



Independent Research Group

Lack of Training:
Employment and Life Chances
of the Less Educated

Contents

Research Topic Relevance 237

Research Agenda 238

Methods/Datasets 240

Research Results 241

Publications 2001–2002 246

Duration: January 2000–December 2004

Head of Research Group: Heike Solga

Doctoral Fellows: Justin Powell
Sandra Wagner

Research Topic Relevance

The origin of the group of less-educated persons is to be found in the massive educational expansion in most modern societies after the Second World War. Both educational opportunities and attainment have increased for most children. As a consequence, today young persons entering the labor market without the minimum expected certificate—one that is necessary, but not sufficient for labor market success—represent a residual category of shrinking proportion, but one in a serious crisis due to ever higher expectations for completion of upper secondary education (see Fig. 1).

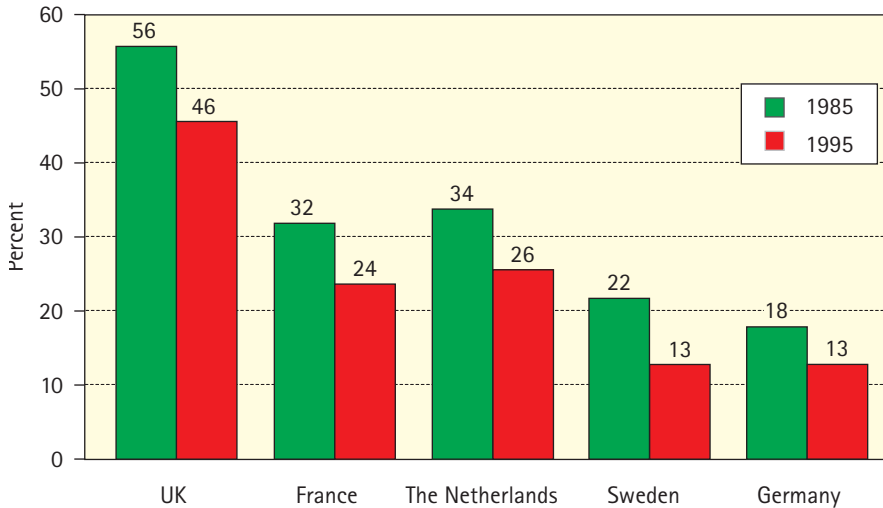


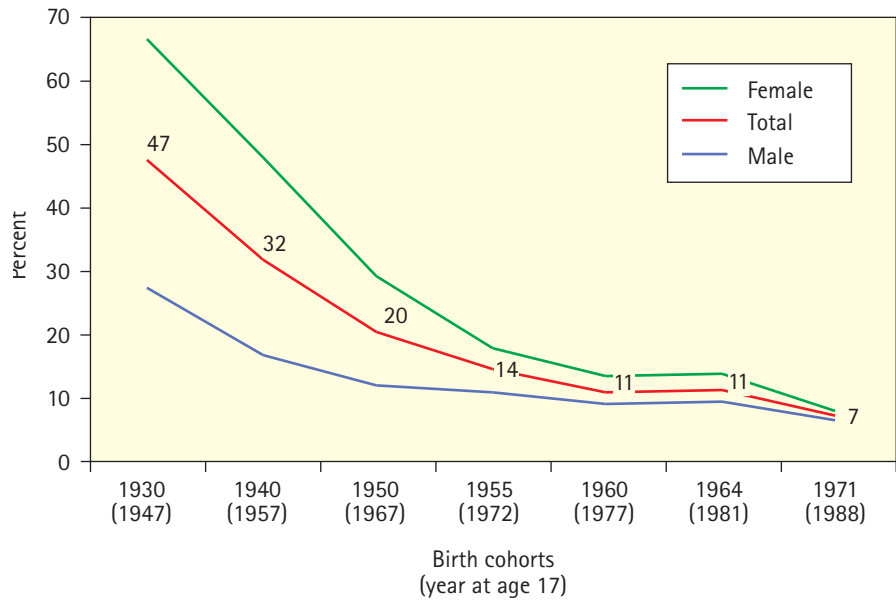
Figure 1. Proportion of persons 25- to 27/28-years-old with less than upper secondary education.

