



Making the case for recordkeeping literacy: a narrative approach

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ABSTRACT

The role of recordkeeping in our personal and professional lives is rarely perceived as a topic of mainstream interest outside the world of professional records managers and archivists. While corporate records management has been written about throughout the recordkeeping literature, there has traditionally been less focus on what McKemmish describes as the role of ‘personal recordkeeping cultures’. Yet personal recordkeeping can play a role in creating a sense of belonging, especially for children and families. For example, within the field of Australian early childhood education, one of the key policy documents replicates a similar theme with the aptly titled ‘Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming’. By reflecting on her own personal recordkeeping story and that of her family, the author aims to explore the purpose of recordkeeping awareness and the role this plays in the wider profession. This article will draw upon relevant recordkeeping theory as well as some key early childhood education literature to introduce how ‘recordkeeping awareness’ could be reconceptualised as ‘recordkeeping literacy’. She will also explore what impact a reconceptualised understanding of continuum-based ‘recordkeeping literacy’ may have upon evolving recordkeeping theory and practice.

KEYWORDS

Personal recordkeeping;
recordkeeping literacy;
continuum theory; early
childhood education

Introduction

The role of recordkeeping in our personal and professional lives is rarely perceived as a topic of mainstream interest outside the world of professional records managers and archivists. There is perhaps a mismatch between the perception of records management in the workplace and the role that recordkeeping plays in people’s personal lives. The former could be seen as a boring ‘tick box’ compliance activity, compared to the more thought-provoking, intriguing nature of personal recordkeeping.

While corporate records management has been written about and researched throughout the recordkeeping literature, there has traditionally been less focus on what McKemmish describes as the role of ‘personal recordkeeping cultures’.¹ Yet, there is evidence to suggest that personal recordkeeping has a role to play in creating a sense of belonging, especially for children and families. For example, within the field of Australian early childhood education,

one of the key policy documents replicates a similar theme with the aptly titled 'Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming'. This framework focuses on the delivery of multiple learning outcomes across the early childhood curriculum, which includes teaching children key themes such as identity, understanding one's place in the world and communication.²

The aim of this article is to document how my own reflective practice as well as my research interests in recordkeeping and early childhood education have influenced my thinking around recordkeeping awareness and the role this plays in the wider profession. This article will draw upon relevant recordkeeping theory as well as some key early childhood education literature to introduce how 'recordkeeping awareness' could be reconceptualised as 'recordkeeping literacy'. I will also briefly explore what impact a reconceptualised understanding of continuum-based 'recordkeeping literacy' may have upon the 'promotion of social justice, human rights, reconciliation and recovery' issues in the context of evolving recordkeeping theory and practice.³

A detailed scan of the existing literature reveals that over the last 20 years, discussion of recordkeeping awareness focuses mostly on promoting the value of the records themselves, rather than on improving knowledge and understanding of recordkeeping processes. In the late 1990s, Gilliland, for example, notes that it is important to help the users of archives to become 'aware of the importance, relevance and complexities of records as bureaucratic, social, political and cultural evidence'.⁴ Whereas Garcia writes about archival literacy in the context of US primary schools where she focuses on how 'archivists have an opportunity to perform archival outreach by communicating and demonstrating the pedagogical benefits of primary sources to K–12 (kindergarten through to 12th grade) teachers'.⁵

While understanding the value of records as artefacts is important, it need not be the only aspect of recordkeeping highlighted as part of an awareness program. A focus on the record as historical object risks separating the record from its context, as well as missing potential opportunities for sharing the richer aspects that the role of recordkeeping can bring to our lives. By focusing on family recordkeeping, both of my own family, and that of others through my research, I am starting to understand the power that can come from reflecting on and then conceptualising recordkeeping practices. For example, when an individual thinks about recordkeeping activities, they may only initially consider the recordkeeping they do as an administrative task in a work context. In a work context, recordkeeping could be seen as an everyday administrative duty. As a work duty, it may not hold significant personal meaning to the individual and could therefore be valued accordingly. When this scenario occurs, the impact of the richer elements of recordkeeping activities on individuals could be underestimated.

