

Facilitating the education-to-work transition

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1 Summary

After graduation, many higher education students will take their first steps into the world of work. Making the transition to the world of work can be challenging, as graduates leave behind the relatively stable and known context of higher education and exchange it for a context that is more dynamic, unstable, and sometimes even unknown. In severe cases, an unsuccessful education-to-work transition leads to early turnover. For example, in the Netherlands, 20% of novice teachers and 14% of graduate nurses leave the sector within two years after graduation due to feeling ill-prepared for their respective jobs. Early turnover can have consequences for the individuals, such as psychological distress and financial problems. Companies can face substantial financial costs and reputation loss. For society, it implies increasing personnel shortages or (youth) unemployment.

Early leave due to misalignment between graduates' preparation for their first job is a serious issue when looking at the financial, material and psychological costs it implies. This calls for educational action resulting in lower early leave. In line with previous research, this dissertation assumes that employability supports students in making a smooth transition to the workplace. Employability refers to a set of competences that allow graduates to self-sufficiently navigate the labour market and find adequate employment. In addition, employability allows graduates to successfully adjust to their new context and engage in continuous professional development and lifelong learning. Moreover, employability competences, such as teamwork skills and flexibility, are increasingly demanded by employers.

This dissertation explores how higher education can optimally prepare students for the education-to-work transition. To that end, the first study of this dissertation analyses existing pedagogical intervention aimed at facilitating students' education-to-work transition (**Chapter 2**), such as internships and client-projects, and how these interventions contribute to students' transition to the workplace. Results of this study indicate that designs of pedagogical interventions aimed at facilitating students' education-to-work transition are only partly based on relevant transition theories, such as the connectivity theory and boundary crossing theory. When designing interventions, higher education should not only work together with the workplace, but also learn from this collaboration.

The subsequent studies in this dissertation focus on coaching as pedagogical intervention aimed at facilitating students' education-to-work transition and increasing their employability. Coaching has become an integral part of many higher

education curricula and allows for a more personalized approach toward learning, in which students formulate their own learning needs and stimulates their (self-) reflection. This personalized approach towards learning is necessary when focusing on the development of students' employability competences.

Findings of the second, third, and fourth study (**Chapters, 3, 4, and 5**) provide compelling empirical evidence for coaching as pedagogical intervention aimed at facilitating students' education-to-work transition. In the second study (**Chapter 3**) we conceptualized the core competences of a transition coach and provided concrete coaching behaviours necessary to provide students with support to develop their employability. After having conceptualized coaching for transition, we studied the relationship between coaching in higher education and students' employability in study 3 (**Chapter 4**). Quantitative results showed that there is a positive relationship between coaching, particularly the autonomy support a coach provides, and students' employability. To dive deeper into this relationship, we explored how coaching stimulates the development of students' employability in a qualitative manner (**Chapter 4**). Results showed that a coach stimulates students' reflection and creates a safe environment for the student to experiment with different learning activities. The last study of this dissertation (**Chapter 5**) deepens our understanding of how coaching in higher education supported graduates in their transition to the workplace. Results of this study showed that coaching in higher education taught graduates how to reflect and created the habit of reflection. Graduates at the workplace reflected on their past experiences and analysed what went well and was still challenging. Based on the outcomes of this reflection, graduates sought out opportunities to learn and increase their competences.

In conclusion, coaching in higher education facilitates students' education-to-work transition and increases their employability by teaching them the skill of reflection and makes them lifelong learners.