entered the doctoral program in education at ASU, she resisted starting the research necessary for her dissertation. But when she consulted an elderly Yurok couple about her dilemma, they said, “If anyone is going to research our people, it should be one of our own, someone that respects our way and wants to do right by us. We have things we want to say, things that we want

remembered.”

Lara’s dissertation explores the community’s concepts of giftedness, which are distinct from western concepts of giftedness. She believes that schools need to approach education from a community context, incorporating Indigenous knowledge.

Now 29, Lara graduated from high school at 16 and since then has earned her bachelor’s in Native American studies and a master’s in linguistics, working all the while as a teacher’s assistant in tribal schools. She also has taught courses at Humboldt State University and at ASU. She is the first person in the Hupa and Yurok tribes to earn a doctorate.

She plans to continue research to improve the way education is taught in Indigenous communities, teach at the university level, and provide professional development for teachers and administrators in tribal communities.