Source: Murray & Steedman (1998). *Growing skills in Europe*.

Figure 2 presents the proportions of different cohorts of youth in Western Germany who have not completed any vocational training by age 25. The proportion has declined from nearly half (47%) in the 1930 cohort to only 7% for the 1971 cohort. Simultaneously with this decreasing proportion, strengthened selection processes in schools and in the labor market are taking place. Our analyses show that in comparison with past cohorts, the proportion among today's youth who lack training coming from socially disadvantaged families has increased (Solga, 2002a, 2002b; Solga & Wagner, 2001).

Furthermore, half of those 20–29 year-olds without training are not of German origin. Among the 26–30 year-olds of non-German ethnic background, 40% have no completed vocational training certificate (Solga, in press-b). Even among those who have lived in Germany prior to the age of 10 or were born here and attended German schools, the proportion is one-quarter. In sum, while during the 1950s this group was largely female, today it has a high proportion of ethnic minority youth (who are furthermore over-proportionally often classified in school as having special educa-

Figure 2. Proportion of persons without completed vocational training up to age 25* (only persons with West German origin).



* Persons in training/at university at age 25 are not counted as "untrained."

Data: German Life History Study of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development (MPIB) and MPIB/IAB Cohort Study 1964/71.

tional needs). Our analyses show that the educational and vocational training systems as gatekeeping institutions play a key role in defining this group, determining its social composition and affecting its public perception and reception. Historical changes over time and variations in the proportion of less-educated youth by country indicate that the "production" of less-educated persons varies considerably by institutional setting. Moreover, the almost entire disappearance of gender differences in the (native-German) group of less-educated people, alongside persistent ethnic differences, indicate that educational structures translate "ascriptive" characteristics of individuals, distribute the risk of educational failure differentially, and determine who receives educational certificates.

Research Agenda

We investigate the *causes and consequences of less education* from a life-course perspective and analyze changes over time as well as regionally and cross-nationally. Our joint research questions are: How do less-educated persons' disadvantages at multiple status passages cumulate over their life courses? What changes, especially in institutional rules and processes, have occurred over the past several decades and what consequences have these had?

(1) *The Causes of Less-Educated Youth*

We investigate how initial inequalities are transformed into exclusion from training and tertiary education, focusing on the educational and training systems and their social mechanisms: sorting and selection

functions, the learning environments that they provide for children with different characteristics—given initial inequalities—and the recruitment practices of firms for apprenticeships or on-the-job training opportunities. The two dissertations primarily address this research question, investigating the societal and institutional factors responsible for the over-representation of certain groups among less-educated youth.

Sandra Wagner's dissertation *Youth Without Vocational Training: Educational Expansion and Institutional Structures in Western Germany Since 1949* investigates the German educational and vocational training system at different stages of its institutional development, asking how it has transformed social origin and ethnicity into disadvantageous resources for socialization and competence development, manifested in low educational attainment. Her contribution is to show why the label "less-educated" is attributed differentially in these changing institutional contexts and, thus, how the social composition of the group of less-educated persons has changed over time (see below "c").

Justin Powell's dissertation *Barriers to Inclusion: The Institutionalization of Special Education in Germany and the United States, 1970–2000* shows how schooling structures categorize students, asking how special educational institutional arrangements themselves contribute to reduced levels of educational attainment for youth classified as "disabled." In Germany today, school leavers from special schools are significantly over-represented among less-edu-

cated youth and those without vocational training, constituting around 40% of all school leavers without the lower secondary certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*). Besides its proportional importance in studying this educational group, "disability" is of particular significance for our research because it highlights the power of institutional regulations and structures as they "discover" and reify "student disabilities," critically altering individuals' life trajectories. Because the processes that affect life-course phases and transitions as well as individual orientations and aspirations are cumulative, we analyze *early* opportunities and differentiation. Comparing dramatically variable levels of segregation, integration, and inclusion by region and by special-needs category in Germany and the U.S., we show how (special) education institutions generate both student disability and social inequality in credential societies.

