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ARTICLE

# Finding My Sparkle: When Recordkeeping Practitioner and Research Life Intertwine to Become One

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**Abstract**

This article discusses the interplay between recordkeeping research and practice through the author's experiences as both a part time researcher and full-time practitioner. By drawing on narrative inquiry in the form of autoethnography, the author uses their current research project as a catalyst for exploring the relationship between practitioner life and research work. Their research project investigates how family recordkeeping can be utilised to provide an entry point into understanding recordkeeping concepts and practices in the workplace. The paper explores how the author's research activities were initially considered secondary and separate from their practitioner life. As the project progressed, their practices helped to shape elements of the research design; and later, the research data played a key role in helping the author to frame the role of recordkeeping literacy in their work program. The author developed a new confidence as they used different analysis tools including scrapbooking and podcasting which in turn brought real enjoyment to the project, a joy that later spilled over and invigorated their practitioner life. Overall, it has become apparent to the author that a recordkeeping career does not need to be a binary proposition between academia or practitioner life.

**Keywords:** *Research*; *Practitioner experience*; *Family Recordkeeping*; *Autoethnography*

In a sun-kissed room, in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, a large pile of children's artwork is roughly divided into a number of different stacks. Some of it has spilled out from underneath one of the chairs, while more pieces lay spread across the living room coffee table. The mother of the young children indicates that the many pieces of artwork have just become part of the 'savannah of daily life' in the home. Yet, some pieces of artwork have made their way onto the loungeroom wall, affixed with sticky tape, and others are magnetised to the fridge in the kitchen. Another piece has been framed and proudly resides in the home's hallway.

At first glance, this description seems far removed from the realities of workplace recordkeeping, yet on closer examination there is much to explore. The children's artwork from this

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loungeroom in outer Melbourne all form part of this family's recordkeeping story, which is also a key part of my current research work into family recordkeeping.

In this article, I discuss the interplay between recordkeeping research and practice throughout my experiences as both a part time researcher and full-time practitioner over a 27 year plus recordkeeping career. Undertaking research activities has been a constant theme across my practitioner life. Up until recently, I believed that I pursued extra-curricular study with research components because I enjoyed the challenge of learning new things. I have never aspired to become a full-time researcher or academic in my field nor have I widely published. In a way, undertaking small-scale research and study projects felt like they had very little to do with my practitioner life. I will outline my own story as a practitioner but I will draw upon my most current research activities into family recordkeeping to explore how I have come to understand that research and practitioner life can become firmly intertwined, complementing each other in ways I have only recently come to appreciate.

## Narrative inquiry

The concepts of narrative inquiry and autoethnography provide important context for both the tone and shape of this article and how I present my work. Narrative enquiry has become core to my research work. It influences the way in which I undertake research, and informs how I reflect on and think about my practitioner and research work and the relationships between the two.

Jane Elliott notes that:

> a narrative can be understood to organise a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to the whole. In this way a narrative conveys the meaning of events.[1]

Narrative inquiry provides a structure for the exploration of complex matters in a way that makes sense to me.[2] As someone who is less comfortable around spreadsheets and sets of figures, I appreciate the warmth and liveliness of the stories held within my research data. The process of bringing those stories to light makes the analysis process more in-depth and engaging than other research methods. Narrative inquiry can be utilised to harness personal expression and reflection in multiple creative ways, within the framework of a rigorous set of proven research steps and processes.[3]

Autoethnography can be described as a form of 'autobiographical narrative inquiry'[4] that presents 'critical self-study'[5] as research. It encourages the rigorous examination of personal experience within the context of a project's research questions. For my current research project, I have situated my use of autoethnography within a broader narrative enquiry framework. The use of autoethnography as a way of framing research is not an uncommon theme in recordkeeping literature. Joanne Evans speaks of autoethnography as a mechanism for reflecting on how her role as a practitioner has influenced her research, bringing her practitioner experience out of the shadows and allowing it to be framed within her research work.[6] Evans also touches upon how autoethnography provides a means to explore and highlight the 'insider' versus 'outsider' role of the researcher and practitioner.

