



## **Creating a second home in rural areas through social emotional education**

Episode Transcript

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# EPISODE 1:

## Creating a second home in rural areas through social emotional education

Yessica Flores, founder of Kantaya, interview by Andrés Neira and María Angélica Latorre.

(intro)

**Maria:** Hello, listeners. This is Maria Latorre. Thank you for tuning in.

Where would you be right now if you had not had any education? Where would the world be if every child had attended school?

UNICEF says a lack of trained teachers, inadequate learning materials, makeshift classes, and poor sanitation facilities make learning difficult for many children. Others come to school too hungry, sick, or exhausted from work or household tasks to benefit from their lessons.

The consequences are terrible. An estimated 670 million children and adolescents around the world are unable to reach minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, even though two-thirds of them are in school. This learning crisis is the greatest global challenge to preparing children and adolescents for life, work, and active citizenship. Eleven percent of primary school-aged children and 20 percent of lower secondary-aged children are not in school at all.

Poverty remains one of the most obstinate barriers why children are excluded from education, with children from the poorest households almost five times more likely to be out of primary school than those from the richest. Children with disabilities and from ethnic minorities are also more likely to be left behind. For girls, in some parts of the world, education opportunities can be especially limited. Only 49 percent of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education. Harmful gender norms can

have severe effects for boys too. Location also keeps children from school. Children from rural areas are more than twice as likely to be out of primary school than their urban peers. In conflict zones, 27 million children are out of school.

Without skills for lifelong learning, children face greater barriers to earning potential and employment later in life. They are more likely to suffer adverse health outcomes and less likely to participate in the decisions that affect them, threatening their ability to build a better future for themselves and their communities.

The guest we have invited for you today is tackling this issue. Yessica Flores and her team are bringing quality learning in a safe, friendly environment, qualified and motivated teachers, after-school activities, and much more. All of this focusing on what Yessica believes is one of the most important elements in education: Emotional capabilities.

Please enjoy the episode.

(interview)

**Andres:** Today, we have a special guest that is Yessica Flores from Peru. She's the co-founder of Kantaya. So, welcome, Yessica, to our podcast in impACTivist.

**Yessica:** Thank you, Andres. Nice to be here.

**Andres:** So, Yessica, please tell us who are you?

**Yessica:** Well, I'm a person super passionate that is always trying to improve and be a better person and I really want to trust in and impact other people with a better life.

**Andres:** Yessica, something that is quite interesting to understand from all entrepreneurs is to understand what is behind the entrepreneurship, in this case, of Kantaya, and we have discovered that always is connected with your personal values. How do you define your values and what are the kind of dreams that you have and how your dreams and your values are connected with childhood in Peru?

**Yessica:** Well, my values are I'm a very commitment person, move by purpose. I think I always was super connected with trying to help others, with solidarity, and I believe in justice and freedom and that's — my dream is that every child has the opportunity to choose what wants to do in their life, no matter where he was born and that's connected with my values, no? That I believe in justice and have opportunities and to choose and decide what they want to do in their life, no matter if they're born in an impoverished community or in a good community so they have a chance to decide what they want to do in the future without limitations,

**Andres:** And how was your childhood? Is there something in your childhood that you experienced that is the inspiration to create Kantaya?

**Yessica:** Well, I have the opportunity to go to school, to go to university, even though it wasn't easy for my parents to pay for it but I had the chance. Also have lived in my house, I have water in my house. But the reality in my country is that a lot of children does not have that opportunities. So I think that when I — I came from a very numerous family so we were always together and I feel a lot of contentment with my family, but I think that when I had the chance to live in the US is when I realized the differences in my country, no? That there are a lot of children begging for money without the opportunity to study and with a lot of poverty that even though I already saw that when I grew up, but it's like I didn't realize that it wasn't normal when I went to another country and that's when I decided to do something, to give back, and to give these equal opportunities to the children, no? That I really want to change their situation.

