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To cite this article: Ellen Larsen, Melissa Fanshawe & Yvonne Salton (2024) “I Want to Contribute, but...”: Exploring the Perceived Valuing of Doctoral Qualifications Held by Teachers in Schools, The Educational Forum, 88:2, 136-150, DOI: [10.1080/00131725.2023.2229389](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2023.2229389)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2023.2229389>



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Published online: 30 Jun 2023.



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“I Want to Contribute, but...”: Exploring the Perceived Valuing of Doctoral Qualifications Held by Teachers in Schools

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the experiences of educators in Australia with doctoral qualifications and how they perceive their knowledge and research skills to be valued and leveraged as legitimate funds of knowledge in school environments. Findings from an online survey and four semi-structured interviews provoke further consideration of how teachers' cultural capital is contemporaneously defined in school settings, with educators with doctorates perceiving their knowledge and skills to be largely underutilised or ignored in their workplace.

KEYWORDS

Cultural capital; doctorate; funds of knowledge; teacher knowledge; teacher qualifications

Over the past decade, an increasing number of educators with doctoral qualifications in countries such as Australia (McCarthy & Wienk, 2019), and the US (National Centre for Educational Statistics, 2023), are working in school contexts instead of taking up academic positions in tertiary institutions. In the context of this study, “doctoral qualifications” refers to a postgraduate research degree such as a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) that earns the title of “Doctor” at the conferral of this award. This is in part driven by wider trends related to work preferences, as well as a dearth of academic positions available to cater to a rapidly growing population of doctoral graduands (Centre for Educational Statistics; 2023; Germain-Alamartine et al., 2021; McCarthy & Wienk, 2019).

For example, the US Centre for Educational Statistics (2023) notes that the number of teachers with doctoral qualifications working in public schools has increased from 1.1% to 1.4% between 2013 and 2021, with a projection that these numbers will continue to grow. Australia, as the site of this study, offers another case in point, with the *Advancing Australia's Knowledge Economy* Report (McCarthy & Wienk, 2019) identifying the Department of Education in New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria (three of Australia's most populous states), as among the top 50 “PhD employers”.

In some industry sectors, there is also an increased appreciation of the skills and knowledge of doctoral graduates (McCarthy & Wienk, 2019). Given the education sector currently faces the need to respond innovatively to increasingly complex educational issues through research-based practice (Loughran & Menter, 2019), educators with doctorates have a particularly valuable skill set that can be brought to their own work and to the schools in which they are employed. Further, the current teacher shortage crisis in Australian schools (Allen et al., 2019),

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and elsewhere across the globe, such as the US (Sutcher et al., 2019) and the UK (Sims & Allen, 2018) could indicate that such a trend might be welcomed as a contributory strategy to increase the teacher workforce alongside their value as a resource in schools to assist with the ever-increasing complexities of contemporary education.

It is therefore pertinent to develop an understanding of the experiences of teachers who hold doctoral qualifications working in school contexts and to gain insight into how they perceive their particular skills and knowledges to be leveraged to benefit both their students and the school more broadly. While some research has been undertaken in international contexts, with some concerning results (Brown et al., 2016; Ion & Iucu, 2016; Perry, 2013), no studies have been undertaken in Australia and only a very few outside of the European context. Drawing on seminal concepts of Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1986), we employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), with data collected from an online survey followed by four semi-structured interviews.

Literature Review

There is ongoing debate in Australia, and internationally, about teacher quality (Meijer, 2021). Brooks (2021) suggests that the indicators of teacher quality are often connected to level of qualification (Meijer, 2021); that is, whether teachers hold an undergraduate (Bachelor), postgraduate (Master), or doctoral degree (such as Doctor of Philosophy, Education or Professional Doctorate). In Poland and Portugal, similarly to countries such as France, Spain, and Finland, a postgraduate qualification is required to be licenced as a teacher (Meijer, 2021). Policymakers across these countries appear to agree that quality of teaching and learning is determined by the quality of the teacher and their qualification (Brooks, 2021). This is supported by some research that links the level of teachers' qualifications to student achievement. Lee and Lee (2020) reported a link between students' academic achievement in school and higher education with their cumulative exposure to schoolteachers with higher levels of qualification, including master and doctoral degrees. Similarly, Betts et al. (2003) reported positive correlations between teacher qualifications at the master and doctoral levels and student success in both mathematics and reading.