This insider/outsider contrast is further explored through the work of Belinda Battley, who also discusses the value of autoethnography. Battley talks about the process of blogging as part of how she manages 'the three wired bridge',[7] a metaphor that sums up the many hats Battley wore as a researcher, participant and friend of the communities she was researching. For Evans and Battley, autoethnography provides an opportunity to monitor and reflect on their various roles and the different 'hats' worn at different stages of their research. It validates


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their research approach and adds valuable insights into their overall results. I am still exploring how I use autoethnography within the context of narrative inquiry in my current research project. However, for the purposes of this article, I am utilising autoethnography in a way similar to Evans: as a mechanism to reflect on how my practitioner life has ended up shaping my research, as well as how my research data influenced my work program in an Australian tertiary institution.

## Career background

Following undergraduate studies in history, I studied for my Masters of Information Management and Systems at Monash University (Australia) during the 1990s. While studying, I entered the profession and began my career in recordkeeping. At that early stage of my career I did not fully appreciate the theoretical frameworks we were introduced to, including the newly minted Records Continuum Model.[8] Instead, I was more concerned about learning the practicalities of my first job in a tertiary archives program. I suspect it was around this time that I subconsciously separated my academic understanding of the field from what I was doing in my day-to-day work life. It is also likely that this is where my perception that academic research and practitioner life were quite separate activities took hold.

A 2012 article by Elizabeth Shepherd provides some reassuring context for this perceived separation of activities. Shepherd documented the historical 'dilemma' the recordkeeping field has with its own identity as both a profession and an academic discipline.[9] Although Shepherd was writing about the profession from the UK perspective, she noted that the 1990s were when the 'foundations of the modern [recordkeeping] academic discipline were being laid down'.[10] Although I did not recognise it at the time, the same foundations were being laid down in an Australian recordkeeping academic life.

Others have also hinted at some non-cohesive elements within the wider field. Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish have stressed that recordkeeping needs its academic discipline and practice elements to both bring 'identifiable, distinctive and rigorous perspectives and toolsets of methods and techniques'.[11] In 2022, Alex Poole and Ashley Todd-Diaz explored a number of pressing issues facing archival education in North America via case study and interview. In this recent study, the historical tensions between academia and practice in recordkeeping are still evident, for example in the comment that 'the scholarly audience tends to be just a little turned off by the issues that interest professionals'.[12] I agree with this statement and suggest that it could potentially be reversed to recognise that professionals are sometimes not engaged with some of the issues that interest scholars.

Although I was never 'turned off' by the issues or themes taught to me in my Masters course, I recall struggling to relate what I had been taught to the challenges of my first professional job. I did not really comprehend for example, how the Records Continuum Model would help me to perfect my box folding skills or teach me the basics of archive repository management.

Over time though, as my career progressed into more senior-level recordkeeping roles, I came to better appreciate what I had learnt through that first degree and I started incorporating aspects of it into my practitioner life. In particular, I would return to the learnings from that course to help contextualise some of the challenges I was seeing in my practitioner role, especially those presented by electronic recordkeeping. Although outside the scope of this article, I also came to better appreciate the role and purpose of the Records Continuum Model as I advanced in my practitioner career, and later when I started to explore my research interests.

As I continued to undertake study and research during the middle stages of my career, I became aware that I was pursuing my own academic interests for enjoyment. For example, around 2010, I delved into the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE), which at that stage,

had no connection at all to my senior records manager role in an Australian tertiary institution. It was through my current research project that I started making more connections between my research and practitioner life. I will now turn to this research project and explain in more detail how the project and my practitioner life have developed alongside each other.

**The current research project**

I came into the topic of family recordkeeping around children through an ECE focus. Initially I had not considered that the ECE component of my study interests would ever intersect with my recordkeeping practitioner life. As I went further into my studies in ECE, I completed a research project on the role of government policy and the Australian Children's Television Standards. From there, I started to develop an interest in ECE curriculum policy.

After completing ECE studies, I was thinking about my next research project and was looking to pursue my PhD in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. At this stage, I was introduced to the aptly titled 'Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming ECE policy document'.[13] This framework focuses on the delivery of multiple learning outcomes across the early childhood curriculum, including teaching children key themes such as identity, understanding one's place in the world and the value of communication.