**Andres:** It's quite interesting, Yessica, because we have discovered also in this journey with impACTivist that several of our entrepreneurs, they have experienced they had the opportunity of living abroad and study abroad and to realize another realities and to connect and to discover the

differences that we have in their countries in Latin America. And when you started with Kantaya, is there many kind of influence of your experience in the United States when you decided to create Kantaya?

**Yessica:** Yes, no? It's like, again, this was when I realized that it's not normal to have children begging for money, no? That we were so used to see that, that in a way, I was like indifferent with that reality, no? It was like normal to see that. But it's not normal, no? It's like, when there's a lot of differences in my country, no? Between different group of — different areas or different group of people. So we need to change that and that's one of the things that really moved me to do something, to give back.

**Maria:** Thank you, Yessica, for this wonderful inspiration. So, it seems that there was something in you that triggered at least in you when you saw those children in the streets, right? Because if you had — your value was to give and to serve and to strive to improve others to have a better life, you could have chosen many, many things. Could we just dig a little bit around that? Why children? And if you have any data that you can share with us in regards to the situation in Latin America or in Peru about, you know, the lack of education in children.

**Yessica:** Yes. I think that I've been move by children since I was young. Now, I was a girl guide so we were always helping, like, in a way, I was connected with children so — and I think that's and I believe that if we change the mindset and we give opportunities to children, we can have a better country. What we do is a lot with value so, again, we have the feeling, no? The intuition that we wanted to help children. At that moment when we started, it was like almost 17 years ago, in 2004, we were gonna start it. And what we did is like at the beginning, we were like, okay, who are the more fragile or the group that has less opportunities we're gonna give something back so that's when we started with children. But when we start to find out what is going on, no? Like the numbers, no? In our country, we realized that we are 129th out of 137 countries in quality of primary education. Peru is one of the worst countries in education worldwide. So that was like a very important moment because, at the beginning, what we did with the children, we were like we have this meeting with them and we have these spaces where we take them to a museum and we just talk with them and we review their homework, how they were doing in the school, so when we find out this number, we said, "Okay, what are we doing, no? We need to change the way we're approaching them. We need

to give them more than just reviewing their homeworks after school because it's not enough." So, that's what the moment that we decided that we want to support children, that we want to create this after-school program. When the children came to the centers, because we have the centers, we have three centers where 300 children come, and we create our own curricula, no? Our own curricula has three parts. One is like this intellectual part when we teach them reading comprehension, mathematical skills, and technology. The other part that is super important for us too is all these social emotional part where they have, for example, mindfulness classes, yoga classes, art, handcraft, all these — like dance, no? All the ways that they can know them better and if they know their worth, they can be able to really reach their dreams. They will be able to be more strength, more self-confidence. And the third part is that we take the children to, again, not to museums, to university, to corporations, so they can see that there's much more outside the area where they are living and they can find inspirational or mentors or people who really explain about their careers and they can see, "Okay, I can do that, I can study that." So if they know they have like a goal, they will be — like they will study more so they will do a lot of effort going to that goal, but if they don't know what they want, at the end, they will say, "Why I'm gonna do some effort if I don't know — nothing inspires me, nothing motivates me." So what we want to do is to give them that motivation, to make them really have like this goal to go further. So that's the curricula. What we have reached in this year, the year, it's like our children, 70 percent has proficiency in mathematical skills and 76 in reading comprehension, comparing with the numbers that we have in Peru, in mathematical in Peru, 16 percent develop mathematical skills and 30 percent reading comprehension. In the other hand, our children are one year ahead comparing with other children of the same community in emotion regulations, so they are really like more self-confidence, they look straight at your eyes, so they express what they want in their life so they always have a smile so they are different from the children of the same community that are not going to our program. And the other number is that, again, the reality in the impoverished communities in Peru is that only 2 percent has access to higher education, that means like a technical education or university, but the children who were part of Kantaya when we began, when we didn't have the centers so we didn't have like this curricula, the children already had the opportunity to have technical or university studies at 67 percent compared with this 2 percent. So, the way what we're doing, we are changing statistics, we are giving opportunities, we are giving like the tools to the children to really change their life. We have the ones who already finished their careers and they already are like sponsorships of a child in Kantaya so they are supporting a child too because we taught them from the beginning is that you receive, you can give always something, no? This is like a circle, no?