In contrast, other research has questioned whether the level of teacher qualification is in and of itself synonymous with quality. Croninger et al. (2007) explored the impact of teacher certification status on student achievement in a longitudinal study in the United States and found that while the level of academic degree can be an indicator of teacher quality, any positive correlation was inconsistent. Croninger et al. (2007) also noted negative effects on student achievement where teachers held more advanced degrees for elementary students in mathematics. Later studies in the United States (Buddin & Zamaro, 2009; Shuls & Trivitt, 2015) concurred, arguing that higher academic qualifications did not necessarily translate into higher teacher quality.

Many researchers do agree, however, that advanced academic degrees, such as doctorates, can change teachers' practice. According to Ion and Iucu (2016), teachers undertaking doctoral studies are better able to bridge the gap between theory and practice and use research more readily and consistently to inform their practice. Kowalczyk-Waledziak et al.'s (2017) study of 16 teachers in Poland and Portugal with doctoral qualifications found that teachers self-reported a positive impact on their own classroom instruction and perceived their doctorate as an effective form of professional learning. Burton (2020) later suggested that a doctoral

qualification serves as a highly relevant form of professional learning to improve teachers' educational knowledge base.

Research, however, is often seen as theoretical and disconnected from professional practice. Perry (2013) and Ion and Iucu (2016) suggested that this view is particularly prevalent in the profession of teaching, where there is a lack of confidence in traditional research to solve complex educational challenges faced by everyday practitioners. Several studies have identified that a corollary of this mistrust is the limited value afforded doctoral qualifications by educators who are sceptical about the benefits of a qualification grounded in academia for teachers' work. Kowalczyk-Waledziak et al. (2017) found that while teachers were able to utilise their discipline expertise and research skills developed through doctoral research to benefit their own teaching practice, there was little opportunity or appetite to leverage their capabilities more broadly in the school environment. Similarly, Ion and Iucu (2016) and Brown et al. (2016) identified that teachers in Romania and the UK respectively with doctoral qualifications struggled when attempting to implement research-driven changes in the classroom due to a lack of support at an institutional level. This potentially limits the perceived and actual benefits of having staff with professional doctorates in some school contexts (Fox & Slade, 2014; Bakx et al., 2016).

There is very limited research undertaken to understand the experiences of educators with doctoral qualifications in Australia. The standard qualification for Australian teachers is a bachelor-level degree in education (Keavy & Jansen, 2010); consequently, teachers with doctorates are in the minority. As outlined above, there is an acknowledged link between teacher qualifications and student achievement in some cases (Lee & Lee, 2020) and professional development (Burton, 2020), and challenges faced by teachers with advanced qualifications in other education contexts (Ion & Iucu, 2016). It is pertinent to understand the extent to which Australian school contexts are perceived to value and leverage the knowledge and research skills that teachers with a doctoral qualification offer in the school setting if schools are to attract, retain and benefit from their employ.

Conceptual Framework

This study used Funds of Knowledge and Cultural Capital, concepts innovatively applied to understand the extent to which knowledge and skills of educators with doctorates are perceived as valuable and contribute to school settings.

Funds of Knowledge refer to the knowledge and skills, often culturally connected, that are 'held' by an individual or group because of their experience or "lifeworld" (Moll, 2019, p. 91). In the context of education, Funds of Knowledge was first used in reference to the cultural knowledge and skills that students from diverse cultural or socio-economic backgrounds brought to the classroom (Moll et al., 1992). The intention of Funds of Knowledge was to disrupt and delegitimise any deficit views held by educators about the Funds of Knowledge of marginalised groups or minorities (González et al., 2005; Luke & Goldstein, 2006) shown to often be overlooked and undervalued by schooling systems that privilege conventional knowledge and skills of the dominant white middle classes (Hogg, 2011; Kelley, 2020, Moll, 2019). Thus, Funds of Knowledge research has been "fuel[led] by ethically dynamic energies...to challenge and change unjust power dynamics" (Neri et al., 2021, p. 34) that disadvantage students due to their own specific Funds of Knowledge. In the context of this study, we posit that teachers with doctoral qualifications also have their own particular Funds of Knowledge.

