
We play every day: Theories and impact of reconceptualized academic library spaces

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ABSTRACT

While imaginative play and sensory-stimulating activities are credited as benefitting childhood development, a growing body of literature suggests play is beneficial for adult development in terms of promoting emotional and physical well-being, facilitating inclusive social interactions, increasing productivity, and improving learning. Experts in library and information science and higher education are examining how best to implement play into academic libraries to better understand how play can have tangible outcomes on community building, student success, and knowledge creation. This paper will demonstrate how Lovejoy Library at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville has innovated library space to encourage practice-based play. We will provide insight into how other academic libraries can reimagine and redesign their spaces. We will discuss – through theories and our case study – the value of designing a library where we play every day. There are many ways to measure student success and our institution focuses on retention and graduation rates; students are driven to graduate by outcomes (grades and degrees) and campus experiences (building community and a sense of belonging on campus). Academic libraries are uniquely situated to contribute to both motivators by creating spaces for formal and informal learning that are engaging, collaborative, and challenging. At Lovejoy Library, we have innovated library space by theorizing play. Play is fun, engaging, spontaneous, disrupts power dynamics, and requires focus and rest; experiencing play is an act of mindfulness, essential to a student's emotional health. Through renovations complete with a new MakerLab, furniture, equipment, resources, programs, and services, we created an environment to support student learning and well-being.

Introduction

Play in academic libraries is a new topic of interest among higher education and library and information professionals. Despite the growing literature on play in adulthood, there is a need for more scholarly work related to play in academic libraries. The lack of literature about play in academic settings could be due to the nature of the academy or a misinterpretation of the work-play dichotomy. Work, or in the context of higher education, academic learning, is considered serious and goal-oriented while play is considered frivolous and not goal-oriented (Kurt, 2010).

This article aims to add to the definition of play and potentially to the play framework by providing theories of adult play in an academic setting. We argue that play contributes to learning and the creation of knowledge and helps to invert power dynamics so that students especially those from underrepresented groups can contribute to how knowledge is produced and disseminated. Additionally, this article will examine theories of playfulness, including our definitions of play, to determine how practice-based play has impacted our library spaces, services, and programs at Lovejoy Library at Southern Illinois University and assess the value of play on student success outcomes.

Literature Review

To date, there has been limited comprehensive research on play in academic libraries as it relates to measuring student success, exploring power dynamics, community building, or knowledge creation. Most of the literature on play in academic libraries focuses on play in terms of gaming and programming. Therefore, we had to expand our search beyond academic libraries and look more broadly at play in adulthood. We can only glean about play in academic libraries in relation to student success, knowledge creation, and power dynamics from the literature on play in adulthood. There is an extant body of literature that helps to define adult play and suggests that play in adulthood has many benefits, which may be closely aligned to an academic setting such as libraries. Van Vleet and Feeney (2015) define play as an activity or behavior that has three main goals: amusement, enjoyment, and fun. They also argue that play is meant to be in the moment and interactive and has both short-term and long-term outcomes. These outcomes (either personal or relational) are thought to reduce stress, increase positive emotions, contribute to unconventional or creative thinking, lead to better problem solving, contribute to feelings of being accepted or valued, and aid in conflict resolution. Based on this definition, we can surmise that by implementing play in academic libraries we are better equipping our students to be successful in excelling at the college level and graduating on time.

Wong (2020) adds to the definition of play, citing it as any activity that is intrinsically motivated, imaginative, creative, and self-directed. Wong also argues that play allows adults to re-connect to our childhoods by escaping the responsibilities of adulthood or is a method that can be used to reset the adult mind. Other research even suggests that memories of childhood play leads to positive outcomes in adulthood. The positive associations of childhood play were often correlated to adults engaging in lifelong playful and leisure activities that kept them physically and mentally active, such as spending time outdoors, doing crossword puzzles, and playing board games (Burr et al., 2019). Again, this could have implications for how academic libraries can use play to increase student success since this could yield higher employment outcomes after completing a degree.

Magnuson and Barnett (2013) argue that adult playfulness is a coping mechanism for stress. Their study used extant research on adult playfulness to study three cohorts of college students. Results from this study revealed that students who incorporated play into their daily lives reported they were less stressed than their peers who were less playful, and they had also adopted more adaptive coping strategies to help alleviate stress or stressors.