Whereas, when the same individual reflects upon personal and family recordkeeping in the home environment, they may start to see and value recordkeeping activities quite differently. For example, in my own situation, which I explore below, my family's recordkeeping activities were never openly articulated or valued. Instead, such activities were previously understood (by myself at least) as just something my mother or grandmother 'did' as part of their daily lives. However, when those same activities were considered as deliberate recordkeeping activity, it changed my own understanding and knowledge of recordkeeping more generally. In my case, it enhanced my belief that recordkeeping has the potential to shape a person's relationship with others, their identity, and also shape their place in the world.

Narratives

Narratives will be presented to illustrate this point. Using narrative in qualitative research is established as a research methodology when combined with critical reflection.⁶ The Australian Society of Archivists also recommends that professional recordkeepers engage in critical reflection as part of their professional practice, because it is a means for established professionals to make sense of complex issues and aid problem solving.⁷

In this paper, I am using narrative as a tool for critical reflection in the context of my own professional, personal and family recordkeeping stories. My wider family recordkeeping activities will focus on my maternal grandmother and mother, who have both influenced my own recordkeeping story. This is because, 'in addition to examining one's own experience and personal meanings for their own sake, insights can emerge from personal introspection which can then form the basis of more generalised understandings and interpretations'.⁸

I will support these personal narratives with an analysis of relevant literature in the recordkeeping and early childhood education fields. The intention is to allow for the exploration of literacy through the lens of records continuum theory. This initial analysis will become a starting point for recordkeeping literacy to be understood as a concept in its own right within the broader recordkeeping field. The aim of such preliminary analysis will be to encourage more complex thinking, discussion and research around the role of recordkeeping literacy in current recordkeeping theory and practice.

Doris Somers' story

My own family recordkeeping story begins with my maternal grandmother, Doris Somers.

My grandmother owned an incinerator. It was quite large and made of grey stone bricks and she was skilled at using it. I have distinct memories as a child of walking up my grandmother's driveway in the outer suburbs of Melbourne and feeling the smoky sensations up my nostrils, well before I saw the smoke itself billowing out of a single funnel from the deep recesses of her backyard.

Often my grandmother was burning acorns. She had planted the oak trees herself, with acorns she claimed to have brought with her all the way from Durham, England when she first arrived here in Melbourne at the tender age of 17. She was proud of their majestic foliage and the link back to her old life and identity as an Englishwoman. I always recalled how my grandmother never identified herself as Australian. She lived the bulk of her adult life in Melbourne, and never travelled outside of Victoria again after moving here from England, however, her roots were firmly planted in her home town of Durham. However, despite their tangible link to her homeland, she did not enjoy the work associated with keeping the falling acorns from her otherwise pristine yard. On the odd occasion that she wasn't burning acorns, she was instead burning papers and photographs.

I don't believe I ever witnessed my grandmother burning photographs, but I know that she did. As my mother only had one photograph of herself from childhood and only one photograph of my grandmother as a young woman. Both of these images had been squirrelled away by my mother when she was younger and had become aware of my grandmother's systematic destruction of records. I recall being quite young when my mother admitted the treasured photographs that she had stolen out of my grandmother's reach, had been faithfully stored under my mother's mattress in her bedroom for many years, prior to her leaving home to get

married. She said she knew, if my grandmother had found the stolen photographs, she would have destroyed them.

I do, however, have one memory, albeit a faded one, of my grandmother burning papers over her incinerator. I believe she had a mixture of things burning at the time, including leaves, and twigs and then at the last moment she added in a pile of papers. I don't recollect her going into much detail about why she was burning the papers, but I have a very strong recollection that she felt it was her right to do so. My grandmother wasn't the kind of person who would be interrogated by anyone. I was just left with the impression that the burning of her paper records was something that she did on a fairly regular basis, as almost part of her routine.

The question I am often asked when retelling stories about my grandmother is why did she burn records? My grandmother was a very complex, intense, independent and fiery woman. According to McKemmish, Patrick White burned his records in order to preserve his privacy.⁹ With regard to my grandmother, I think the issue was more concerned with shaping her identity, which is a topic I will return to later in this paper.

