

Enhancing the World Languages Collection: From Imagination to Creation

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In 2022, the Lake Oswego Public Library (LOPL) adopted a new mission statement: “Together, we inspire discovery and cultivate well-being by welcoming all people to read, learn, and connect” (Lake Oswego Public Library, 2024a). This mission statement inspired the library to plan an expansion of its World Languages offerings. My prior success building a World Languages collection at a California boarding school with an international student body aligned well with the library’s goals. In October 2022, I was hired as an Adult Services Librarian tasked with bringing this vision to life. The project ultimately resulted in the creation of a World Languages collection for adults, a significant expansion and upgrade to the children’s World Languages section, and the formation of an inclusive adult World Languages Conversation Group.

Identifying the Need

I analyzed how language needs within the community were being met by our current services and collection. Census data from 2020 revealed that nearly 15 percent of Lake Oswego residents spoke a language other than English at home. At our request, Megan Kim, the Director of Student Data & Accountability for the Lake Oswego School District, shared a report with us showing that the district provided language services for 13 languages in 2022, with Chinese, Spanish, and Korean being the most common (Lake Oswego School District, 2022).

At the time, our children’s materials spanned 14 languages, and the Youth Services department was actively developing its Global Stories Project which included circulating kits called *Global Stories Book Bundles* and hosting First Saturday Readalouds (Lake Oswego Public Library, 2024b). Each Global Stories Bundle includes a discussion card and five picture books about how kids around the world play, learn, eat, dress, and fill their days. The stories aim to reflect our global similarities, while opening doors to new cultures and experiences. The Readalouds spotlight a different world language each month and feature guests from the Lake Oswego community who read and explain a world language picture book, share stories about their country’s culture and traditions, and lead a simple themed craft activity. The Youth Services department also curates booklists on Pinterest in various languages to further reach out to our multilingual patrons.

Our adult programming and collection were limited to English, however. There were only a few dozen titles available in Spanish for adults, and no adult world languages programming existed. Our pop-up library program, Rover, offered 15 Chinese-language titles as a pilot for a larger adult World Languages Collection. Check-out data for these materials confirmed local interest in adult language books, especially Simplified Chinese. It was clear that there was a gap in adult collections and programming waiting to be filled, and I looked forward to working collaboratively with our Youth Services department to bring about needed changes.

Planning for New Collections

Prior to community outreach, I secured internal library support by meeting with representatives from each library department. This helped identify areas of impact and potential collaboration. For instance, Youth Services already had a relationship with a local parenting group focused on multilingual families. In addition, I identified multilingual coworkers who were willing to share their language knowledge with me.

We considered whether to interfile our World Languages materials with our English materials or to create a dedicated section. Based on feedback from neighboring libraries about how patrons seek out a specific area in the library to find World Languages books, space was identified for dedicated World Languages sections for the children's and adult areas. For the adult collection, a plan was made to significantly weed the reference collection, change shelf heights, and integrate the genealogy collection with the reference section to free up a block of three shelving units near the nonfiction reference desk. In Youth Services, the DVD section previously located by the entrance to the children's area was relocated to nonfiction, and the World Languages books previously located in nonfiction were relocated to be the first books encountered by anyone visiting the children's space.

We also collaborated with neighboring libraries (Happy Valley, Beaverton, and Tigard) to learn about popular titles in their World Languages collections, and to solicit advice about vendors and cataloging procedures. A team of librarians from different departments developed a collection strategy to intentionally budget for and collect books written in or translated into Chinese, Korean, and Spanish, while remaining open to other languages. To match our community, it would have been ideal to dedicate 15 percent of our collection to languages other than English. However, given the daunting nature of this task—both in terms of space and money—a more modest goal of filling the newly allocated spaces was adopted.

We created new specifications for spine labels that would be consistently patterned in both the children's and adult World Languages collections. These labels show the language name in English (for shelving purposes); followed by any children's room categories (board book, picture book, chapter book, etc.); the Romanized call number; and, for languages using non-English characters, the title and author's name in the original language. We also chose to include the words "simplified" or "traditional" in parenthesis on the labels for Chinese materials.

Cataloging procedures were reviewed to ensure that we could correctly catalog many different World Languages materials. New internal location codes were implemented for better searchability, as well as for internal data extraction and tracking purposes. Finally, revised cataloging and shelving guidelines were created and distributed to staff.

Community Engagement

We designed a survey to gather insights from our residents regarding the languages spoken and learned within their homes, as well as their preferences for material types and book genres in

various world languages. Before launching the survey, we collaborated with our local antiracist organization “LO for LOve” to solicit feedback and secure support for promoting the survey.

In response to racist incidents at Lake Oswego High School in 2016, a small group of local people organized a march through downtown Lake Oswego that was attended by over 300 citizens demonstrating unity against hate. This led to the establishment of a permanent group that advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusion in Lake Oswego. Working with the city’s DEI Advisory Board and Equity Manager, LO for LOve initiates and promotes diverse activities and events. These include the annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration, the library’s Lunar New Year event, and Juneteenth recognition (LO for Love, 2024a).

The city, school district, and LOPL proudly partner with LO for LOve and the neighborhood group Respond to Racism, which focuses on educating the community about the history of racism and fostering dialogue for change (LO for Love, 2024b). LO for LOve has proven to be an invaluable ally for LOPL, especially when it comes to engaging with minority community groups that could be affected by our programming or communications.

In line with guidance from LO for LOve, we made fliers advertising our survey with QR codes and options to take the survey in English, Spanish, Korean, or Chinese. The survey translations were obtained from a professional translation service that works with the city. We began distributing the survey in late February of 2023 and received results throughout the month of March, closing it in early April. The library sent emails and hand-delivered fliers to local businesses, centers of worship, community groups, and schools to invite residents to participate in our community language survey.