The “critical edge” (Hogg, 2011) of Funds of Knowledge has aimed to disrupt the privileging of Cultural Capital in schools. Cultural Capital represents that knowledge considered to be advantageous to that context (Bourdieu, 1986), often that which offers personal distinction and social status (Smala et al., 2013; Bleazby, 2015). According to Oughton (2010), Cultural Capital is therefore related to Funds of Knowledge in that it is comprised of that knowledge given privilege and legitimacy by the power-dominated discourse of the context. For some time, Cultural Capital has most often been hailed as teachers’ educational qualifications (Oughton, 2010) with teachers’ life and experiential “wealths” (Neri et al., 2021, p. 14), both personal and professional, afforded significantly less respect.

In response, several studies involving teachers (Hedges, 2012), teacher educators (Banegas, 2022), and preservice teachers (Coleman, 2015) have aimed to disrupt that conception of the Cultural Capital of schools and the domination of formal qualifications as the valued knowledge that teachers bring to their schools and work. Hedges (2012) notably argued that teachers’ life and work experience were significant Funds of Knowledge that enriched their work. Hedges (2012) went on to categorise teachers’ Funds of Knowledge (Table 1) with a focus on elevating informally developed, applied knowledge (represented as family and centre-based knowledge in her trichotomy) that is less theoretical and more practical (Smala et al., 2013; Bleazby, 2015). This is contrasted with the formal, theoretical Funds of Knowledge (Smala et al., 2013; Bleazby, 2015) attained through qualification (more aligned to community-based knowledge). However, even in this third category, Hedges (2012) fell short of specifically including doctoral qualifications in her description of community-based Funds of Knowledge. We have therefore expanded Hedges’ (2012) categories to more explicitly address this ambiguity through the addition of a fourth category, representative of formally acquired research-based knowledge.

Interestingly, Hedges’ (2012) first two categories of Funds of Knowledge have more recently seemed to usurped qualification-driven Funds of Knowledge as the Cultural Capital among teachers (Kowalczyk-Waledziak et al., 2017). However, Oughton (2010) cautions that the “imposition of cultural arbitrariness” poses the risk of simply replacing one Funds of Knowledge with another Funds of Knowledge as the privileged or legitimised knowledge in discourse is noted (p. 10). Rather the aim should be to empower “the agency of all groups to mobilize the use-values of their diverse cultural assets with equivalent agency” (Neri et al., 2021, p. 16). In this instance, there is the potential that attempts to recognise the value of knowledges attained through life and teaching experiences have an exclusionary effect on the legitimisation of knowledge acquired *via* doctoral study.

Methods

The researchers for this study are all qualified teachers with doctoral qualifications, and while currently working as academics within the School of Education within one Australian regional

Table 1. Extension to teachers’ funds of knowledge.

FoK	Meaning
Family-based	Knowledge gained from personal and family experiences
Centre-Based	Knowledge gained from teaching experience
Community-based	Knowledge gained through teacher education programs and professional learning opportunities
<i>Research-based</i>	Knowledge gained from research higher degrees

(Adapted from Hedges, 2012, p. 4).

university, have extensive school-based classroom experience. Using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design which, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), is a robust method to firstly explore, and subsequently explain a situation or context, this study included two phases (Figure 1) (Ivankova et al., 2006). Firstly, quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a national online survey, followed by four semi-structured interviews, to understand how educators with doctoral qualifications perceive the knowledge and skills developed through their research to be valued and leveraged within the school settings in which they work.

Phase 1 Data Collection

The online survey, conducted between April and August 2022, collected demographic information about each participant, including school context and position, using Likert scale questions followed by quantitative data using open-ended questions about the participants' experiences of being an educator with a doctorate in a school context. Following ethics approval, the online survey was distributed via social media posts. Only 14% of the 42 responses to the survey were educators working within a school context. Participant details are outlined in Table 2.