I have previously written about the role of records and recordkeeping processes in determining identity and how individuals connected to each other.[14] 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.[15]

Originally, when the research problem was framed within an ECE setting, my focus was on establishing why the role of recordkeeping in people's lives was rarely perceived as a topic of mainstream interest outside the world of professional records managers and archivists. An overview of the existing literature in this space has also been documented in a previous article.[16]

My literature review for the research project revealed a mismatch between the perception of records management in the workplace and the role that recordkeeping played 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. However, though corporate records management had been written about and researched throughout the recordkeeping literature, there was less focus on what McKemmish describes as the role of 'personal recordkeeping cultures'.[17] I wondered if there was evidence to suggest that personal recordkeeping had a role to play in creating a sense of belonging, especially for children and families.

My original multidisciplinary doctoral research project therefore aimed to investigate family records and recordkeeping practices in order to understand the role of recordkeeping in children's early years learning and development. I determined that the best methodology would be to interview a small number of parents about the recordkeeping activities they undertook around their children within the home. In brief, the research design for this research project included a literature review, a series of interviews with five parents who had at least one child aged between 0 and 8 years old at the time of the interview, a focus group with five workplace colleagues (to validate the findings from the interviews) and associated analysis and write ups of the findings.

### Family recordkeeping interviews

I chose to interview five parents in order to gain a broad, but not overwhelming, number of different types of family recordkeeping for the study. The initial participants were drawn from people in my own professional acquaintance circle, which at that point included people I had met through work, study or through professional networks. It is important to acknowledge that the selection of participants for this study was representative of people encountered in my work at an Australian University. This is a socio-economically privileged environment where most participants have had the opportunity to engage in tertiary-level education or participate in the tertiary sector workforce.

I was therefore aware that the participants were not going to be representative of the wider Australian community as a whole. The decision to include families who had a connection to tertiary education was not consciously embedded into the research design of the project at the beginning. As the research project evolved and my own life and work experiences began to influence the study, it became apparent that focusing on research participants who also form part of my practitioner world was going to become more pertinent.

My interview questions for the family recordkeeping interviews were semi-structured (focusing on particular themes and concepts, but without relying solely on fixed questions to provide scope for exploring ideas and responses as they emerged). I approached the development of the interview questions from a functional recordkeeping perspective.[18] The questions that were developed for the family interviews were framed around an understanding of the key functions that take place within a typical family. As far as I was aware there were no established, published sets of functions developed for recordkeeping analysis within families. This would make sense as these tools were originally developed for use in government agency settings.[19]

When thinking about the key family functions that could be used to classify different types of recordkeeping activities I considered my own experiences growing up in a family, as well as typical functions that may also take place within the homes of friends and family. I also consulted the Australian Early Development Census[20]; however, the Census data was classified for statistical purposes which was not helpful when thinking about family functions from a recordkeeping perspective. I therefore created my own set of family functions which are included further in the text. I have also noted some of the activities and records that might sit underneath each of the following functions.

- **Family Celebrations** (e.g. demonstrated through activities such as birthday parties, and creating records such invitations and birthday cards)
- **Family Health and Wellbeing** (e.g. demonstrated through activities such as doctor visits, immunisations, medical diagnosis and creating records such as 'baby' birth books, immunisation records, birth charts, etc.)
- **Children's Education** (e.g. demonstrated through activities such as attending day care, kindergarten or school and creating records such as school reports, photographs and artwork, etc.)

### Why functions?

My background practitioner experience led me to use functions as a guide when structuring the research interviews. As a practitioner I was aware of the limitations in taking a function-based approach to a recordkeeping consultation with work colleagues. For example, there is always the risk that you might end up over-structuring the interview and miss important recordkeeping activities as the interviewee may feel that they can only speak to the 'prescribed' functions. On the other side, I have also experienced how asking people to talk about their records and recordkeeping activities without any functional context can lead to blank looks and

a fair amount of confusion. For example, questions such as 'tell me about your recordkeeping activities' make too many assumptions about an audiences' level of recordkeeping literacy and provide limited entry points into the conversation. Instead, using functions and associated activity-based examples of recordkeeping as an entry point to a broader discussion around recordkeeping is usually quite effective. I have found this approach helpful for consultations at work, and so decided to use it to interview participants in the home environment about their family recordkeeping activities.

Prior to the interviews, some of the participants indicated that they were unsure if they created any records at home within the family. I introduced the family functions and examples into the interview questions, which prompted the interviewees to start thinking about their family recordkeeping activities. For example, in many cases the parent spoke about birthday celebrations and the recordkeeping associated with that activity. This then led them to other topics, such as how they managed photographs and activities associated with social media.