That when you — you can give something always to someone that needs around you. So that's one of the things that we do a lot, no? To create this consciousness about how they can give back on what they're receiving today.

(music)

**Andres:** Yessica, that's quite interesting what you are telling us and really inspiring, but I have a question and it's a question about you because, as a person, you inspire a lot. I understand that before Kantaya, or to be dedicated fully to Kantaya, you were working in the private sector, as a person, as a professional that was in the private sector. At the end, changed your career, or I don't know if properly is that you changed your career, but you connect with these parties related to social development. What is your undergraduate? I would like to understand more about your background and how you connect your background with this part that is connected with social development. You are talking about mindfulness for children, you are talking about education, too many things that sometimes are not connected with your background in the private sector. So what happened? How did you discover this vocation in your case?

**Yessica:** Yeah. I studied industrial engineer, no? When I was in university, my dream was to be like a super successful corporate leader and that's what I did, no? When I finished university, I work in important corporations where I learned, grew, and I was promoted, but I always have this feeling that something was missing, no? So that's why I decided, I went to study into the US for a year and a half and when I came back to Peru, I still was in a corporation but I decided to create Kantaya, no? At that moment, Kantaya was like a way to be connected with my reality and to give back what I received from my life. But when the years we started in — after eight years, no? I had to decide, because I still have this missing part, even though I have Kantaya but there was so much to do, there's so much children, in Peru, there's over 2 million children who are in primary in poverty so there's a huge group of children that we can reach and we can give a quality education with values and that's when I decided in 2014 to quit, to dedicate my life to my purpose in life. So, in a way, I found my purpose in life that is Kantaya, that is to support, to change the education in my country, to do something for trying to change it. And that's my twist in life, no? It's like a huge change. I think that even though they're not connected, no? Like it seems that they're not connected, but I think that, in

a way, having the experience of being in a corporation bring a lot of ideas of the structure to Kantaya, no? To this social world, no? So, and we have learned a lot about education because I'm not an educator but I admire, I love the teachers, it's amazing the kind of work they do, I was completely ignorant before, and, moreover, now in this time, when they are really, really doing their best to try to reach the children in this virtual world, no? Without having the connection with them and they're doing their best, it's really an impressive vocation what they have. So I think that are connected, no? I think that one of the things that are positive, all this background that I have, I'm experienced to bring it to a social work because it's like I give like a different view and it's a better way also to reach for other corporations to be part of Kantaya and do projects with us, do donations, and also with individual donors. I've been working in marketing a lot of years and all this strategy, so I think that's a lot that if we are more, people from the corporate life that can give a little bit, because I need so many hands, sometimes I'm like the technological part is not one of my strengths as the financial part so we're always like, "Who can help us?" No? We can need some time to try to organize this part, no? Because our team is a small team so we always need hands. So I think that, now, I think that everything is for a reason and that's the path that my life has to go through and because maybe if I finished university and I started, no? To creating an NGO or Kantaya, I wouldn't be able to give as much as I can give to Kantaya now, no? Than before.

**Maria:** Yessica, and this is great what you're just saying, it's something that Andres and I have spoken about is why are we so divided? Why is the private sector so divided from the social innovation sector? And I love what you say, because your example is a concrete example, meaning you come from the private sector and, all of a sudden, there's something inside you that is stronger than you that says, "I want to do something else. I wanna create something different. I wanna make a bigger impact." And with Andres, we had said that's wonderful for people that have courage, as you have, because I think it's not an easy decision, right? How do you start in education if you don't have the expertise? Who do you partner with? It is a very courageous decision and what we have sort of discussed about is how can we, even the people in the companies, how could they even start within their firms in the private sector, how can they themselves create solutions or ideas so that other people within the company have another purpose, right? And so this is something we're pondering and I think it's really eye opening what you're saying. My question to you, Yessica, is, how do you find the courage? Because we have spoken to a lot of entrepreneurs that — you want to act, right? They're tired of listening and seeing and they know that they can have a bigger impact, but how do you decide to just say, "I'm



going to quit. I'm going to quit this job that I've had for 15 years, 20 years, whatever, and I'm gonna start something different to make a difference." How do you have the courage and how did you start?