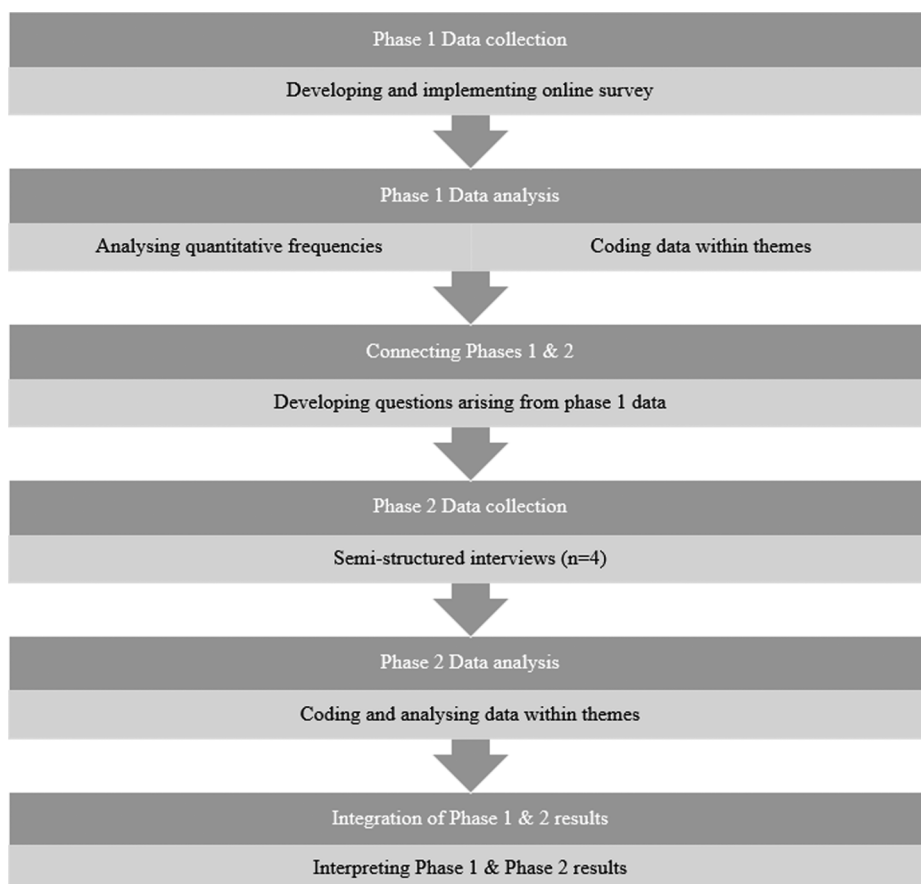


Figure 1. Visual model for mixed-methods sequential explanatory design procedures, adapted from Ivankova et al. (2006).

Table 2. Phase 1 participant demographics national online survey.

Participant #	School context	Role in school	Age on completion of doctoral study	Number of years in this setting
1	Early years	Assistant educator	31–35	2
2	Primary	Classroom teacher	46–50	22
3	Primary	Principal/Deputy	26–30	0.5
4	Secondary	Classroom teacher	36–40	18
5	Secondary	Curriculum lead	46–50	5
6	Secondary	Curriculum lead	36–40	16

Table 3. Phase 2 semi-structured interview participant demographics.

Pseudonym	School context	School sector	Role
Alex	Secondary	Catholic	Classroom teacher
Jo	Primary	State	Classroom teacher
Lon	Secondary	Independent	Curriculum lead
Taylor	Secondary	Catholic	Curriculum lead

Comparative descriptive statistical analysis was undertaken using Excel to understand how and the extent to which participants perceived their qualification as a community-based fund of knowledge (Hedges, 2012) was valued and utilised in their role as a teacher in their school setting.

Phase 2 Data Collection

Following the analysis of first-phase data, the semi-structured interview schedule was designed to seek a deeper understanding of the initial findings. Four semi-structured online interviews were conducted in late 2022, with participants who expressed interest in being interviewed in the survey. Each participant was allocated a pseudonym (Table 3).

Participants were asked questions about their experiences pertaining to how they perceived their expertise acquired related to their doctorate was utilised in their current school setting. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. NVivo was subsequently used to support thematic analysis using a set of a priori codes from Phase 1 and emergent codes to develop key themes.

Findings

Phase 1 Findings: National Online Survey

Of the Likert responses collected, the majority perceived that their knowledge and skills developed through their completion of a doctoral qualification were not considered an asset by others in the school context. Of the six, four rated the extent to which their researcher knowledge and skills were valued in their current work context as either limited or not at all. Further, in the case of half of the participants, there were reportedly few or no opportunities to use their knowledge and skills. Most considered their doctorate to have only moderate to no advantage for them as school-based educators, while at the same time, they felt that it did not disadvantage them. In short, it appeared they saw others as being quite ambivalent about what they could potentially bring to the school context.