Susan (nee Somers) Nicholls' story

My mother, Susan, (my grandmother's, only child), also has a strong relationship with records, but I would again suggest this is not a conscious or deliberately acknowledged skill. I remember complimenting her specifically on her recordkeeping skills a number of years ago only to have her deny that she was doing anything special. Her reply to the compliment was to assert that 'she just likes to keep the house neat and tidy and managing the paperwork properly is part and parcel of that'. I am the only professional recordkeeper in the family. Yet, it is my mother who (currently) has the most precise and consistent approaches in place for arranging her personal records. My mother knows which storage solution are the best options for the many different kinds of personal records that she manages. Important records such as family birth certificates are stored in the lounge room wall unit cabinet, whereas less important records are stored in notebooks in the home office. Now in her mid-70s, she has even embraced electronic recordkeeping and has systematic processes in place for her various electronic receipts, minute-taking for her bowling club committee, cooking recipes and so on.

My mother is also the only one in our small family who can currently locate the records that she needs with less than a few minutes notice. My father and I can both locate things, although it will often take us longer to find things, as we do not employ the same kinds of recordkeeping systems that my mother uses. Yet when asked about it, she simply observed that her approach did not reflect a 'recordkeeping system', rather her actions just reflect a 'common sense approach to organising things'.

Yet like her own mother, my mother does not have a large collection of photographs in her personal archive collection. When asked about this, she indicated that the cost of having photographs developed was often an obstacle to taking too many pictures. As she lamented, unlike today, there was no easy access to digital cameras and phones, which she believes makes taking photographs nowadays a lot easier and cheaper.

While my mother routinely undertakes regular reviews of her personal records and disposes of records that she no longer feels are necessary, she does preserve significantly more than my grandmother did. I also believe, after talking to her about it, that her motivation for destroying records differs to those of my grandmother. When my mother reflected on

this latter point recently, she started to shift her own understanding of recordkeeping more generally, in particular her understanding of what I do as a profession. As she noted, she will review and throw out redundant personal records because not doing so impacts on her ability to find the important records she needs quickly. The records that she does destroy are mostly related to personal administrative matters, like taxation, or a letter from the government that is no longer relevant.

As she noted, she carefully preserves the personal records related to my birth and childhood (as well as my brother's) and she would never destroy these as she feels they are an important part of her life story and those of her children. She felt that my grandmother's destruction of records disrupted the family narrative by impacting upon my mother's ability to share her family story with me and my brother. It also meant that my mother lost valuable information about other distant relatives that she may have wanted to connect with later in her life. She reflected that my grandmother's recordkeeping activities have impacted on her own sense of identity as she really doesn't know if she might belong to a larger 'clan' (especially poignant as she is an only child as noted above).

Personal behaviours and how these might translate to other spheres of action

My own relationship with recordkeeping, of course, has been far more formal. I have spent over 20 years working in senior tertiary recordkeeping roles within Australian universities including some time working in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, Canada.

My initial interest in pursuing recordkeeping as a profession came about after spending an afternoon in the Monash University Careers Library, while undertaking my Bachelor of Arts degree. I was majoring in history and was led to believe that studying history would not translate into an actual job. I was determined to prove this assertion incorrect. I began by looking into a career in librarianship and then discovered the field of archives and records. I then made a few visits to the Public Record Office Victoria and spoke to some practising records professionals. At this point, I really liked the idea of working in a field where I would be involved in the process of determining what records were selected for retention over time. Written histories were produced from these types of records that provided a clear link back to my passion for history. I enrolled in the Master of Information Management and Systems course at Monash, where I would be taught by Sue McKemmish, Frank Upward and Barbara Reed.

My own approach to personal recordkeeping, however, does deviate slightly from both my mother's and my grandmother's approaches. As outlined above, I am nowhere near as meticulous as my mother in managing personal records. Despite my formal training, I have a far more casual approach to it. Whereas my mother arranges personal records in folders (electronic or hard copy) with clear labels, I tend to 'throw everything into the one box'. I will occasionally review the contents of the box (or folder in the electronic context) and throw out anything that is due for destruction. Often I find that I have preserved a mixture of low-value and high-value records together, mostly with little rhyme or reason to their organisation.

Overall, I feel that I am *consciously* records literate (no doubt due in part to my professional recordkeeping background and tertiary qualifications) and that this is demonstrated most strongly in my personal recordkeeping activities around social media. For example, I

approach posting to social media in my personal life cautiously, with an awareness of who can access my information and where they can access it from. I am always very aware that I may not be able to control where the information goes or how long it is kept for, which in turn influences how much information I choose to create, capture or share (which is often minimal). In this regard, I believe I am probably following my grandmother's legacy, of wanting to exercise a certain degree of control over how personal records about my own life are shared and accessed.

