# Changing the Conditions for Learning

General Domingo Urrutia School • San Carlos, Chile

“For me, the method was the 15 minutes, but the method is not that. It is a support for my teaching practice.”

- Karina Pereira, teacher (translated from Spanish)

Karina Pereira didn’t expect it to change how she taught. When General Domingo Urrutia School began working with Sylvia Langford’s educational approach in 2014, Karina treated it as another classroom routine - a 15-minute daily exercise. Something to fit in between the real work.

Five years later, she described a different experience entirely. The principles she’d picked up from those sessions had worked their way into the rest of her day. She stopped raising her voice to call for silence. The children were calmer. She was calmer.

Karina’s story matters because she didn’t describe the change as something that happened only to her students. Her own practice changed too.

## The school

Domingo Urrutia is a public primary school in San Carlos, Chile. In 2014, its School Vulnerability Index sat at 95% - meaning almost all its students came from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The principal, Matilde Jofré Martínez, had encountered Langford’s ideas through a television interview and the book De Regreso a la Armonía, and she reached out to begin a collaboration.

The work started in preschool transition through Year 2. Activities covered self-control, independence, fine motor coordination, readiness for reading and writing, number work, and physical expression. But the activities themselves were only part of it. How teachers delivered instructions, responded to disruptions, and set expectations was treated as equally important. The goal was to build these habits into everyday classroom life, not confine them to a scheduled block.

## What the teachers said

Yomara Fuentes Parada, after three years with the same class, said she started coming to school feeling less anxious about children's behaviour. Gabriela Candia admitted she needed self-control and patience herself - that progress required continuity and couldn't be rushed. Karen Sepúlveda, a special education teacher, described learning to trust students' developing abilities instead of stepping in too quickly.

These are personal accounts. Nobody measured the shifts with a standardised instrument. But taken together, they describe something consistent: the adults changed how they worked, and the children responded.

## Mental calculation and classroom practice

One specific strand of the work involved structured mental calculation. According to Langford's 2018 account, the relevant cohort completed 260 sessions of roughly 15 minutes between 2015 and 2017 - about 65 hours of practice, starting in Year 2.

Teacher Karen Carrasco reported that workbook calculations her students initially took ten minutes to finish could later be done in under two. That's her own observation of classroom performance, not a controlled measurement. Still, the testimonies across the team suggest something broader was going on. Teachers were building routines and creating conditions where children could listen, concentrate, and work more independently across all subjects.

## SIMCE results

During this period, the school's Year 4 results on SIMCE (Chile's national standardised assessment) showed substantial movement:

| Year | Mathematics | Language |
|---|---|---|
| **2015** | 251 | 218 |
| **2016** | 280 | 248 |
| **2017** | 317 | 304 |
| **Change 2015-2017** | +66 points | +86 points |

These are different cohorts each year, not the same children tracked over time. And the scores alone don't explain why the improvement happened.

But the Language result is worth pausing on. The school did structured mental calculation practice, yet Language improved by 86 points compared to 66 in Mathematics. That pattern fits what the teachers described: the changes weren't confined to maths. Better attention, more self-control, calmer classrooms - those things helped across the board.

Dunia González, head of the school's Technical-Pedagogical Unit, pointed to children's growing self-control and confidence. She also highlighted something less tangible: teachers and students had started believing the children were capable of more. For the school's leadership, the test scores were part of a bigger shift.

## The 2018 record

In 2018, the Chilean newspaper El Sur invited Langford to publish an opinion piece about the experience, titled "Un ejemplo de educación de calidad y sin seleccionar estudiantes" ("An Example of Quality Education Without Selecting Students").

Langford credited the school community directly: the systematic method supported the process, but the learning achievements belonged to the school's leadership and teaching team.

That distinction runs through this whole story. The program gave tools. The principal, teachers, students, and school community did the sustained work.

## What this case shows - and its limits

This is a historical case study of one school. It draws on reported SIMCE scores, Langford's 2018 article, and teacher testimonies. There was no control group, no comparable non-participating school, and the teacher interviews capture personal observations rather than formal measurements. Other school and community factors may have contributed.

We can't isolate the Langford Method's specific contribution or promise that another school would see the same results. What we can say is that Domingo Urrutia changed its teaching environment, its educators described real shifts in practice and participation, and the school recorded major improvements in academic results over the same period.

The most telling part of the story may be the simplest one. Before deciding what children can't learn, it's worth examining the conditions we create to help them learn.

Source: Based on the historical Domingo Urrutia account; testimonies from Yomara Fuentes Parada, Karen Carrasco, Dunia González, Karen Sepúlveda, Gabriela Candia, and Karina Pereira; and Sylvia Langford's 2018 El Sur opinion article. SIMCE figures are reproduced as reported in these sources. Quotations from Spanish are translated.