



Building a bilingual community through reading

Belgrano Day School, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Founded in 1912, Belgrano Day School is a bilingual school in Buenos Aires, educating children from kindergarten through to secondary. Andrea Pelliccia, who works in Learning Innovation and Technology, and school librarian Silvina Sala share the school's approach to fostering dynamic bilingual literacy, inviting children to explore, connect, and express themselves naturally in English and Spanish, while bringing families into the reading experience.

A library at the heart of school

The library sits at the centre of the school building, connecting the kindergarten, primary and secondary areas. Its position means that children move through it throughout the day, allowing unlimited opportunities for them to explore the shelves and choose books to take home.

Weekly 40-minute scheduled library sessions in each language give kindergarten and primary children time to enjoy stories together. Unlike typical lessons, these sessions are not assessed in any way. Alongside helping children choose books, librarians lead these sessions, introducing stories that children might not yet be able to read independently and helping them enjoy a book without understanding every word.

This different environment can reveal another side of a child, with teachers noticing abilities and responses they have not seen in class.

Building social and emotional connections

Reading together gives children something to talk about. In second grade, Jon Klassen's hat trilogy prompted a class vote on their favourite book. Other stories opened conversations about feelings and differences between people, allowing reading to make the connection with experiences children recognise.

The school's bilingual approach gives children room to contribute while their language skills develop. During project work, children can share ideas in Spanish when they need to, with teachers then paraphrasing in English. This allows children to express what they know and stay involved in the conversation while continuing to hear English modelled. Children can also choose



which language to use during activities focused on social and emotional learning. Giving children this flexibility helps protect their enthusiasm for contributing:

“I would never hinder the emotional part of being engaged with a topic because of the language.”

Andrea Pelliccia, Belgrano Day School

Celebrating reading together

The first-grade reading celebration marks an important moment in children's growing independence. Hosted by the library and class teachers, it gives children the chance to guide their parents around the library and share the books they are discovering. Children choose a book in either language and read to their parents,

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who also read to them. It is an event to recognise their progress through something they can enjoy together. Children's own choices are central to this connection: they select books at school and take them home to read.

The annual bilingual Book Week brings the community together through storytelling, performances and author visits. Younger primary children enjoy songs and stories brought to life through performances, while older pupils have opportunities to meet authors and ask questions about books they have read. Children have the opportunity to become performers, with fourth-grade pupils sharing poetry by reading aloud to the third grade. As part of Book Week, families can visit the book fair to browse books in both languages together.

Keeping the momentum going

Reading is not always a regular habit at home, and protecting time for it in a busy school week requires attention, particularly when project work runs over. The school encourages reading at home through assemblies and family events, while scheduled library sessions and regular reading-aloud practice help maintain its place at school. Children are borrowing books independently and proudly sharing their reading with parents.

Using digital tools to support reading

The school uses the Microsoft Reading Progress programme in third and fourth grades to support regular reading aloud. Children record their reading in English and Spanish, while teachers review feedback on fluency and accuracy. Teachers also use AI to help



prepare texts connected to class projects, checking them and modelling reading before children practise. Library staff help select quality digital resources and support implementation. Reviewing one child's recording revealed that he was whispering, prompting his teacher to help him build confidence in reading aloud. Teachers identify finding quiet recording spaces and coordinating staff support as ongoing challenges. Alongside these practical considerations, the programme supports more consistent reading practice and personalised feedback, with opportunities to help children grow in confidence.

The philosophy behind the practice

Underpinning all these activities is the school's belief that the library plays a central role in children's literacy development. As Silvina Sala explains:

“At Belgrano Day School, we recognize the vital role of our school library as the foundation for literacy development – a journey starting in the Early Years and continuing through Cambridge Primary, fuelling a rich English-Spanish immersion that invites families to take part.”



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