**Yessica:** Thank you for your words. I think that is something that takes, in my case, it took time. I knew two years before that that was my next step but I was like, okay, I need to be prepared, no? I need to save, save money, no? To be ready for this change, but it's something so inside, you feel it, no? You feel something inside that is saying, "You have to do this. This is the right move —

**Maria:** Yeah.

**Yessica:** — you need to do it. You're gonna be happier, no? You're gonna be more fulfilled in your life if you do it. You will learn a lot." I always say that I think that I have to learn more since I'm in Kantaya full time than in my 15 previous, no? Corporate life. In a lot of aspects, I'm a better person now than I was before, even though there's a lot of challenges of not having like an established job and the position that I had before, but at the end, it always is positive, no? The balance is super positive and I'm super grateful for having the courage to make the decision, no? To say, okay, this is wonderful, I did it, that's what I thought it was going to give me happiness but it's not so I need to go for my happiness, no? For what I am here for in this life.

**Maria:** And that's wonderful because it shows that purpose and passion, it can be so strong that actually it gives you the courage to take action, right? I feel your passion. I mean, I feel it inside, like you have it in your heart, right? And then you take action. I wanna go back to Kantaya. Just tell us a little bit about the children because you did talk about the curriculum, you know, everything — the wonderful things that you're doing that you're able to see the type of education Kantaya is giving compared to the other type of education, but I really want to understand the children in Kantaya. Tell us about them, their communities, their families, how do they live, what are their challenges?

**Yessica:** Okay, the children live in impoverished communities outside the suburbs of Lima. That's the beginning, because now we are reaching

children in other parts of the country. With this COVID situation, we have like reinvented our program so we don't depend now in a physical center because the centers are still close so what we are doing, we give them — we create this virtual plan, even though 17 percent, only 17 percent of the families has internet, so it's super hard to reach them so what we do is we have these folders where we give all the educational program for a month so the parents pick up the folders, we give them that and with that, the children work the whole — every day, they have to do like a different homework or something to do some exercises. How they do that? With WhatsApp. WhatsApp is free in the plans of the phone, on the phone so it doesn't mean that they have to pay more or they lose their data for that. So that's the way that we find out how to connect with the children. Okay, so about the families. The families live in very tiny houses in these impoverished communities that is sandy, it's like a lot of sand, it's a desert, they live in the desert. They are living there because they have to migrate from the Andes when we had the terrorism in the 80s so the majority of these families have left all their things, their houses, what they knew to do because the majority of them were like people who worked with animals, they worked with the plants, no? And they have to leave that and move to the capital which was a safer place with terrorism situation. So they just settle in this desert land where they cannot do what they knew, no? They knew how to create, to work with animals and the animals will not survive because there's no water around. And many of the houses has no sewer. The water is already in the last one, two years, there wasn't water there too so they have very complicated conditions. They just survive, no? And the parents has to leave to work early in the morning, 7 AM, to the main city, to the downtown, which is like around two hours by public transportation to go and two hours to come back so they are around 10 PM back to their houses so the reality is that the children are alone by themselves, exposed to a lot of risks, so that's why we have the children after school. They go to school, they have this safe space in their schools, and they come with us and they are in a safe place. If you ask the children what means Kantaya and they will say, "It's my second home," no? Because they feel, no? The love of the teachers that are containing, emotional containing them. They feel that the people want them the best so they really — and when they, for example, I asked them why you come here, they said, "No, I learn here but in a very — super entertainment." I love the word. But it's like, "I have a fun space. I learn with fun. I'm not learning like with my school is like super like the teacher is like serious, she didn't smile, so I don't like to learn with her but here, I enjoy learning." And that's what we want to do, that's the way we want to teach them. And now that we have — we don't have the centers but we have the virtual plan, the virtual program is that the children, one of the data that we have is that seven out of ten children are having emotional problems because of the lockdown. How I was saying, they live in very small