Therefore, I see much overlap and value in both observing my family recordkeeping practices as well as my own professional and personal recordkeeping story. On reflection, I do not see the recordkeeping activities that occur in a personal setting as being inferior to those that occur in a professional organisational setting. All of these activities, regardless of setting, embrace the same basic principles around capturing, controlling, accessing, storing and destroying records. When I think about various recordkeeping practices in both settings, it continues to enhance my own thinking and understanding of the complexities of recordkeeping issues, even if this is not often considered the norm in professional recordkeeping practice. As Foscarini and Oliver note, the human element in recordkeeping is often overlooked in the recordkeeping literature, even though 'people, processes, and structures are all part of human activity systems, and are inextricably linked to one another'.¹⁰

However, this lack of attention on the personal is changing within the profession, in the quest for more inclusive and equitable archival and recordkeeping frameworks, processes and systems.¹¹

Links to recordkeeping theory

Records continuum theory itself, as most recently articulated in the work of Gibbons, provides a 'comprehensive series of principles, concepts and theory that explores evidence, recordkeeping, multiplicity, plurality and memory making'.¹² Gibbons gives us a sense of what she means by multiplicity in noting that 'evidence cannot be conceptualised as a single one person narrative, but must be understood via multiple narratives'. Plurality on the other hand 'refers to the multiple uses records and archives have beyond their management and organisation in official government or business recordkeeping systems'. This concept of plurality linked to multiplicity helps to explore the big questions of why and what impact recordkeeping and archives have on the construction of society through memory systems. As described by Gibbons, 'memory can then be seen as a tool for individual and collective identity that is restructured only through the use, interpretation and reconstruction of information'.¹³

Gibbons picks up on the need to incorporate co-creation in recordkeeping frameworks, processes and systems to promote more participatory and inclusive recordkeeping practices. All recordkeeping should enable 'multiple, diverse and dispersed voices to be heard across spacetime'.¹⁴ She has developed a new cultural heritage continuum model, the Mediated Recordkeeping Model, with co-create at its centre. As the model moves into the wider circles, we see how recordkeeping of a personal nature can then influence the wider community and also the collective memory.

What constitutes agency in recordkeeping behaviour?

In this regard, records continuum theory has also evolved to include participatory processes and a deeper awareness of how different voices can be left out of the recordkeeping process. As McKemmish notes, writers such as Hurley 'highlighted how modern archival theory and practice are complicit with privileging certain groups over others. Often at the expense of marginalised or vulnerable groups'.¹⁵ Gilliland and McKemmish are at the forefront of arguing for a new participatory model that centres around a continuum-based redefinition of agency. Such a redefinition in records supports the participatory process by vesting participatory agents with a suite of negotiated legal and moral rights and responsibilities.

The consequences for groups across the wider community that lack this agency can arguably been seen most starkly in the social justice concerns facing some members of the Australian indigenous community. The reality facing indigenous people in this regard is illustrated by the work of McKemmish, Faulkhead and Russell, who note:

indigenous people have access rights to government records about them, but there are no rights of disclosure, and there is no shared decision-making relating to ownership, custody, preservation and access. Policies, processes and systems in government archives are based on particular constructs and values relating to control, access, privacy and individual but not collective rights in records.¹⁶

McKemmish, Faulkhead and Russell had also discussed how they

found the dichotomy of oral versus written text so often cited in the literature relating to Aboriginal Australia increasingly problematic, especially given its close association with western representations of oral traditions as inferior.¹⁷

If key recordkeeping processes of indigenous Australians are based upon oral traditions, and these are viewed predominantly as inferior processes, then it diminishes the agency of these Australians to have their voice adequately represented in the recordkeeping systems such as those controlled by federal, state and local governments. As noted by Nugent, Aboriginal people are more likely to trust family narratives (e.g. oral history) as 'other historical narratives are not to be trusted, primarily because they have so often been proved to be unreliable or false'.¹⁸

It is vital that different groups across the wider community are aware of and/or 'vested' with the knowledge and skills in order to support and enable agency in the participatory recordkeeping processes for which Gilliland and McKemmish advocate.¹⁹ If certain groups within the population are potentially privileged with certain skills, while others are not, it is not difficult to understand why the notion of a participatory archive could be seen as difficult to implement. This is also further compounded when the recordkeeping systems privilege certain kinds of skills and knowledge over others, for example when indigenous Australians' oral recordkeeping is considered inferior to written recordkeeping, as detailed above by McKemmish, Faulkhead and Russell.²⁰