In other words, this study implies that play makes the students more resilient. Magnuson and Barnett's research, therefore, has huge implications in the academic world and academic libraries since resilience is often used as an indicator of academic success as it is often correlated to high grade-point averages or better performance in rigorous courses (Bittman, 2021).

Proyer (2017) takes a more analytical approach to defining adult play, identifying four main types of play in adulthood: light-hearted, other-directed, intellectual, and whimsical. Other-directed play is described as play with others. Light-hearted play is inconsequential play. Intellectual play is playing with ideas and thoughts for problem solving. Whimsical play involves eccentric things or activities. While all four types of play could be relevant to the academic library, intellectual play and other-directed play are the most applicable concept to the type of play incorporated at Lovejoy Library.

Play is also beneficial in organizational innovation in helping to create more flexible and innovative organizations (Kurt et al., 2010). This is especially important for academic libraries since academic libraries are constantly forced to evolve and adapt to the rapidly changing information landscape. Libraries can utilize play intellectually to problem solve creatively and to create new knowledge, or to change or challenge established systems of power and routine ways of thinking by intentionally thinking of and including students when redesigning spaces or creating programs and services. Therefore, an academic library can help to build community with students and can invert the top-down approach to how academic institutions are run.

In libraries, play has also been transformative for students as well as used to attract students to the library building, give them a reprieve from their studies, and to engage in creative learning (Kurt et al., 2010). Adult play studies also suggest that playful individuals could be more interested in successful outcomes since they seek 'internal rewards, active and novel engagements, opportunities to be challenged and further develop their skills, and have social interactions, and they regard these motives as more important than their less playful peers' (Barnett, 2011, p. 397). Again, this signals that play can have a direct or indirect impact on student success as well as community building.

Theories of Play

What is play? What is it not? We have had many conversations trying to answer these questions in the context of an academic library in the United States. Central to our ideas of understanding play in academic libraries is learning; because of this, we cannot help but draw comparisons to the university classroom. Since our institution places emphasis on retention and graduation rates as key indicators of student success, we find it essential to find ways for the library to contribute to them. We see the library as uniquely positioned to support student learning in both their academic achievements like classroom grades and degree completion, and their college experience, that is, their sense of community and belonging on campus.

How can theories of play help us create a library to realize our university's mission and vision? To begin, we see

play as flexible and dynamic: play is fun, enjoyable, inclusive, engaging, spontaneous, informal, friendly, competitive, and can be experienced in groups or as individuals. Play in our library is not formal and is not a performance. By creating opportunities through spaces, programming, and services, we hope to create a sense of play we see as a learning zone, not a performing zone. The classroom is a learning zone, but it is also a performing zone: students are formally assessed by faculty and receive grades for their performance. While the classroom may be playful and space for learning, the stakes are higher because ultimately the students are working towards a grade. We hope to create an environment in our library that invites students to experiment and practice with the intent to foster learning and community. We would like to add to the body of research on adult play by sharing what has influenced our own theories of play. These theories are mostly derivative of ideas about learning including social constructivism. Social constructivism is a learning theory that argues that students learn by engaging with others and can create their own knowledge through this engagement (Crowe & Sclippa, 2020). Therefore, we argue that play, especially in the scope of the academy and the academic library aids in the creation of new knowledge and the discovery of knowledge. This notion of engagement has tremendously influenced our planning in spaces, programming, services, and even personnel (we hired a Diversity and Engagement Librarian in 2020!). We wanted to create an environment that engages students in the library and all it has to offer in terms of resources and tools. We wanted to create a thriving community in which students are actively engaged to take part. We believe that play is about learning and connection, and we observe it through engagement.

We also believe that play is inextricably linked to growth. In spring 2021, library faculty and staff were invited to join an optional book club to read Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Dweck (2006) explains:

...growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience. (p. 6)

Growth mindset is a guiding principle in libraries. This concept connects directly to lifelong learning, which is an essential core value in the profession (American Library Association, 2019). With this understanding in mind, we continue to evaluate the library environment to seek out opportunities to improve it for our students to learn, grow, and, more importantly, play. Within a growth mindset, mistakes are to be expected and we see this same concept in play. Even in a simple game like checkers, a player can make a costly mistake and lose, but will learn a strategy to win in the process. Eduardo Briceño, co-founder of Mindset Works and collaborator to Dweck, spoke about the importance of practice and sleep for learning:

The people who achieve the highest level of expertise in their domains sleep more than other people. And a couple of reasons for that. One is that deliberate practice involves full concentration at a high challenge

level beyond what we can already do. That involves a lot of concentration. It's tiring. Therefore, a full night's sleep, is a very effective learning strategy to consolidate things into long term memory. (2020, 32:59)

This brings up an important strategy we used to theorize a playful environment in our library: creating opportunities for deliberate practice. For example, students are in the library to learn and grow through deliberate practice by working in groups. We view this deliberate practice as being done playfully, and in an environment we created to engage students in play. We see groups of engineering students making paper airplanes and throwing them to help understand concepts, and we see chemistry students taking turns writing out formulas and equations on large white boards set on casters. We see groups of nursing students quizzing each other in preparation for anatomy exams. This is the learning zone. All of this is done to prepare them for a time when they will be asked to perform, i.e. exams and other assessments in the classroom. What is interesting is how engaged the students are and how they work as a team to learn. The library is a place for students to play and make mistakes and learn in the process.

The library building is open and staffed ninety hours a week during the fall and spring semesters and provides a place for students to study and gather and play. However, in all this practice, they do need ways to rest and relax. There are growing trends in libraries around mindfulness and self-care. These trends, coupled with understandings of growth mindset, guide us in our development of space and programming.

Significance of Study

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is nestled between Chicago, IL and St. Louis, MO. The University is an R2 institution that serves approximately 11,000 undergraduate students and 2,500 graduate students. This number has grown over the last five years, and enrolment numbers are expected to increase in the upcoming years. Lovejoy Library is the only library on the Edwardsville campus, which means that the library serves thousands of users annually. Like most academic libraries, Lovejoy Library has had to innovate to accommodate this number of patrons and to evolve with the changing information landscape. This has meant that we have had to experiment with ways to best address users' needs. One of the ways that the library has sought to be innovative is by implementing play.

One significant aspect of this case study was to contribute to the literature about play in academic libraries by providing a case study of how Southern Illinois University Lovejoy Library has incorporated play into our spaces, programs, and services while examining the immediate and long-term outcomes of these initiatives. Secondly, we wanted to demonstrate best practices for spaces, programming and services that other academic libraries can adopt. Library and information science lends itself to interdisciplinary work, and this study could have broad implications for all professions, but particularly to library and information science professionals in understanding the role that play has in academia and libraries.

To determine the effect of play in academic libraries and its outcomes on student success, community building, knowledge creation, and power dynamics, we carried out a study of Lovejoy Library at Southern Illinois University. We observed instances of play and asked a series of questions to evaluate how we had implemented play in our library. We brainstormed these questions together and they were influenced by our personal and professional backgrounds. Our university has a firm commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism (DEIA), and provides training and resources for us to build upon our knowledge. DEIA was a guiding force in our critical approach to drafting questions. We stand committed to challenging the systems and practices in our library so we can identify barriers and end oppression in all forms.

The questions we asked were:

1. Have we created a playful environment at the library?
2. What programs or services are conducive to play?
3. Have we used play to create inclusive spaces? Have we used it to disrupt power dynamics and how?
4. How has play contributed to a sense of community in the library?
5. How do our ideas or theories of play comply with the established literature on play? Do they offer greater insight into play in academic libraries?

Spaces

One of the ways that the library has incorporated play is in the design of physical spaces. Over the last few years, the library has reconceptualized space to be more collaborative, innovative, and community based. The Lovejoy Library building has four floors: one lower level and three upper levels. It was one of the first buildings constructed on the Edwardsville campus in 1965. The building houses not only the library collections but also shares space with campus partners.

Since 2018, the faculty and staff at Lovejoy Library have worked to reconceptualize the space on all floors of the building; some of those spaces are primarily for public while others were reconfigured to serve as faculty and staff workspaces. This work was directly connected to one of the six strategic directions from the 2018-2021 Library and Information Services (LIS) Strategic Plan, *Design*¹, which read, 'Provide and expand innovative spaces for diverse users collaborating in the creation of knowledge. LIS provides space for diverse groups of thinkers, which reflects our commitment to supporting all patrons. The provision of physical and virtual space is essential for providing academic experiences and success'. The first floor has seen the most dramatic change. The vision was to open the floorplan too, and this included: consolidating five service point desks into one, relocating the music collection to the third floor, relocating interlibrary loan staff workspaces to the lower level, weeding, and

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OnBJCnHKc0_0a4tbAllirw_oQ5KtFedh/view?usp=sharing

relocating the print reference collection to the circulating stacks, construction of the MakerLab, and purchasing furniture for collaboration and study.