spaces so they are like seven people in this small place, when I say small, it's like maybe one room, a room and something else and that's it and they have to be the whole time together in this small space. So, having the chance to receive the videos that we send, to receive the folders and do their homework, we are trying to connect a lot the parent with the children so a lot of the things that they have to do as homework is with the parents but it's playing. You can play cards and you learn numbers with that, no? And they play with the parents, "Oh, I have a big number, the bigger number," so that's the way we are like making them connected with the family, having this space with the family and also they are learning with that.

(break)

**Maria:** Wow, this is — so many things that come to mind. The first one is children, you know, exposed to risk, alone, living alone because their parents have to work. And then COVID hits. I go not to the children but to the parents because probably the parents also lack education. So, how do you also educate their parents? I think it's part of — indirectly part of Kantaya's role, right? I train their parents, for example, in COVID, to put their children to study and while playing, how do you do it? How are you able to manage the parents as well?

**Yessica:** Having the WhatsApp, that is mainly the way to connect with him. So, yes, you said something super important. The parents didn't finish school.

**Maria:** Yeah.

**Yessica:** Even some of them didn't finish primary school and they don't know how to read because they came from the immigration of terrorism in the 80s so they didn't have the chance to go to school and study. But one of the things that the parents, for example, were saying to us is that, and I wanna say the number, 83 percent of the parents consider that their children are learning more in Kantaya than in their schools, in their public schools. The problem here and I'm going to another problem, no? It's like the school, the public school wasn't able to reach these children that doesn't have internet.

**Maria:** Yeah.

**Yessica:** So what they did is a radio program, one hour per day, they're learning nothing, almost nothing with one hour per radio, how are they gonna learn to read or to write numbers? So, the parents sometimes didn't understand whether children are learning and that's why we are the ones who are connected with their children. But they find out how their children change because, for example, when I talked with some parents, they say, "No, my children now is super — help me a lot in the house, it's different, now, he talked me better, he's not so angry or he helped now, he's helping his little sister or little brother to study," no? So those are the changes so that's why we consider that our parents super strong in social emotional support, because the children are really changing some of their behaviors when they are feeling that there's people that cares about them. Their parents are working, they don't have plenty of time.

**Maria:** Yeah.

**Yessica:** And they are surviving so we want to, in a way, to contain them —

**Maria:** Yeah.

**Yessica:** — and make them feel better and then feel loved, no? Because you see the children, the children are always with a huge smile. It's like how can a child with all these needs that are not covered can be so happy? But they are.

**Maria:** Yeah, and it's so beautiful, right? And so, so many challenges. I mean, I see so many challenges and you seem to, right? Just giving them that holding space and that safe space can really change their emotional side and I think that's key. I think my last question before moving to the call to action is, I mean, there's data that you spoke about that says, you know, Kantaya's center or Kantaya's curriculum does bring much more value to a child. All this mindfulness, all this, you know, the different things that you spoke about. What do you need today in order to have more Kantaya

centers? How could we bring more of those centers to the communities that are in need?