As Gilliland and McKemmish note, a 'continuum-based' redefinition of agency within the recordkeeping theory and practice may help to address this imbalance.²¹ However, this redefinition should also be undertaken in conjunction with more research and understanding into the role of what I define as recordkeeping literacy. As indicated in the introduction, the existing recordkeeping literature and even broader information literature does address some of the issues surrounding this concept. However, there are gaps in the existing literature

around the specific term and meaning of recordkeeping literacy, which will be explored in the next section of the paper.

Understanding the foundations for recordkeeping literacy as a concept

As a practitioner, with significant experience, I am able to articulate from that viewpoint a sense of the profession's overall reluctance to promote recordkeeping beyond its own professional borders. As Mike Jones (current Co-convenor of Australian Society of Archivists, Victorian Branch) laments on his blog:

the cliché of the introverted archivist – like the idea of ‘dusty’ or ‘musty’ archives – is widespread. I shared that State Records NSW tweet with colleagues at the time to knowing laughs; and more recently I noted there is often a sense at the end of archival conferences that many of the participants are scurrying away, eager for some much needed solitude.²²

Whether this preference for personal solitude can be linked to the gaps presented in the literature around concepts such as the participatory archive and how this might be practically achieved is perhaps stretching the point too far. However, when exploring other fields of interest, including early childhood education (which I detail in the next section below), the contrast, in terms of how different professions can and do promote what they do and the importance of what they do, is vivid. This observation, at minimum, suggests that there may be other ways to tackle the need to develop and invest in the concept of ‘recordkeeping literacy’ both from within and outside of the recordkeeping profession.

Writers in the field of information literacy, like Heider, have focused on how school librarians in particular can assist school teachers in helping children develop the skills they need to become information literate.²³ Such skills have been identified by the Australian Library and Information Association, who also note that literacy skills can impact on issues such as children's rights and concepts such as citizenship.²⁴ However, the information literacy literature to date does not appear to contain a great deal of focus on recordkeeping activities.

Another small body of literature concerns archival document packs. This is another form of ‘archival literacy/advocacy’, which, as noted earlier, was a concept explored in detail by Gilliland.²⁵ A key resource on archival document packs by Cox, Ceja Alcala and Bowler notes:

the potential of teaching packets to orient students to the nature of archival sources also suggest another potential for teaching about archival advocacy. If we fail to take advantage of these opportunities, we lessen the chances of informing future generations about the value of archival sources, a message we need to emphasize in teaching future archivists.²⁶

With the focus on the teaching packet, the documents themselves again become the focus of the ‘archival advocacy’. This focus on the record as historical object, as noted earlier, risks diminishing the opportunity to improve the end users’ understanding of the recordkeeping elements that went into creating the record. Too much focus on the object itself can distance the role of the recordkeeping practices that created, shaped and framed the records in the first place. This in effect can then remove some of the richness of the records’ value and dilute their connection to our lives overall. Yet, despite these limitations and gaps in the existing literature, my research will continue to be influenced by the emerging literature from both the wider information management field (including potentially the digital preservation community) and the worldwide library community.

Interestingly, while exploring these gaps, other avenues within the early childhood field were also investigated and these observations provide an interesting juxtaposition to the work of records continuum theorists and the important matter of agency.

The fertile ground of early childhood literacy and why it is relevant to recordkeeping literature

Two key things influenced my research interest in early childhood education. Firstly, I was intrigued to explore a different field to my own in order to expand my career options and I have always had a natural interest in education from both a practical and a theoretical perspective. Secondly, I found the literature in the early childhood education field to be entertaining and accessible to read. In relation to this, I also found the nature of the profession very colourful and engaging. Walking into the academic department of early childhood education, or attending conferences in the field, one is immediately drawn to the displays (on walls usually) of the smiling faces of children, the use of narrative and pictures, the use of children's artwork and the apparent ease folk in this field have in expressing what they do and why.