While the word *play* is not explicitly used in the strategic plan, it is noticeably clear that these decisions to change the space were intentional, and the intent was and is to empower students in taking ownership of the library space. By doing this, students disrupt the power dynamics with traditional gatekeeping approaches to managing library spaces. The users reconfigure space to their needs: they make messes, they eat food, they play often using the furniture as a vehicle (the spin chairs and bike desks), they rearrange furniture, and respect the library as a communal space. The library recently completed a large-scale weeding project which has opened floor space for more seating. While we offer reservable spaces, much of the library is open to whoever gets to a space first. We observe students using library spaces confidently for their own needs and respecting one another. We believe that there is an absence of conflict among students in the library because students feel welcomed and because of the variety of spaces available to them, e.g. group study, individual study, open seating, reservable spaces.

Visitors to Lovejoy Library are immediately drawn to the MakerLab on the first floor. It is enclosed and two of its walls are glass so onlookers can observe the work from the outside. In 2020, there was a total of 55 new subscribers, and 164 visitors. In 2021, there was a total of 82 new subscribers, 15 persons who toured the lab, and 418 visitors. Due to safety regulations and university policies, the MakerLab is supervised by the MakerLab manager and several staff members and student employees. The current space is larger than the first iteration, which the university determined did not meet safety regulations. The original space was too small to house both equipment and people, so the library had to secure more funding to build a larger room before it could open. For those looking to create a makerspace, we recommend incorporating safety regulations early in the process to understand how much space you will need to have equipment safely operating around a number of people. All users must sign a MakerLab Safety Procedures and Agreement form before using any equipment, but everyone is welcome to visit the MakerLab for a tour. The term *new subscribers* refers to people who have signed the required safety agreement form. The total number of subscribers we have had since the MakerLab's opening on November 19, 2019, is 148. Total visits are the total number of persons who reserved equipment each day throughout the year. The MakerLab represents play in so many forms: making/creating, designing, problem solving, fixing broken equipment, and collaborating. Community members can reserve times to use the following equipment: 3D doodle pen, 3D printer, 3D scanner, Arduino kit, two button makers, comb binding machine, digital storage oscilloscope, Dremel engraver, Dremel rotary tool, Glowforge plus laser engraver/cutter, green screen, collapsible chromakey panel, twelve-inch laminator, large format printer, mug heat press, programmable embroidery sewing machine, soldering iron kit, sublimation printer, t-shirt heat press, UGEE graphics tablet, vinyl cutter, and an Oculus Rift virtual reality headset system.

Makerspaces are no new phenomenon to academic departments like engineering or chemistry, but the library's MakerLab is open to everyone to come in and experiment. The only expectation we have in the library for

students using the MakerLab is for them to have fun. You can visit the library's MakerLab website to see a gallery of projects created by students². Many of the tools – especially the 3D printer – can be prone to breaking down, but that is part of the fun. Figuring out what went wrong in a print and problem solving to get the machine running again is a huge gain in learning. One of the most popular tools in the MakerLab is the button maker, so much so, that we now charge \$0.20 a button to help cover the cost of materials. Many student organisations enjoy making buttons to market their clubs.

Throughout the upper three floors of the library, we have unique furniture and spaces. On the first floor we have six collaboration tables, which each have space for five chairs and a monitor for students to wirelessly connect and mirror their devices' screens. Half are reservable and all are very popular. We have even observed students displaying cozy fireplace scenes on these monitors, which we see as evidence of claiming the library as their space. All three floors have reservable group study rooms which allow for focus and collaboration. There are three wiggle rooms on the second floor, which resemble telephone booths and are for single study. Many students use these office pods/study pods for things that need concentration, e.g., interviews and attending classes online. Although the wiggle rooms are used for serious study or other serious endeavors, we intended to make them playful spaces through design since they are shaped like telephone booths. Many of the tables throughout the library building are on casters, so students can move them as they see fit. We have dry erase white boards on casters throughout the building, which students move around to use for solving chemistry and math problems, as well as drawing large diagrams for various subject areas. On the third floor, we have treadmill desks and bicycle desks to aid students in physical fitness and mental concentration. Most recently and perhaps the most talked about furniture added in recent years is the Magis Spun Chair³ from Herman Miller. We have two of these chairs and they look very much like a spinning top: a person sits in the chair, leans back, and rocks and spins around – very playful! It's an informal space, so they know they can engage or play or study how they want to. We intend for the library to be a place where students are actively engaged with resources, spaces, tools, furniture, and each other. With each purchase of these items, we are shaping an environment to encourage students to experiment and try something new with no fear of failing.