**Yessica:** One of the things, for example, I'm gonna tell you about which were our main challenges. Our main challenges, the first one is like for the majority of the social entrepreneurs or the NGOs is to receive donations so have the money, how we can create the incomes, no? Is one side. But one of the other problems that we used to have is to find in that areas, in that community, the impoverished communities, good quality teachers. And we see, again, which is the main reason why the country's one of the last places worldwide in quality of primary education is because of the teacher, that's the main reason. The lack of quality teachers. So what we did, and it's connected with your question, is we create Kallpay, and Kallpay is another program that we have where we train and certificate women as teacher's assistants with super quality, again, quality curricula which is focused in the intellectual part but also the social emotional part. The women that are gonna be teachers came from the same communities and have the same needs so that's why we are doing a lot of emotional containment because they have to contain the children so they have to be super strong in the emotional part to be the best support to the children too. The reality in the country is that 52 percent of these teacher's assistants who are working with children, who are teaching children has no education, even though they haven't finished the school and that's the ones who are now helping children and teaching children. So because of that, then we create this program that we are doing now virtual, we started presencial also with the centers, but then, with the situation, we migrate to a virtual program and we — this is our third cohort that we just started this Monday and that's the way we are gonna — because you were asking me how you're gonna grow, how we're gonna grow, no? And that's one of the main reasons that we will have an exponential rate of impact because if each teacher assistant will impact 20 children per year, so that way, we will reach much more children with quality education, through a teacher assistant who has a quality education and are super empowered. We empower them. We have a lot of — the program is super complete. We have experts in psychology, education and coaches who works with them. They have like — we have an alliance with a coaching company so each of the students, they receive six personalized coaching sessions so it's like super — we work a lot in the human being, no? A lot in that part to make them super strong and empowered. And that's one way. And the other way to grow Kantaya is with alliances with corporations who are working in specific communities so we can go there with Kallpay and with Kantaya, we train their teachers and that teacher who are trained by us can create the after-school center, after-school program and help the children who are in that community.

**Andres:** Yessica, what I want to say to you in this moment is thank you, is thank you for following your intuition, for the coherence and for having the courage in doing Kantaya because this contribution that you are doing show us that the impact of education is real. This is not just a theory. And what we need more, not just in Peru but also in the developing countries, is that kind of transformation, is changing the mindset through the education but also through the development of another kind of mindset that is connected also with emotion so that is also connected with what you are doing. Now, I want to talk about what's next for Kantaya? What are the plans that you have for the future? What is going to happen with Kantaya and we can invite our listeners through a call to action that you can give us.

**Yessica:** Well, what's next? We have two main goals. One is with Kantaya after school is to increase the number of children not only in the community where we started, that is Ventanilla, now we are in another part of Peru and we want to keep growing that number so we want to reach much more children and, in Kallpay, again, we want to — today, we have 25 percent of our students from different — not only Lima, no? It's in different regions of Peru, and that's the main goal, no? Try to reach not only Lima but also the other provinces or regions in the country that needs a lot of support in education. So, and for that, we are preparing to scale. That's our main goal this year how to start preparing to scale and that means our processes, the way we — Kallpay, one of the things that I didn't mention, I think that Kallpay, we have two problems that I mentioned before, one to receive the money or the income, how to create incomes, and the quality of teachers, Kallpay solved these two things because each student pay for their certification or for their program, around \$300, US dollars, so it's not so much but it also give — that person who is studying is giving a child in Kantaya the opportunity to go to after-school center. So that's the main thing that we do here. So, how can you contribute? Well, you can see a lot of information in our web page, which is [kantayaperu.com](http://kantayaperu.com), and also if you want to write me, you can do it, my name is [yeflores@kantayaperu.com](mailto:yeflores@kantayaperu.com). So there's always different ways to contribute. The money is important. But also sometimes it's experience, sometimes it's being a person who wants to be ambassador in your country, in the country where they are and want to share what we are doing with other people. Everything is important. Everything that seems like a little is a lot for us. And that's why, yes, so the different ways — and also hands, no? We were saying we are not so good at the technological part, if someone is super expert and can help with that, wonderful too.

**Andres:** Dear Yessica, thank you very much for this inspirational conversation of today and to our listeners, we invite you to contribute. We will be posting the information of Kantaya in our webpage and if you want to receive more information, please send us an email or you can connect through our webpage. Thank you very much, Yessica.

**Yessica:** Thank you for the invitation and for the opportunity to share what we do with Kantaya. Thanks.

(outro)

**Maria:** What an inspired conversation, from being a corporate leader to working on solving one of the world's most pressing problems: Lack of education. You can all be part of Kantaya. You can go to [kantayaperu.com](http://kantayaperu.com) and see all the options you have to participate in this important cause. We will leave all the details on the show notes. Thank you for choosing the impACTivist podcast today. You can write to Andres and myself at [connect@impactivist.global](mailto:connect@impactivist.global).