For example, when visiting a Victorian Government website that provides information about how to become an early years learning educator, the following information is provided:

Every day I go to work wondering what adventures we will have today. I love that the children are as excited to see me each day as I am to see them. I really get a kick from the sheer, unbridled excitement they show when they have learned something new or made a discovery for themselves that they can't wait to share. The children blow my mind daily grasping high-level concepts and understandings. I have 'goosebump' moments every day.²⁷

The comment from this educator starkly contrasts to the early quote regarding the recordkeepers' relationship with promoting their field and passion. The educator describes her job as generating 'unbridled excitement' with learning and discovery, while recordkeepers may well find their work is less exuberant. Although these excerpts could be viewed as nothing more than stereotypes, as explained earlier, they do provide a tantalising clue for further exploration. I therefore propose that a completely different field, such as early education, can provide the recordkeeping profession with a roadmap for bridging that all important gap between the theory of participatory archives and recordkeeping literacy and the practice of recordkeeping.

Early childhood education and identity research

As a recordkeeper, I am familiar with accessing industry-specific frameworks and policy documentation, such as Public Record Office Victoria standards. These types of documents are formally written, presumably only for the professional records management community, and rely heavily on words such as 'measurable and mandatory requirements', 'custody specification', 'self-assessment checklist'.²⁸ However, it is interesting to view such a key early childhood education policy document, such as the 'Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming' (hereafter referred to as EYLF) through the same recordkeeping 'lens'.²⁹

As the audience for the EYLF document are educators and families, there is a sense from the design and tone of the document that it would be accessible to a wide variety of readers. For example, it includes quotes from young children, colourful backgrounds and

photographs of children engaged in early childhood education activities. The focus of the document is on enriching and encouraging excellent 'learning outcomes' for children, with a particular focus on identity, connection, contribution, wellbeing, confidence and communication. Words such as 'active learning centres', 'agency' (which in this context means 'being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world') 'attuned', 'community', 'co-construct', 'critical reflection', 'inclusion' and 'involvement' feature heavily in this particular government framework.

The three learning outcomes that are most relevant to my recordkeeping research include 'Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity' and 'Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world' and some elements of 'Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.'³⁰ The key themes of these outcomes are also present in the recordkeeping literature. For example, records and recordkeeping processes, amongst other things, can play a role in determining identity and how individuals connect to each other. As Cook notes:

beyond evidence, archives also preserve memory ... archives are constructed memories of the past, about history, heritage, and culture, about personal roots and familial connections, and about who we are as human beings ... memory and forgetting, can serve a whole range of practical, cultural, political, symbolic, emotional and ethical imperatives and is central to power, identity and privilege.³¹

The EYLF also brings the role of literacy into sharp focus. As the Framework explains:

Literacy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, story-telling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing. Contemporary texts include electronic and print based media. In an increasingly technological world, the ability to critically analyse texts is a key component of literacy. Children benefit from opportunities to explore their world using technologies and to develop confidence in using digital media.³²

It soon became apparent that the early childhood education literature around literacy would be able to further expand my previous understanding of 'recordkeeping awareness' into something more complex that could have relevance within the recordkeeping field and literature.

How does educational literature help to expand the notion of recordkeeping awareness?

In its simplest form within an educational setting, 'literacy' can refer to reading and writing.³³ Yet, even as early as 1984, Street claims that many early definitions of literacy falsely 'rest on the assumption that it is a neutral technology that can be detached from specific social contexts'. This quote about literacy being a 'neutral technology' is perhaps indicative of how the archival and recordkeeping community currently conceives recordkeeping awareness.³⁴

Gee begins his definition of literacy by firstly introducing the notion of discourse. As he articulates, 'discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society'. Gee argues there are two ways to come by the discourses a person controls including 'acquisition' and 'learning'. Acquisition is unstructured and almost incidental, the kind of learning one does through just existing and living in day-to-day

life, whereas ‘learning’ is more structured and intentioned. Within this context, Gee also observes that the ‘common sense’ understanding of literacy (as being about reading and writing) becomes problematic. As he writes, ‘reading is at the very least the ability to interpret the past ... an interpretation in print is just a view point on a set of symbols and viewpoints are always embedded in a discourse.’³⁵

Anstey and Bull support this notion, as they also indicate that it was around 1994 that the term ‘multiliteracy’ was first coined by a group of literacy educators who wished to develop appropriate pedagogical responses for teaching literacy in a world undergoing significant economic, social and technological change.³⁶

Masny and Cole confirm that when the more traditional view of literacy within education goes beyond a fixed definition of reading and writing, the traditional understanding of the term is ‘disrupted’. The writers argue that ‘this disruption opens up potentialities for viewing literacy as a different concept ... putting literacies to new uses’.³⁷ The broadness of the definitions and the recognition that literacy can be applied to concepts beyond reading and numeracy in this literature is encouraging.