Tucked away on the third floor is the Lovejoy Library's Meditation Room. The creation of this space was born out of a study on the international student population at SIUE, as it drew attention from the researchers: 'The inclusion of a 'prayer room' or a spiritual space in the library was one of these themes' (Burel et al., 2019). With support from a grant from the Trust for the Meditation Process, the library created the Meditation Room, which is

² <https://libguides.siu.edu/makerlab>

³ <https://www.hermanmiller.com/products/seating/lounge-seating/magis-spun-chair/>

a 'space open to all, regardless of religious affiliation or philosophy. It has been designed for silent meditation, contemplation, or prayer' (Library and Information Services, 2019). The establishment of the Meditation Room is intended to engage students by creating a sense of community and inclusiveness. We recognize the importance of rest in its relationship with play. Play requires focus, and focus requires a healthy mind and body. Quality rest and sleep is essential to a human's well-being. In addition to the Meditation Room, the third-floor houses four nap pods⁴ for students to take a twenty-minute break and recharge for play.

Programs and Services

The library has incorporated play as a means of inclusion and community building through programs and services, especially by elevating those who are normally excluded from intellectual or other-directed play activities. Successful programming has included building an escape room, having a Day of the Dead festival, and participating in International Games Week.

The Day of the Dead Festival, for instance, was planned in conjunction with library faculty and staff, campus partners, and community partners including the Hispanic Student Union on Southern Illinois University's campus and Hispanic Festival, Inc. in 2021. We created this program based on feedback from members of the Hispanic/LatinX community concerning the lack of representation on campus and from being excluded from planning and implementing programs and services related to them. To get the Hispanic/LatinX population more involved in programs and services, we performed several outreach activities including directly reaching out to Hispanic student groups and faculty members. We also planned a strategic marketing campaign to elicit feedback from the Hispanic community outside of the campus on how we could engage this population.

Despite previous challenges engaging our Hispanic population, students from the Hispanic Student Union and other Hispanic/Latinx students on campus were excited to be involved in the process because they had never been asked to be involved in library programming or in university programming in general, and they also had the opportunity to display and celebrate their heritage through playful activities such as crafts, music, storytelling, food, and art. These students also volunteered their time on the day of the festival, playing a crucial role in translating information to guests and community partners, and served as cultural ambassadors (helping to educate others about Hispanic heritage) while engaging in play. Therefore, Hispanic students were able to participate in experiential learning through the context of play. More importantly, we were able to strengthen our relationship with our Hispanic students and connect them with other students, community members, and campus community who are interested in Hispanic culture. Since the program concluded, students who were involved have asked how they can participate or contribute to future library programming and have been using

⁴ <https://metronaps.com/#energypod>

the library's spaces and services more frequently. Based on the level of student and community involvement and positive feedback from participants, we plan to have annual Day of the Dead events, and we also plan on having a sustainable relationship with our Hispanic population by creating other programs that are directly related to this population and continuing to engage them in the conversation about the future direction of the library. Other libraries aiming to replicate our success with this program, or interested in building lasting relationships with underrepresented groups such as the Hispanic/ LatinX population, need to be prepared to first look within their personal networks and determine if they have liaised with anyone Hispanic and use these networks to build rapport with other members of that population. If these networks do not exist, libraries will have to conduct media and community outreach directly to demonstrate they are interested in engaging with this community.

We also planned events for 2021 International Games Week based on the premise that the library could be viewed as a playful and creative place for our student users and recognizing that games are useful in community building, knowledge seeking and development, and collaborative learning. We found that we could use the games we purchased for this event to develop a game collection. We also used the games as an outreach tool to not only attract students to the library but also to introduce them to other resources, services, and programs that were non-gaming related (Boyle, 2018; Crowe & Sclipa, 2020).

This was Lovejoy Library's first time hosting International Games Week. During this week, we invited students to play several types of games, requiring different levels of skill and engagement. We purchased most of the games and added them to our circulating collection (board games only) for students and other users to use onsite or borrow to take outside of the library, and we plan to expand this collection. Additionally, we collaborated with student gaming organizations including the board game club and the Esports club. About 80 students engaged with library faculty and staff during this activity, either directly or through observation.