The results of open-ended questions showed that knowledge and skills gained through doctoral study were used to some extent through their work. For example, participant #3's research skills were used for a range of tasks such as the "location and sharing of information on best practices from the literature, collection, and analysis of data for strategic and instructional purposes, and written communication for formal and informal reasons." Similarly, participant #32 indicated that they undertook 'qualitative and quantitative data analysis to improve quality teaching and student improvement' while participant #13 went on to explain that they secured the role of Deputy Principal because of their qualification, stating:

My Principal (I'm a deputy) wanted me in the role because of my deep knowledge of early intervention and early years pedagogy and I'm leading improvement work in that space. Also, I am leading school-wide work on data collection and analysis.

Notably, while this school leverages their knowledge and skills, this teacher went on to say however that "absolutely no one cares that you have a PhD and it will make no difference to your employability on its own; only if you can sell the practical skills."

Participant #37 felt that their school setting did not value their academically developed expertise, stating that, "I am always thinking I need to put my complex ideas in my pocket and go to do practical routine activities." It was felt that in that setting, practicality was seen as divorced from complex thinking. Similarly, participant #2 reported that while they were willing and able to "do so much more," they were not asked to draw in their doctoral expertise in any way:

Although I have research skills, I am not asked to evaluate programs, or speak at pupil-free days or staff meetings...My skills are very underutilized. I could be doing so much more...the fact that I gained my PhD was never communicated to the school community. There is no incentive – no extra pay, or positions for PhD.

In this instance, this classroom teacher felt that not only was their expertise ignored, but there was an absence of any other incentives to have a doctorate in a school context.

The perceived advantages of doctoral qualification for those working in the school context were limited in the survey responses, restricted to a perceived increased level of respect from parents primarily. As participant #2 stated, "I find parents are less likely to question me. While the students call me Mrs, I have Dr in my signature. I find parents have been very respectful to me, more so than previously." In contrast, it appears that colleagues, including school administration or leadership, do not have increased respect as noted by participant #32 who felt that "others are jealous and make snide comments."

While the limitations of the survey data in terms of participant numbers are acknowledged, some important preliminary ideas emerged pointing to complexities for educators with doctorates working in schools, including: a) a sense that while some felt there were avenues to use some of their doctoral expertise and skills, the majority felt that these were largely ignored; b) a perceived lack of recognition for the qualification they held; c) that a doctoral qualification was considered less essential to practical knowledge.

Phase 2 Findings: Semi-Structured Interviews

In Phase Two, three key findings emerged from the interview data.

Knowledge and Skills Gained from a Doctorate

When asked about the knowledge and skills gained from completing a doctorate, all participants identified specific content knowledge that they had gained through their study which they believed gave them “a specialised skill set” (Alex) to teach their content area. All four participants identified that they had also developed advanced research skills because of their doctorate, including the ability to undertake literature reviews, data collection and data analysis, which lent itself to school-based program evaluation and research to inform their schools’ instructional decisions. Three participants believed that completing a doctorate had also developed their time management skills and ability to persist in a project (Taylor).

Participants perceived that the doctorate afforded them confidence (Jo), credibility (Taylor), validity (Alex), and respect (Alex, Lon) as educators to some extent within the school context. The three secondary school educators all used the title of Dr. within the school and reported that students were very respectful of the title. Alex offered that educators with doctorates enabled students to “actually see themselves at university and see what success looks like for different people.” Conversely, Jo, who works in a primary classroom, said that while young students were unaware of the doctorate, “that doctor in front of my name makes parents feel very comfortable and confident in my teaching.”

Lon shared that educators with doctoral qualifications added a “richness to the school” and a “positive for the reputation of the school.” Taylor reported that their secondary school recognises “the prestige” surrounding a doctorate. While Alex and Jo believed a doctorate was important within a school, they both conveyed that they did not think that their schools placed importance on marketing the teachers’ qualifications. Alex thought that schools should advertise their staff’s qualifications to their prospective parents, as seen in the following comment:

...Being able to say we’ve got X numbers of PhDs on staff may be a tipping point for some parents in terms of where they choose to enrol their child... The most recent position is that our marketing manager feels that talented staff ‘don’t impact enrolment, so he’s not particularly inclined to celebrate staff success.

Alex did acknowledge that “perhaps part of that is not wanting to suggest to other staff that they’re less valuable.”