**Initial responses to the interview results**

The interviews with the five participating parents were conducted from May to August 2017. During this process, the importance of individual recordkeeping values and behaviours in families started to emerge as a theme. For example, several of the participants self-identified as 'someone who doesn't like to throw things away', while others declared they were more attached to a 'minimalist' house aesthetic. For this second group, throwing things away when they were no longer needed (including children's artwork for example) was seen as completely necessary. In this early stage of the analysis I recognised that my study was small, and that perhaps I was reading too much into my participants self-described personality traits. On reflection however it appeared to me that the decision to keep a room neat or tidy, or the choice of a minimalist decorating style at home did reflect an individual's overall values and behaviours; and within that, such values and behaviours were influencing the recordkeeping activities that were taking place within the home.

In my work I had thought about the roles and behaviours that could be present within an organisation or work team; however, I had not considered how such values and behaviours might originate and play out on an individual level. While it would be hard to measure exactly how much one individual's recordkeeping values and behaviours might hold sway across a large work team or organisation, understanding that this element will be in the mix, provides a more nuanced understanding when thinking about my own practitioner experiences.

Often, when providing recordkeeping advice in an organisational setting, my focus was on improving a business process or improving the evidentiary value of the record. It could then come as a shock if that advice (which felt neutral at the time of delivery) was met with emotional resistance or opposition. My first reaction to such a response was to think that perhaps there is not enough stakeholder 'buy in' or that there was a resourcing issue – all of which might have been true. However, the family recordkeeping project demonstrated to me just how closely an individual's values and behaviours are entwined with recordkeeping activities, and that this can provoke quite strong emotional responses when challenged. This has led me to ask more questions and undertake a closer analysis in my practitioner life, especially when it comes to working with groups or even individuals who are implementing new recordkeeping processes or activities.

I also turned to the literature to see what had been documented about the role of values and behaviours in personal recordkeeping, starting with the information culture research work by Gillian Oliver and Fiorella Foscarini. Interestingly, they did not have a lot to say about information culture on the home front. Oliver and Foscarini note their focus is on organisational recordkeeping values and behaviours, while recognising:

> an interesting avenue for future research in the records management context: being able to associate specific behaviour types with the different layers of culture will provide us with significant insight. For instance, one may assume that appraising records and assigning retention periods will partly reflect value systems acquired through the family, the social context one grew up in, and later through school; while the activities involved in registering records and routing them to specific employees will be primarily influenced by workplace practices and professional skills.[21]

This led me to question why the traditional forms of workplace recordkeeping training in my field often fell short of delivering the expected outcomes. Once again, I relied on my practitioner experience to help me think more deeply about what I was observing. I was used to providing two key types of recordkeeping training. One type focused on explaining the terms used in recordkeeping (e.g. 'what is a record'?) and outlining the legal obligations and compliance issues around recordkeeping; and the other was more focused on how to use an electronic document and records management system to capture and manage records. In both cases, I observed that the initial enthusiasm for undertaking the recordkeeping task that led a participant to undertake the training in the first place would fade once the training was complete. Often, I would then see the same people coming back asking the same recordkeeping questions. I could see that this type of traditional recordkeeping training was disconnected from what my colleagues were dealing with on the ground. They were not always willing or able to apply the recordkeeping rules, regulations and systems training to manage a shared drive, or to decide what system to use when storing important records. This is perhaps further exacerbated by the sheer scale and size of the information management landscape in the large-scale tertiary institution where I currently work. As with any complex institution there are often many options, processes and systems (potentially hundreds) working in tandem at any one point in time. While the overarching rules and regulations have a role to play, there also need to be other layers and access points to allow the various groups working across the organisation to relate these broader information management or recordkeeping principles to their day-to-day activities.

This reflection led me to question whether these traditional forms of workplace recordkeeping training addressed the right things. I wondered (along with my supervisors of my PhD) if there was a gap in terms of the types of recordkeeping training I was used to providing. Perhaps the gap was the false assumption that all non-recordkeeping practitioners had a certain level of recordkeeping literacy.