We made several observations after hosting International Games Week. First, we noticed that students began using the library space for more than studying or learning. For instance, students are checking out games from the library's collection, and they are also bringing in their own games to play. Additionally, the library has successfully collaborated with external groups such as the university's board games group due to our hosting this event. This group now uses the space to host monthly meetings and as a communal space to play games, and has asked to partner with the library for future events.

In 2021, Lovejoy Library also partnered with the Honors Student Association to host an escape room called Escape the Library. This was the second time that the library had partnered with this organization. Students were locked in the library the entire night until early morning from 7pm to 2am. They could only escape the library after solving puzzles and other clues. The escape room concept was adopted by the library because it combines multiple aspects of play theory including other-directed and intellectual play, since students engaged in teams to solve a problem. This type of play also involves elements of social constructivism and our theories of adult play that play helps to create knowledge (Crowe & Sclipa, 2020; Proyer, 2017).

Results

Based on our collected attendance data and observations, our results indicate that play has been a useful engagement tool. When we allow students to play, we have seen steady attendance or an increase in attendance numbers for our programs, even during a pandemic. We learned how to organize these programs under extreme circumstances and aim to modify them in the future. The pandemic allowed us an opportunity to experiment with play and helped us to consider how we will better assess future programming related to play.

Students appear more comfortable using the space, and we will attempt to measure their perceptions of the library and if they view it as a more diverse space (a space where they can learn, be creative, get rest, or be playful) and an inclusive space (a place where they have community, can create knowledge, or contribute to knowledge). These results could have broader implications on the campus community in that play could be as impactful on student success and learning outcomes as traditional learning methods of learning and campus engagement.

More importantly, the results of this case study demonstrate several methods for designing successful library spaces and programs that emphasize play. From this case study, we gleaned that we had to offer diverse modes of play, offering students choices in how they would play. Partnerships with student organizations and individual students is also critical. Additionally, we learned that students desire a space that they can mold to fit their imaginations as well as to their needs, and that we can and should facilitate this as best as possible.

Limitations

This case study has its limitations. For one, case studies like this can lead to bias since we relied heavily on our understanding of how academic libraries contribute to student success and learning outcomes to answer the question of if play has an impact on student success and learning. Assessment findings of academic libraries demonstrate that there is a correlation between library usage and instruction and better academic performance (Brown & Malenfant, 2017). For instance, students who interacted with the library either through instruction, collaborative learning initiatives with academic departments, or through their own self-guided interaction often had higher grade point averages, had better academic performance in general, and higher retention and graduation rates than their counterparts who did not interact with the library (Brown & Malenfant, 2017). None of these findings examined the role of play in being involved directly or indirectly in these outcomes. Therefore, incorporating play into our library may or may not have had as much of a significant impact as we had previously surmised.

Secondly, there is a lack of writing about play as we have theorized it, even theoretical, in academic libraries, and the literature that is available mostly on gaming and escape rooms. Most of our arguments about play rely on our assumptions and biases about adult academic play since we cannot adequately compare our research to others in this area even when we have incorporated the aforementioned types of play into our library's programming.

Thirdly, the scope of inquiry for this case study relies mostly on direct observation or anecdotes and is mostly

qualitative instead of quantitative. The quantitative data is derived entirely from event participation and MakerLab usage attendance which may not have a direct correlation to support theories about adult play in academia as it relates to student success (i.e. retention or graduation rates). Our qualitative methodology was also limited. To test these theories, we will need to develop assessment tools such as interviews, surveys, and focus groups to evaluate student's reflections on interactions with the library prior to and post engaging in play in the library, if they believed this helped with their success, and if they continued to engage with the library or their fellow students. We would also need to implement more longitudinal studies to determine the long-term outcomes of play. More qualitative data would also be useful.

Conclusion

Lovejoy Library at Southern Illinois University recognizes that play has value for our student users. Since 2020, we have significantly increased offerings of playful spaces, services and programs, and re-evaluated and contextualized how we use space to create a playful and nurturing environment. We believe it is essential to contribute to a student's wellbeing by being the learning zone on campus, so that they are better equipped when it comes time to perform in the classroom. Through this case study, we have established methods other academic libraries can use to incorporate play into their library programs, services, and spaces. We hope that this study will serve as a model for other academic libraries who want to create a playful environment.

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