We received 105 responses. While English, Spanish, and Chinese unsurprisingly topped the list of spoken languages, Ukrainian and French emerged as intriguing surprises, displacing Korean from the expected top five languages. The strong French showing likely reflected our local French private immersion school’s enthusiastic parent base, and the low Korean response rate indicated a need to create greater ties between the library and the local Korean population.

Eighty-four individuals from the survey population subscribed to the library’s mailing list. These subscribers received monthly updates detailing the progress of ongoing projects. Additionally, they were invited to join a newly formed World Languages Team, which functioned in an advisory capacity. This team met regularly via Zoom, with typical attendance of three to eight participants. Through these meetings, the team collaboratively developed strategies for building, cataloging, and promoting the library’s World Languages collection.

Notably, the team’s contributions extended beyond internal planning. One of our members was engaged in resettling Ukrainian refugees locally. This team member had also promoted the library’s survey within this community. In response to this opportunity, the library procured Ukrainian language materials for our World Languages sections, and in August of 2023, we partnered with a local translator to conduct a virtual library orientation specifically designed to welcome Ukrainian newcomers.

Launching the Collection

In May 2023, in preparation for launching the new World Languages collections, the library subscribed to the Mango language learning platform, further expanding the library’s digital offerings. Additionally, a dedicated webpage was created to provide a user-friendly search interface for World Languages materials (Lake Oswego Public Library, 2024c).

When we began to place World Languages book orders, one of the biggest challenges was finding sources for materials, especially in Asian languages. Frequently, popular titles are much more expensive than similar English titles, shipping times are quite slow, and the costs for shipping internationally can be high. The World Languages Team brainstormed the idea to jump-start the collection by soliciting donations from our existing community. This idea paired well with the grand opening-style launch party we already planned to throw for the collection in September. We decided to promote the launch party as a time to donate used World Languages materials in good condition in exchange for a free canvas library book bag. To each bag we attached ribbons and a thank-you note with a QR link to our World Languages website.

In response to our World Languages Launch Party press release, we were interviewed by the *Lake Oswego Review* about our new collection goals. Shortly after, our project appeared on the front page of the *LO Monthly* magazine (Larsen, 2023). The article generated lots of interest. People contacted the library asking about the launch party and donations began rolling in even before the party was set to launch. A week after the feature article appeared, LOPL hosted the World Languages Launch Party, attended by nearly 100 people, who enjoyed global snacks and world poetry. Community members donated 91 new World Languages books for both children and adults.

After the party was over, patrons asked when we would be hosting more World Languages events and asked for more opportunities to meet with other multilingual speakers in the community. The World Languages Team was especially interested in not losing the connection they had formed during the planning of the book collection. The decision was made to continue the monthly newsletter, and in early 2024, we launched the World Languages Conversation Group for adults. Our monthly meetings are open to adult individuals at any language proficiency level, from beginners to bilingual speakers, including those learning English. Each month we learn about a cultural topic, discuss how language and culture impact our lives, and share our book recommendations with one another.

Successes, Challenges, and the Future

LOPL's efforts to create and promote dedicated World Languages collections had a significant impact. From January through December of 2023, we expanded our youth and adult sections with 560 and 969 new titles, respectively. This enrichment led to a 165 percent surge in book borrowing during the same time period. LOPL is now the third busiest library in Clackamas County for lending World Languages books and fourth for World Languages books borrowed by LOPL patrons (Libraries in Clackamas County Equity Committee, 2024; LINCC Equity Committee, 2025).

Our collection thrives not only through regular acquisitions but also through continuing patron donations to our World Languages collection. We work with the LOPL's Friends of the Library group to notify the library of any donated World Languages materials and to pass on any unusable World Languages books to the Friends' bookstore. We also trained Friends volunteers how to use apps to translate book titles and how to look up similar copies for sale online to price them accurately, ensuring that every contribution enhances our collection or supports the Friends' bookstore. These donations are excellent opportunities to get contact information from donors interested in world languages in order to further promote our growing collection.

We were also fortunate to encounter an unexpected opportunity that deepened our engagement with the Korean community. Tigard Public Library received a substantial donation of Korean language books from H-Mart in January 2024. Because Tigard had previously

offered helpful advice to us about our World Languages materials, we extended our congratulations and inquired about its connection with the donor. Tigard Public Library revealed that H-Mart had proactively offered the books without solicitation. Given the donation's significant volume of about 1,500 books, Tigard generously gave seven boxes of books to our library. Our collection was enriched by the addition of over one hundred new Korean titles. We then offered Korean community members the opportunity to take home any unselected books as complimentary gifts.

While we celebrate these advances, we acknowledge the challenges faced. Some seeking English classes have contacted us based on the publicity about our new collection, and they are disappointed when we redirect them to our conversation group or to resources that are not in person. Additionally, attendance at our World Languages Conversation Group has been lower than expected. We've recently transitioned to a hybrid format in hopes of increasing participation. There's also a strong interest in a formal Conversation Partners program, but we don't have the resources to meet this need at the moment.

We also recognize areas for improvement. While we've hosted programs with bilingual musicians and speakers, our adult programs are still primarily in English, with translations available only upon request. We also haven't yet added World Languages books to the teen section, but see that as a future opportunity. There are also various cataloging enhancements that we hope to make, such as adding English translations to book records for better searchability (for instance when searchers look for "The Great Gatsby in Chinese" the actual title in Chinese does not come up).

As we look to the future, we take pride in our progress and the connections we've made with Lake Oswego's diverse community. The presence of World Languages books on our shelves has opened up a broader conversation about including all the people that live in our community. Building the World Languages collection is a significant step toward our goal of welcoming all people to read, learn, and connect in Lake Oswego.

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