(2) Social Consequences of Less Education

The group's second research focus is the social and especially the long-term consequences of attaining less education. Heike Solga addresses this research question in her analyses of labor market participation of less-educated West Germans since the 1950s. We know that in many Western countries, less-educated persons constitute an increasing share of the long-term unemployed. They are less able to enter into even unskilled jobs. The dominant (mainly economic) explanation is the so-called "displacement" argument, which theorizes that given an over-

supply of qualified persons, trained persons out-qualify less-educated persons in job competition. Here, decreasing employment opportunities are seen as being essentially a labor market (mis)matching problem. Yet that explanation does not include the "production process" of less education in its analysis. Our project offers a sociological explanation for the increasing labor market vulnerability of less-educated youth, emphasizing the consequences of historically declining proportions of less-educated youth. This sociological explanation takes into account changes in group size, group composition, and employers' perceptions over the course of educational expansion. This theoretically-derived hypothesis, which has been empirically strengthened by our work, states that less education itself has become a social stigma in highly credentialized societies (such as Germany) and is closely related to the social and psychological processes of self and external selection. We conceptualize analyses of *less-educated persons' life chances in other life domains* as the logical step following labor market analyses. We will explore the extent to which discernible differences in these opportunities can be attributed to either the status "less educated" itself or to labor market exclusion.

Methods/Datasets

Much of our research compares different West German birth cohorts, allowing us to investigate the two research questions given changing educational norms and institutional

settings in educational and training systems, as well as under varying economic circumstances. In our comparison of Western Germany with the U.S., we examine whether and how the degree of locational "segregation" in educational systems—a highly differentiated and hierarchical school system in contrast to tracking or ability grouping within comprehensive schools—influences the production of differential educational attainment levels for ascriptive groups, such as, gender, ethnicity, ability. In addition, we have completed comparative analyses of East and West Germany before unification to discern the extent to which "marketization" in modern capitalist countries may be mainly responsible for less-educated persons' labor market disadvantages, besides unemployment.

The *Life Course Studies* of both West and East German birth cohorts of the Institute's Center for Sociology and the Study of the Life Course are the empirical foundation for our analyses of social change in Germany over time. However, two groups are nearly completely missing from this database, namely those who are of non-German origin and those who attended special schools. For the former, we use the German Institute for Economic Research's German Socio-Economic Panel Study (GSOEP). For the latter, we complement collections of aggregate statistics with our own life history database (from 105 school-leavers from schools for "learning disabled" children) derived from a pilot project on "job coaching" in North Rhine-Westphalia that we studied with the organizers at the

University of Cologne, 2000–2002. This study highlights the interrelationships of ethnicity, social class and disadvantage found in special schools for pupils with learning difficulties. This dataset is particularly valuable because most large-scale educational studies in Germany, including the recent OECD-PISA study, do not specifically address special school pupils or graduates.

Research Results

(a) Differences in the Institutionalization of Special Education in the German and United States School Systems and their Consequences for Educational Participation and Educational Attainment

For almost two hundred years, but especially since the 1960s, both Germany and the U.S. have increasingly provided schooling for children classified as disabled—in structures ranging along a broad continuum from special schools to full inclusion in regular classrooms. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) developed one of the most differentiated special school systems in the world with more than ten separate school types. In both countries, education reforms and debates have shifted from whether and how these children can be integrated, to the institutional structures in which they should be taught. Despite growing consensus that school integration and inclusion are desirable, institutional inertia, embodied in highly differentiated classification systems and (special) education bureaucracies and represented in professional interests, block diverse

attempts to school all children together in regular classrooms. Countries such as Norway and Italy have completely eliminated special schools. In contrast, Germany's educational system still segregates the overwhelming majority of its disabled pupils: Over 90% of children classified as disabled do not attend regular schools. While schools in the U.S. still separate the majority of pupils classified as having special needs for part of the schooldays, over 95% of all pupils who have an individualized, special education plan do attend regular, neighborhood schools.