As a practitioner and a researcher, these questions eventually led me to explore whether my research into family recordkeeping could be utilised to provide an entry point into recordkeeping literacy and fluency that could generate more meaningful and accessible understandings of recordkeeping concepts and practices in the workplace. I needed an approach that incorporated recordkeeping values and behaviours, rather than just a focus on records management rules and regulations. In combination with other factors (including an unforeseen health situation, explained in the final section of this paper) my practitioner-led realisation about workplace recordkeeping literacy eventually led to a change in the whole structure of my PhD. By 2023, my research was no longer in the field of Education and I had transferred into the records and archives domain in the Faculty of Information Technology, with a renewed focus on the role of family recordkeeping in designing workplace recordkeeping literacy.

### Analysis process – scrapbooking

Analysis of the family recordkeeping interview data occurred over a long period of time.

The research data was full of small anecdotes and beautiful stories that I wanted to keep alive; I did not want to risk losing some of its vibrancy by reducing it to a set of words sitting in tables and spreadsheets. While many find coding data an effective approach for seeking patterns and insights, it was not aligned with how I was making sense of the family recordkeeping interview data. My overall process was also influenced by narrative inquiry methodology. Reissman notes that 'just as interview participants tell stories, investigators construct stories from their data'.[22] She goes on to discuss how narrative can be represented visually, supported by examples including where researchers have retold their data stories via stain glass windows, cinema and even comics.

I chose to undertake my analysis stage through the creation of scrapbooks that visually represented key points from each of the interview transcripts. In summary, I would begin by re-reading the transcript from each interview to re-familiarise myself with the family and the contents of the interview. Then I would start to break down the interview transcript into sections. I would print out the transcript and use brightly coloured pens to make little annotations in the margins about the stories that were popping out from the text. These were not meant to be detailed notes, but rather points of interest that stood out to me from the interviews. As I was using the scrapbooks to re-story the interview transcripts, I thought about what I wanted to represent visually and how this would be achieved.

Each family recordkeeping interview was roughly represented across 12–20 individual pages within two scrapbook albums. Families 1, 2 and the first part of Family 3 are represented in the first scrapbook album, and the second part of Family 3, all of Families 5 and 6 are in the second scrapbook album. Each page of the scrapbook albums contains a double-sided page sitting within a plastic sleeve. Each page of these scrapbook albums represented one section of one of the family recordkeeping transcripts. There is one section of a transcript from one family on the front side and another section on the back of each scrapbook album page. Each page has been constructed using a combination of my own hand drawn illustrations, store bought scrapbooking paper, papercraft decorations, stickers and stencils.

The advantage of using a scrapbook album was that they came with specially designed sleeves. This meant that the scrapbook album pages could be easily removed (by simply opening the clip binding) and placed into different orders, which became useful when I was looking across the albums for common themes, as represented via the family functions.

The detail on each scrapbook album page was constructed using a combination of my own hand drawn illustrations, store bought scrapbooking paper, papercraft decorations, stickers and stencils. Rather than transcribe the interviews word for word, I created visual cues or symbols to help retell the recordkeeping story from the parent's point of view. In Figure 1, a mother tells a story of going to a doctor's appointment and recalls her newborn's 'baby book' record falling from the stroller and being run over by a car. She was able to retrieve the book, but she recalls the medical professional being somewhat surprised and judgemental by the book's condition when she eventually made it into the appointment.

While the end product is quite simple, the analysis was enriched by my process of thinking of how best to visually represent the different recordkeeping stories each section of the scrapbook album aims to tell.

In many ways, this was a really enjoyable experience as I have always taken on craft projects in my personal life. I soon realised that by undertaking the analysis in this way, I was constantly thinking about the transcripts during the creation of each scrapbook page. Little subtleties such as a turn of phrase from the interview subject, or a small anecdote would come to life and lead me to think deeply about what that particular content told me about my research topic. As I scoured sections of the transcript to create each scrapbook album page, certain


**Figure 1.** Example of scrapbooking folders, photograph taken by author.

stories from the research interviews would become embedded in my thoughts. This process prevented me from skipping over things and potentially missing important details that I may not have picked up otherwise. This approach to analysis resonated and made sense to me, even though at times it felt quite unorthodox, and not like a 'serious' or 'formal' way of doing research. However, as my supervisors explained to me, it was a rigorous process and I could document each step, so it met the criteria of research analysis. This improved my confidence as both a researcher and practitioner. It helped me to realise that my ideas were valid and I could use practices and ways of undertaking research that made sense to me, even if they didn't feel overly 'academic'.