Opportunities to Apply Knowledge and Skills within the School

All participants considered their expertise to be useful by way of subject-specific content knowledge or teaching pedagogy gained from the doctorate as it directly informed or impacted their teaching. For example, Alex, who teaches a specialised senior secondary subject, felt that completing their doctorate meant that they gained specific content knowledge required to teach a specialised subject in their school. They said this was of particular importance in this instance, as:

... it’s not a subject that many people kind of naturally just feel equipped to be able to teach... those that do have a fairly specialised skill set. Doing the Ph.D. helped me feel that I had more of that skill set.

Similarly, Lon reported “utilising the actual knowledge [from the doctorate]...because it was very practical and it can be practically used in schools.”

While all participants felt the school valued the practical content knowledge that could be implemented into the classroom, there was less confidence in the value of research skills gained

through the doctorate within the school context. Taylor acknowledged that the completion of their doctorate meant they “have really highly developed research skills which I suppose are under-utilised in the sense of how schools should be.” All four believed that research skills were important in schools, with Taylor expressing that “education should be driven and informed by research and people who are in touch with the educational literature.” However, all shared that they had limited opportunities to use research skills in their school. Jo raised concerns that this impacted the students:

[The school] has got all these programs that are running adhoc... I feel like students have missed opportunities because the school hasn't taken up the offer to really look at the programs and research them and see how they're going.

Both Jo and Alex expressed that the limited uptake of their expertise, knowledge and skills negatively impacted them, leaving them with a sense of frustration, and at times, a sense of being under-valued. In contrast, Lon and Taylor were less troubled by these circumstances, with Lon sharing, “I was [happier] to achieve the award than having any sort of expectations around the implementation of my knowledge or the implementation of anything to do with my research project.”

Participants were able to identify examples of how knowledge and skills gained from their doctoral studies could be better utilised within their schools. This included collecting data more systematically (Lon), measuring impact to evaluate classroom programs (Jo), sharing content knowledge in staff meetings or professional development (Jo, Alex), formal leadership roles (Taylor), and mentoring others to use evidence-based practice (Jo).

When asked why they believed the doctoral knowledge and skills were underutilised, participants identified that schools were “very busy places” (Taylor) and practical teaching skills were more valuable in the school setting. Lon suggested that “there is probably not the time... probably due to the busy hours just with the day-to-day running and the normal expectations.” Jo concurred, “[schools] place more value on the outcomes, an extra thing is just not really valued because they're just trying so desperately to do what they need to do. And a lot of schools are very reactive, not proactive in that sort of space.” While Jo also acknowledged the busyness of the school day, they suggested the unwillingness they felt their school demonstrated to draw on their doctoral knowledge and skills could be for fear of judgement:

My PhD is on inclusive education and participation in education, but I have not even been asked by the head of special education to talk to her or tell her about my learning. I think they don't really want to ask my opinion because what if they [are] doing it wrong? So that's a bit disappointing that they have this amazing resource... that they're not putting the kids' needs first.

The participants all recognised that leadership within the school may impact, to varying degrees, the extent to which doctoral knowledge is leveraged as a resource within the school. According to Alex, “[School leaders] don't necessarily want to acknowledge the expertise because it's not expertise they themselves hold. We are the most qualified people in the school, but we are not the most senior people in the school.”

Lon and Taylor, who are in leadership positions as curriculum heads within secondary schools, both offered that the practical skills that support content in the classroom were more highly valued than academic knowledge. Lon offered, “first and foremost, I just need to be a good teacher.” Taylor agreed, stating, “the school just values teachers who are reliable and

responsible and deliver good lessons... We may be a doctor in a school, but we have the same things, the same kids.” Taylor explained that when school leaders were hiring staff,

they were just looking for people who fit the school culture... They’re not really that interested in academic results let alone your marks during your educational degree... Some schools are looking for people with some special quality, somebody who can run their netball programme or get their music program up.

Similarly, Jo identified that their “school really highly values extracurricular activities... So someone who comes to the school with knowledge about sporting skills would actually be more highly valued than someone coming with a PhD.”

The Value of Achieving a Doctorate for Educators within Schools

When asked what advice they would give to other educators who wanted to obtain their doctorate in a school, the participants gave varied answers about the benefits of achieving such a qualification if part of a school setting. Alex felt that the school was “not hugely supportive” but reasoned that “people don’t understand what I did and therefore don’t know how to value it.”