In Germany, nearly 80% of all pupils who attend special schools do not even receive the lower secondary certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*). In many German *Länder*, special schools are not even allowed to offer the higher degrees that are required for most vocational training programs or tertiary education. In the U.S., a quarter of each year's exiters from special education programs are dropouts or ageouts, a fifth return to regular education, and nearly half graduate with a high school diploma or certificate.

Historical-institutional case studies of special education policy together with aggregate education statistics over time manifest that institutionalization of special education and classificatory praxis and the resulting distributions of educational certificates vary considerably by region and disability category. Variations in all indicators, but especially in educational attainment rates within Germany and the U.S. show clearly that existing institutional structures in (special) education have dramatic

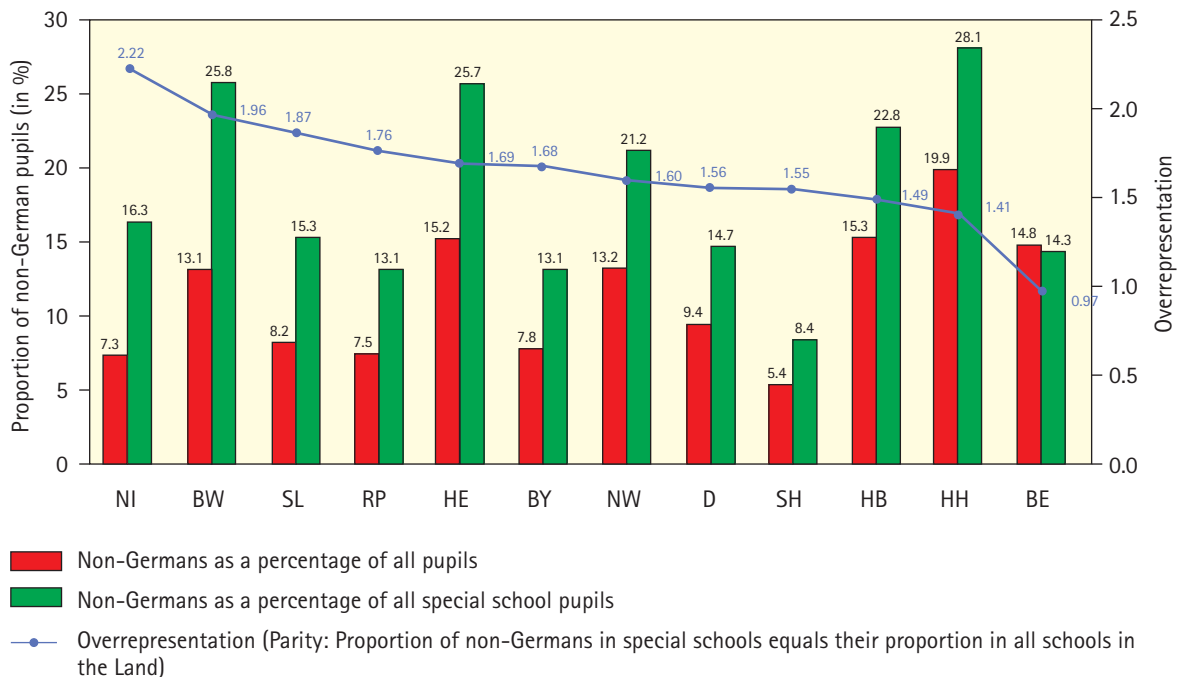
effects on the risk distribution of educational failure.