### Significance of the family recordkeeping findings

When thinking about the significance of the interview findings, it became apparent that many of the issues being discussed in the family recordkeeping space, including which record was the authoritative one and what option was best when it came to storage, were also present in my practitioner life. In the workplace, for example, I would often observe that the plethora of digital information systems on offer, with their many parts containing multiple versions of data, meant many non-recordkeeping trained colleagues would encounter understandable difficulties determining what was in fact the authoritative record. For example, was the email in which the information was transmitted the authoritative record, or was the record in the system where the information was processed the authority? Lacking the understanding required to easily identify the authoritative record would sometimes lead to other recordkeeping challenges, such as the over retention of records, or the proliferation of records across multiple storage locations.

I witnessed this behaviour of wanting to keep similar types of records together even if that meant creating duplicates both in the workplace and the family recordkeeping examples. Identifying and making decisions about where and how long to store externally issued records (e.g. passports, vaccination status records, etc), was also a common topic across the workplace environment. This led me to think about the design of the final research gathering exercise for the project. I settled on validating my family recordkeeping interview findings with a focus group of work colleagues. My hypothesis was that thinking about recordkeeping behaviours and values in one's personal life was a potential entry point as a first step into developing base level workplace recordkeeping literacy skills.

### Validating the family recordkeeping results

I presented the family recordkeeping interview findings to the focus group of work colleagues in October 2023, alongside three fairly common workplace recordkeeping questions:

- What is an authoritative record?
- Where should records be stored?
- What is the value of recordkeeping?

The 1-h focus group was run online. Before attending, the participants were asked to listen to a pre-recorded podcast. As the focus group would involve five work colleagues, who I knew were already busy, I thought that listening to a podcast as part of the focus group preparation was an easier proposition than presenting them with pages of reading material. The podcast enabled the focus group participants to listen to the findings from the family recordkeeping stories at their own pace and in their preferred environment.

In preparing these podcasts I had to think carefully about how to use some of the quotes from the transcripts, and whether I should use music. In the end, I created a script and worked on using different kinds of tones with my voice to indicate when I was sharing a story using the words of my interview participants. I also purchased some music to use for the introduction and conclusion sections of the podcast. Making editing decisions for the final version of the podcast was at times a slightly frustrating and fiddly endeavour, but one which I ultimately really enjoyed and learnt a number of new skills from. The focus group provided a range of useful insights to the research project overall, as well as validating a number of key observations made during the family recordkeeping interviews. At the time of writing, the final analysis of this work and write up of the research is in progress.

### When life gets in the way …

Towards the end of the family recordkeeping interview stage of the research project, a number of changes in my life started to occur which impacted both the direction and focus of the research project, my practitioner world and my life overall.

Around early 2018 I had become quite ill. Although I was able to recover, I was left with significant long-term health issues. This explains the break away from the research project and why there is such a gap between the data gathering stage (2017) and the focus group stage (2023). Overall, I took approximately three and a half years of leave from the thesis in order to focus on my health. I only resumed the research work again at the beginning of 2023.

When I first had to step away from the research, I was dismayed. I also was not sure if I was ever going to be able to go back to it. At that initial discontinuation point I assumed there was nothing more I could do. Gradually my health improved and I started to notice that I was still drawing on the findings from the family recordkeeping interviews in my practitioner role. I was regularly thinking about the value of the interviews and how those parents were able to


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effortlessly demonstrate their acquired recordkeeping knowledge, even though their self-assessment of that knowledge was quite low at the beginning of the interviews.

During the hiatus period I also recognised that the parents involved in the study were not following any government recordkeeping rules or policies when it came to managing their children's records at home. This makes sense, as no such rules or policies exist in the family setting. Yet, when they spoke about their various family functions, it became apparent that all of the parents were capturing, controlling, accessing, storing, disposing of or preserving records as part of their day-to-day lives. I found significant evidence of recordkeeping activities being undertaken, even if the parents themselves did not identify them as related to 'recordkeeping'.