Further, none of the participants received a pay increase following the completion of their doctorate, yet both Taylor and Lon were able to use the qualification for promotion purposes. This was considered a successful outcome, as both Taylor and Lon completed their doctorates to progress their careers. Despite the potential benefit of a doctorate for promotion, both Jo and Alex wanted to remain in the classroom. Even though “it’s less common for classroom teachers to pursue [a doctorate] with the intent of staying in the classroom,” (Alex), both Alex and Jo noted that it was important to have teachers in the classroom with these advanced qualifications:

...we want to have teachers in the classroom who are making a difference in their practice... there are some countries where they all have doctorate level or master’s level ...they’re working together to better themselves and to better the students. (Jo)

Ultimately, all four participants believe that completing a doctorate was a personal decision, and educators should “do it because you want to” (Taylor), or as Jo suggests, “you do it for yourself. You don’t do it for others.” In other words, the reward should be primarily that “you’ve contributed to knowledge, and you’ve succeeded in a high-level degree” (Lon). Lon advises that educators with these qualifications should “be really happy with that” and not seek school recognition, as, from their perspective, it is unlikely to be given.

Discussion

Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), as examined through the work of Hedges (2012), offered a lens through which school contexts could be understood. Hedges (2012) sought to disrupt the historical notion that legitimate teacher knowledge was qualification-based knowledge alone, and to foreground the value of knowledge accumulated through teacher experience perceived as more practical and applied in nature. This study has shown that the perceived value of some qualification-based knowledge may be in actuality limited among key school actors, with this Fund of Knowledge largely seen as irrelevant and extraneous in this setting. Such a rejection of the value of research-based approaches to teaching and learning practice has implications for teachers, students, and the profession more broadly.

In defining research-based qualifications as “theoretical” or “a-practical,” a limited and narrow understanding of the expertise and skills of teachers holding this level of qualification is assumed. Unlike Croninger et al. (2007) who questioned the link between teacher qualifications and instructional capacity, many participants viewed a doctoral qualification as an enhancement to their practice. As Burton (2020) found, doctoral studies can have a positive impact on the ability to teach specific specialist areas, such as inclusive education. Participants saw the completion of a doctorate as a significant professional learning experience. They could envisage opportunities to implement cutting-edge research-based instruction and serve as a source of professional learning for their colleagues about their research topic, a reasonable assumption given the clear benefits of collaborative professional learning (Dalby, 2021).

Further, these teachers saw their research degrees as supporting the development of personal skills such as persistence, resilience, time and project management capabilities. These are significant attributes demonstrated to support teacher retention (Aguilar, 2018), well-being (Weiland, 2021), and school leadership (Bauer & Silver, 2018). O’Brien (2019) similarly described the completion of doctoral study as a transformative experience, elevating creative, critical and personal capabilities as a consequence of the pressure and high cognitive and emotional demands involved in attaining such a qualification. She asserts that this transformation enhances an individual’s capacity to deal with what she describes as “liquid modernity” (p. 217). Classroom teachers and leaders too are working in an educational landscape characterised by rapid change (Loughran & Menter, 2019) and intensified workloads (Heffernan et al., 2022; Stacey et al., 2022).

Given that teacher and school leader burnout and attrition, connected in part to these demands, are impacting the workforce in Australia (Wyatt & O’Neill, 2021) and elsewhere (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022), the capacities these teachers bring bodes well for their persistence, as well as being beneficial for the school, students, and the profession more broadly. That said, Shields and Mullen (2020) have argued that these personal resources alone are insufficient to entice teachers to stay and that leadership support and a sense of being valued are critical. Our study, therefore, indicates that teachers with doctorates may not necessarily choose to remain in schools without these latter conditions being available to them.

This study highlights that participants believe that their research skills could be utilised in highly practical ways to support program development and evaluation. Given the shift towards research and data-informed teaching and learning and evaluation of school-based programs, it would appear counterintuitive to consider the skills developed by research degrees as extraneous to the “real work” (Edwards & Martin, 2016) of teachers. This study suggests that the mistrust in educational research previously posited by Ion and Iucu (2016) may inhibit the extent to which the knowledge and skills of educators with doctorates are leveraged. Participants also perceived fear of judgement or disruption to the school’s ways of working, a need to ensure that other teachers without these qualifications did not feel devalued, and the ever-present issue of time poverty (Boeskens & Nusche, 2021) as reducing appetite to involve their particular knowledge and skills more fully.

