Role of curricular internship in psychology in the transition to the job market: Perceptions and experiences of interns and psychologists

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Introduction

The curricular internship is a formative step of great impact in the personal and professional development of the student (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2009) for allowing a direct contact with the world of work (cf. Silva et al., 2016). It also provides opportunities for professional experimentation and allows the development of self-efficacy, autonomy and technical and interpersonal skills that assist students in decision making and problem solving (Caires & Almeida, 2000; Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes, 1996; Vieira, Caires, & Coimbra, 2011).

Aims

1. Understand how psychology students experience the curricular internship.
2. Understand how the curricular internship prepares the newly formed psychologists for the job market.

Methodology

Two qualitative descriptive studies were conducted: Study 1 - semi-structured interviews with three students who were performing or who had already undergone the psychology curricular internship. Study 2 - online structured questionnaire (with opened-ended questions) to 30 individuals working in the field of psychology.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2011) and quantitative data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis.

Results

For the first and second aims, five and two themes were found, respectively. These themes are shown in the scheme under. Overall, our results show that the distinct phases of the curricular internship entail different responsibilities and levels of autonomy for the students and that the knowledge and skills developed during this process promote personal and professional development and facilitate the transition to the job market.

Conclusion

This study highlights the role of the elements of the intern’s welcoming institution, in terms of supervision, modeling and monitoring. It also reveals the challenging environment of the internship and the gradual autonomy of the demands and the confrontation with the challenges properly suited to the development and emerging capacities of the intern, thus enhancing the autonomy, responsibility and confidence of the interns in solving problems. It also reinforces the relevance of this formative experience in the success of the transition to professional practice.

This research points areas for improvement of curricular internships in psychology (e.g., the tasks to be performed, the monitoring, support and feedback). The curricular internship is a fundamental formative stage for both students and future workers, who benefit and develop through it at multiple levels, obtaining gains in knowledge (not only professional, but also personal), skills, attitudes and the acquisition of new perspectives about the world of work.

References