

# LIS: Investigations

Where ALIA's Research Committee brings you news from the world of library and information services research.

## Playing with our metaphors

*Libraries belong to the human environment, so Suzana Sukovic says the gene metaphor appearing throughout this issue of INCITE should be adjusted because really, it's all about memes, not genes. A meme can be a cultural or behavioural element and is passed on, not through genetics, but most often through imitation. Here Suzana explains the usefulness of this idea and two recent research articles as a starting point for creativity in the workplace.*

Libraries seemed to be on everyone's lips at the recent inaugural conference of the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities. We heard that libraries can be trusted with research data – to collect, organise, preserve and provide access to large data sets for many generations to come. Researchers count on librarians for support in using digital tools and methods. I was pleased to confirm that everything was fine with the world and the library is still the humanist's laboratory.

I tend to see the humanists' use of the library as litmus paper indicating changes in the information environment. This is why it was also interesting to note that the library was described as large, supportive and passive. However, scholars want big repositories as well as agile, innovative and exploratory projects, which are poorly supported by existing academic systems.

To follow the DNA metaphor, discussions at the conference suggest that the library carries genes of an alpha institution for managing large amounts of

information for long-term use. However, agile and creative behaviours are currently enabled only by recessive genes. Like genes, memes can be very persistent, but they can be affected more easily by our actions. To mix my metaphors, the agile, creative and fast library is a recessive meme, even non-existent in some circles. But, as any child or a fiction reader can tell you, make-believe is very powerful in bringing ideas into existence.

While a need for innovation has been well-recognised in the information field, organisational creativity has been rarely discussed in libraries. Two recent articles about creativity report congruent approaches and findings, focusing on the importance of playfulness in fostering creativity in libraries. The article *Innovation: the language of learning libraries* (Bergart and D'Elia 2010) reports results of an experimental training program called *Innovation Boot Camp* in a Canadian academic library, while *Playing with the future: library engagement and change* (Sukovic, Litting, and England 2011) reports experiences from the University of Technology, Sydney Library.

Authors of both articles describe projects involving experimentation with play and creativity for organisational purposes, and present results of their research studies arguing for the importance of play in developing creativity and innovation.

The Canadian paper describes an innovation-training program "in which participants engaged in playful activities designed specifically to inspire, energise, and challenge them to become more innovative at work. The

## From our collection

Bergart, Robin and M.J. D'Elia. 2010. *Innovation: the language of learning libraries*. *Reference Services Review* 38(4):606-620.

Sukovic, Suzana, David Litting, and Ashley England. 2011. *Playing with the future: library engagement and change*. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 42 (2):70-87.

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Australian paper proposes engagement through serious play as a way of dealing with change and exploring future possibilities. Two library projects are described as examples of how playful engagement can be used for strategic planning and evaluation of the projects is based on data gathered from a number of sources, including surveys.

To make an agile and creative information space, even in a big and passive library, we need to play with possibilities. With some research-based evidence to guide our changing practices, we can strengthen both our analytical and creative minds and reputations. The two articles are a good place to start when you go looking for ideas.

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