Multiliteracies means being cognitively and socially literate with paper, live, and electronic texts. It also means being strategic, that is, being able to recognise what is required in a given context, examine what is already known and then, if necessary, modify that knowledge to develop a strategy that suits the context and situation. So the focus is on being a ‘problem solver and strategic thinker’.³⁸

Therefore, this concept of literacy as being a social skill involving an in-depth understanding of recordkeeping practice is more complex than a neutral technical skill around understanding the value of records as artefacts. How can anyone, including previously marginalised or vulnerable groups, engage with the concept of a participatory archive, exercise their rights or even understand the role of recordkeeping in terms of how it might shape their identity, if there is no recordkeeping literacy?

Conclusion

Returning to my own family narrative, as Saukko observes,³⁹ critical reflection draws attention to ‘taken-for-granted ideas’. My initial response to my grandmother’s approach to recordkeeping was that I ‘took for granted’ that her burning of records was simply to remove them from existence. It took the critical reflection process, within the context of recordkeeping theory, to dig deeper and question ‘why’ she took that action to reframe my initial thinking.

I do not believe my grandmother had a lot of respect for government bureaucracy (as evidenced by the fact that she seemed to have lied on official records, including the age she provided on her marriage certificate). My feeling is that she wanted to disrupt the narrative that government recordkeeping in particular had created around her. Although I initially perceived her desire to destroy her personal records as an act of records heresy, I now, through reflective practice, understand that her behaviour could have demonstrated a records-literate approach.

As Gomes de Andrad notes, it is legitimate for individuals to want to erase information collected about them, as

the right to be forgotten, the right of individuals to have information about them deleted after a certain period of time, not only concerns a fundamental identity interest, it also develops and enriches the conceptualisation of the right to personal identity.⁴⁰

I do not believe my grandmother's destruction of records was random and thoughtless. Instead, my grandmother's desire to destroy the records and perhaps exercise her right to be forgotten showed an intrinsic understanding of the power and value of recordkeeping, especially in terms of shaping and controlling her identity. Those choices have also impacted my mother and her sense of identity, and possibly my own. Yet the reflective practice has in its own right helped redefine how my mother understands recordkeeping, which is an interesting revelation in its own right. For me, the reflection activities have influenced my professional activities, by further demonstrating the value of personal recordkeeping in the professional recordkeeping dialogue. As noted by McKemmish and Piggott, 'psychological factors involved when individuals make and keep and destroy documents do not suddenly disappear in corporate settings'.⁴¹

The additional links that I have begun to explore through the early childhood literature, the EYLF and the identity work that occurs in recordkeeping are a fruitful place to continue to explore the concept of recordkeeping literacy. The goal is to challenge and expand the definition of records awareness and archives literacy beyond the notion of promoting the record as historical object. Of particular interest is the notion that some individuals, like my grandmother and my mother, demonstrated recordkeeping literacy through their record-keeping behaviours. However, they may not have identified this as a deliberate activity, at least not initially, especially in the case of my mother.

Yet, regardless of how this literacy is obtained, it needs to be part of the dialogue when it comes to discussing agency and the way in which existing biases and inequalities in who can exercise their rights in regards to recordkeeping matters are addressed. As Gilliland and McKemmish note, a 'continuum-based' redefinition of agency within recordkeeping theory and practice may help to address this imbalance.⁴² This idea is mirrored in the early education literature by Anstey and Bull, who confirm that we are often exposed to or are required to access large amounts of information, from many and varied sources. We must be aware that the texts we access or are exposed to have been consciously constructed to share particular information in particular ways, shaping our attitudes, values and behaviours.⁴³

Therefore, the research undertaken around recordkeeping literacy to date is promising and points to further avenues to explore including the analysis of research data from family recordkeeping practices (which includes research involving parents and their attitudes towards recordkeeping concerning their children) and analysing the early childhood literature on literacy through the records continuum lens. It is anticipated that such research will continue to allow a more comprehensive and detailed definition of the concept of recordkeeping literacy.

Endnotes

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