Often, they described these activities as 'life admin', or 'memory making' tasks. With my practitioner hat on, I realised that by exclusively focusing on recordkeeping policy and processes as the foundational content for recordkeeping training, I was making too many assumptions about the recordkeeping literacy level of my audience. Perhaps my practitioner hypothesis was on the right track. I was also reminded through the research that most people can easily relate to recordkeeping practices when seen through the lens of personal recordkeeping. I went back to the work of Oliver and Foscarini[23] and the idea of workplace recordkeeping behaviours and values. General discussions with my team at work at this time based on the family recordkeeping findings led to a number of changes in how we shared recordkeeping information with our organisational colleagues. This included how we explained recordkeeping concepts and how we thought about training programs, as well as influencing the professional terms we used (or in some cases deliberately stopped using with certain audiences).

After realising how much the original family recordkeeping research data was still influencing my practitioner role, I wanted to understand why these findings felt so important and relevant, especially in relation to workplace recordkeeping training. I realised that I needed to go back to the research and explore my findings in more detail. I suspected some of the answers to my questions might come through applying records continuum theory to the problem; however, I was aware that I would need some guidance. This was one of the key drivers behind my return to formal study.

My enforced 'pause' could be characterised as 'laying fallow'. As Friedman and Yoo state:

> this form of pause serves the purpose of refreshing people, resources, or other aspects of the project. Such fallow periods aid with project sustainability and can act as a counterpoint to what might be experienced as relentless project workflow leading to burnout.[24]

With hindsight, my health situation allowed me to take on the 'design mechanism of pause' – an unexpected but positive outcome to becoming so ill.

## Conclusion

My overriding belief now is that research enriches my practitioner life. While timing, resources, life circumstances and the right research opportunity all play a role in determining how much research can be incorporated into a practitioner role, it should never be perceived as an either/or situation. This binary notion of practitioner versus researcher is now no longer part of my subconscious or conscious mindset.

The joy that narrative inquiry has brought to my current research project into family recordkeeping cannot be underestimated. This method has encouraged me to take a creative approach towards my research process, including capturing stories during my family recordkeeping interviews, and re-storying those experiences back into scrapbooking as part of my analysis. It has also enabled me to draw upon narrative methodology techniques to present my data in different ways, including creating a podcast full of short stories for my focus group

exercise. The ability to design a research project based around how I see and understand the world has made the research journey infinitely more enjoyable and rewarding for me as both a researcher and practitioner in the recordkeeping field. My research has enabled me to share my theoretical findings and insights with my work program team and colleagues, and the ability to provide a sound rationale as a practitioner has helped to remove some of the guesswork out of planning and strategic thinking exercises across our activities and program as a whole.

On a personal level, the research has improved my writing skills and my conceptual thinking. It has also provided me with invaluable and exciting insights into how I view the world and take in and process complex information. The discovery of the narrative theory, and the use of autoethnography within that approach, has validated my natural instincts to want to represent both my research and practitioner life creatively in order to make sense of it. I came across the idea of scrapbooking through this research project because it ultimately made the most sense to me in terms of an analysis technique. What I did not realise until recently was that using hand drawn pictures and paper craft is a really valuable way for me to make sense of the world more generally, well beyond my work and study life.

My personal journaling activities now include small components of papercraft/scrapbooking exercises as a way to process and make sense of my current health journey as well as day to day life. I employed this process during my laying fallow period on the thesis to keep myself connected to the research when I was so unwell. Even during the worst of the illness, I would still complete a few scrapbook pages across weeks, and sometimes months, in order to stay connected to my data. However, this also helped me to process the findings and think about their relevance to my work program. Writing things down does not, on its own, provide a useful way for me to engage with new thinking or problem solving. Now, through the narrative inquiry methodology, I have found a way to help make better sense of both my research problems, and my practitioner life and beyond.

I can't recommend the bringing together of research into a practitioner role highly enough. No matter the scale, be it large or small, undertaking research and incorporating it into my practitioner life has been and continues to be one of the most rewarding and long-lasting aspects of my career in recordkeeping. It has been and continues to be a key source of my sparkle!

### Notes on contributor

Catherine started her career in the Monash University Archives, while she also completed her Masters of Information Management & Systems (Hons) with a thesis component that explored the role of exhibitions in archive outreach programs. Catherine later moved to the University of Melbourne for 10 years in a series of practitioner roles including Manager, Records Services. During this time, Catherine also completed her Masters of Education (Early Childhood Education) with a research component that focused on the Australian Children's Television Standards. In 2011, Catherine took on the role of Records Manager at Monash University and in 2023 recommenced her PhD studies, also at Monash University in the Faculty of Information Technology.

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