Of concern is that overlooking the potential resource that these teachers represent is counterproductive for the school and the teachers with these qualifications. As previously reported in other research (Kowalczyk-Waledziak et al., 2017), many participants in this study also felt undervalued and frustrated by the limited acknowledgment of their potential contributions to their school setting. As argued by Tatto (2021), educators with research skills have an opportunity to assist their colleagues to engage in diverse forms of research practice to improve

teaching and learning. However, like findings by Kowalczyk-Walędziak et al. (2020) in a cross-national study of teachers undertaking thesis work, this study identified that in some cases this limited recognition was expected and, in some cases, accepted by teachers holding this qualification. In these instances, the privileging of Funds of Knowledge based on practical accomplishment and experience to the exclusion of formally acquired research knowledge as a Fund of Knowledge may continue to go unchallenged.

This study confirms that teachers bring to their work many Funds of Knowledge that have the potential to make significant contributions to the school context and students' learning outcomes. These findings do not seek to counter Hedges' (2012) and others' argument of the need to recognise the Funds of Knowledge that teachers acquire outside of conventional qualifications-based mechanisms, but to make more expansive the Funds of Knowledge that are valued to include educators with doctorates as contributory to school's Cultural Capital so that teachers with these qualifications may be able to meaningfully contribute to their school context.

The Cultural Capital of any context privileges certain Funds of Knowledge and may jeopardise the participation of those that hold Funds of Knowledge that deviate from that which is legitimised. This study highlights that in school settings, professional Cultural Capital privileges experience and practical application over the knowledge and skills acquired via research qualifications, which leads to the underutilisation, and potential professional marginalisation, of those with doctorates. A more expansive model of Funds of Knowledge that includes not only family-based, centre-based, and community-based Funds of Knowledge, but also research-based Funds of Knowledge as legitimate cultural capital can only benefit education. In short, a broader conceptualisation of what Funds of Knowledge constitute Cultural Capital in school settings might add further to the kinds of experiences made available for both teachers and their students.

Limitations of the Study

The authors acknowledge that the size of the survey sample is a limitation of this study. However, the research design was significant in this regard, with the survey primarily serving as a prompt for interview design and exploration in the second phase. In addition, the participants while representative of different school roles and specific school contexts, were all located in Australia. Further investigation is required in alternative school contexts, nationally and internationally, to ascertain the extent to which these experiences are representative of the wider cohort of teachers with doctoral qualifications.

Conclusion

Schools are complex and demanding contexts, that thrive on the diverse forms of knowledge and skills that each employee and student brings. Without diminishing the significance of the knowledges and skills that teachers bring from their own lives and their context-based experiences, this paper contends that schools may underutilise the Funds of Knowledge available to them through failure to thoughtfully leverage the research skills and acquired expertise of teachers in their employ with doctoral qualifications.

This study aimed to understand how the discipline expertise and research skills of teachers with doctoral qualifications are perceived to be valued and leveraged within Australian school contexts. This study has highlighted a potential reticence within schools to acknowledge and

leverage the particular knowledges and skills of their teachers with doctorates. Issues of perceived irrelevance to the real work of teachers, concerns over collegial equity, and, importantly—but not surprisingly—time poverty had created conditions that compromised the value and legitimacy afforded formally acquired research-based Funds of Knowledge specific to a doctorate as part of schools' professional Cultural Capital.

Increased doctoral graduate numbers, limited academic positions, and teacher shortages are creating the conditions that are likely to escalate already increasing numbers of teachers staying in or moving to school settings for employment post-conferral, in both Australia and elsewhere such as the US. Thus, these findings have implications for schools, teachers with these qualifications, and the discourse that surrounds what counts in teachers' work beyond the Australian context. Diverse backgrounds, expertise and qualification levels all bring to schools a wealth of resources that cumulatively contribute to the rich experience of being a student and a teacher in that context. Just as students have been shown to be marginalised by narrow conceptualisations of what constitutes legitimate Funds of Knowledge for schooling (Moll et al., 1992), this paper proposes that Cultural Capital, as it applies to the teaching profession in schools, can be exclusionary to teachers that bring academically sourced Funds of Knowledge. Moving forward, the challenge is to disrupt this binary and seek to create an expanded understanding of Cultural Capital in the teaching profession that can begin to divaricate and enrich what Funds of Knowledge count in the teaching profession.

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