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Differentiating Grapes from Wine: The Education-To-Work Transition

William E. Donald

University of Southampton, UK and Donald Research & Consulting, UK

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3670-5374>

Michael Healy

University of Southern Queensland, Australia and Education Services Australia, Australia

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9572-2182>

Abstract

There is a growing interest in connecting the literature on graduate employability, career development, and worker employability. However, inconsistent terminology across these fields poses a challenge. This essay focuses on the term ‘school-to-work transition’. In career development and worker employability literature, it often refers to the movement from all stages of schooling into the labour market, while in graduate employability literature it is understood to only refer to the transition from secondary school into the labour market. To illustrate this issue, we use a metaphor comparing grapes to wine. Consequently, we propose ‘education-to-work transition’ as an overarching term, with various subcategories specific to secondary and tertiary education.

Keywords/key phrases: career development, graduate employability, school-to-work transition, university-to-work transition, vocational training-to-work transition, worker employability.

1. Setting The Scene

The literature on graduate employability and career development has developed independently with limited interaction (Healy et al., 2022). This has led to the ‘jingle-jangle fallacy’ where different researchers use different terminology for the same concept. One key example, and the focus of this essay, is the phrase ‘school-to-work transition’. Offering alternative terminology can bridge the graduate employability and career development fields, and address calls for closer integration of the graduate and worker employability literature (Akkermans et al., 2024).

2. Defining The Problem

In graduate employability literature, ‘university-to-work transition’ refers to university students becoming graduates and entering the labour market (e.g., Donald et al., 2024; Healy, 2023; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2017). In contrast, these scholars understand ‘school-to-work transition’ as specifically referring to secondary school students transitioning into the workforce. However, in the career development and worker employability literature, ‘school-

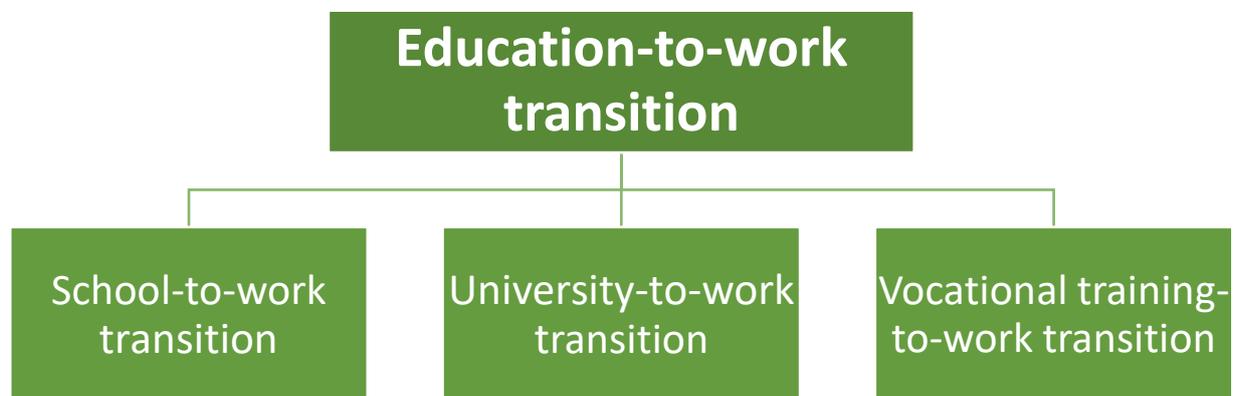
to-work transition’ encompasses movement into the labour market from schooling in its broadest sense, including all forms of secondary or tertiary education (e.g., Blokker et al., 2023; Lo Presti et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). The term ‘university-to-work transition’ does appear in the career development literature, but typically in works where the authors also publish in higher education journals (e.g., Donald et al., 2022). Additionally, in some countries (e.g., Hungary) the term ‘school’ is colloquially used to refer to ‘university’.

To clarify, consider this metaphor. In the initial process of growing grapes, the outcome is grapes, which we use to represent secondary school students transitioning into the labour market after finishing their studies. Some red and white grapes are fermented to make wine, representing students entering university or vocational training and subsequently entering the labour market. When a friend says they will bring you grapes, you expect grapes, not wine. However, using ‘school-to-work transition’ in career development and worker employability literature often confuses graduate employability scholars, akin to expecting grapes but receiving either grapes, red wine, or white wine. To be clear, we are not suggesting that grapes, white wine or red wine are inherently better or worse than the other, purely that they are distinct.

3. Alternative Terminology

Given the problematic nature of ‘school-to-work transition’ as an all-encompassing term, what can we use instead to enable researchers from different fields to empower students for sustainable careers (Donald & Mouratidou, 2022) and sustainable career development (Shtaltovna et al., 2024)? We propose ‘education-to-work transition’ as an overarching term, with ‘school-to-work transition’, ‘university-to-work transition’, and ‘vocational training-to-work transition’ corresponding to the transition from secondary or tertiary education into the labour market, respectively as subcategories. Figure 1 offers a visual representation.

Figure 1. Education-to-work transition



Source: Author’s Own Creation, 2024

4. Conclusion

In this essay, we differentiated grapes from wine by suggesting ‘education-to-work transition’ as an inclusive term, encompassing ‘school-to-work transition’, ‘university-to-work transition’ and ‘vocational training-to-work transition’. This distinction helps address calls to bridge the graduate employability, worker employability, and career development literature (Akkermans et al., 2024; Healy et al., 2022). In the spirit of collegiality, we acknowledge the valuable contributions of scholars like Blokker and colleagues (2023) in the fields of career development and worker employability. Rather than sew division, we seek common ground to overcome the ‘jingle-jangle fallacy’ and foster interdisciplinary collaborations.

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Corresponding Author

The corresponding author for this manuscript is Associate Professor William E. Donald who can be contacted by email via w.e.donald@gmail.com.