(b) The Nexus of Ethnicity and "Disability" in the German School System

Between 1965 and 1994, the number of non-German students in Germany increased twenty-fold. In each year since 1991, over a million students without a German passport attended schools in Germany: one in ten students were non-German. At the same time, the proportion of non-German students in segregated special schools rose continuously, such that by 1999 almost 15% of all students in special schools were not German, although their percentage of all students in the Federal Republic was only 9.4%, resulting in an overrepresentation factor of 1.56. Our analyses show that children without German citizenship are

clearly overrepresented in special schools and the trend is going up, not down (Powell & Wagner, 2002; Wagner & Powell, in press). In 1999, a full 70% of non-German pupils attending special schools were classified with a "learning disability"; the remaining 30% attended other types of special schools (for German special school pupils the ratio was 50:50). Furthermore, dramatic variance between federal states (*Länder*) in special school placement rates of non-German students (see Fig. 3) and between children of different European nationalities continues (in the 1998/99 school year, the placement rate varied between 0.5% and 13.6%). This regional variance in the distribution of non-German youth among the nine categories of special educational needs (as of 1994) demonstrate state-specific educa-

Figure 3. Overrepresentation of non-German pupils in special schools, 1999.



Source: Powell, J. J., & Wagner, S. J. (2002).
 Data: Kultusministerkonferenz (2001).

tion policies and institutionalized educational pathways. Significant differences in the acceptance of inclusion and integrative pedagogical concepts, in teacher training and certification, in the development of school systems, and financial constraints resist change. The overrepresentation of children and youth who belong to ethnic or racial minority groups who are schooled in segregating or separating special educational programs is not only an important indicator of their individual educational and employment opportunities. Continuously over the past three decades, it has also been an indicator of social and institutional discrimination in Germany (and the U.S.).

(c) Changing Learning Environments in Germany's "Hauptschulen"

Nearly all sociological research on the results of educational expansion focuses on the reduction in social inequality in terms of access to higher education institutions. Yet the following question has been largely ignored: What consequences has the outflow to higher secondary school types had for pupils in the lowest general German school type (*Hauptschule*)? Explanations for individuals' school failure are not only found in the individuals' own families, but also in their learning environments. Analyses of peer groups' social composition by Heike Solga and Sandra Wagner (2001) for native West German children have shown that today children from less-privileged families—children with parents employed in low-skill, low-wage jobs, and children growing up in stressful family situa-

tions—are overrepresented in the *Hauptschule*. In terms of its educational environment, much less now than in the past this lower German school type today represents a field of "anticipatory socialization" (H. Fend) providing less advantageous role models. These changes in composition of pupil groups point out that educational expansion has impacted lower educational groups in the educational hierarchy just as it has the higher: We find long-term increases in participation rates in higher education, especially for younger cohorts. Then as now we find that the majority of youth without vocational training (in Western Germany) are school leavers from the *Hauptschule*. Yet these school careers can be seen less as a process of status attainment and increasingly as a process of status ascription. As our recent analyses show (Solga, Independent Research Group Working Paper 2/2002), this ascriptive process is visible in the considerably lengthened school careers even of lower educational groups. In addition, today the median age of entry into first employment of these youth has dramatically increased to about 21 (compared to 16 in the 1930 birth cohort). Especially important for these less-educated youth, their educational pathways, and their schooling experiences is that—in international comparison—the German educational system's selection process is largely irreversible.

(d) Less Education in State-Socialist and Capitalist Societies

In his diploma thesis (2001), Kai Maaz compared less-educated per-

Online publications and Independent Research Group Working Papers: <http://www.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/en/forschung/nwg/arbeitsberichte.htm>

sons' employment chances in East and West Germany in the 1980s (Maaz, Independent Research Group Working Paper 3/2002). Two results in particular are worthy of specific mention because for many scholars they were empirically and theoretically unexpected. *Firstly*, the group of persons without vocational training in the FRG—with its much more highly stratified and multi-tiered school system—was less (!) socially homogeneous than the same group in the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) comprehensive school system. In the GDR, the odds of persons without vocational training having parents who also had none was six times higher in comparison with their peers who received vocational training. In the FRG, this risk was only three times as high. Thus, a comprehensive school system that treats unequal children equally and continues to label and categorize children as "educational failures" (such that they drop out of school before receiving a certificate), will not necessarily eliminate social inequality in lower educational strata. *Secondly*, Maaz' analyses show that the currently highly favored modular vocational training programs, which were routinely used in training lower performing youth in the GDR, do not necessarily increase this group's employment opportunities. In fact, these types of certification in a highly certificate-oriented mobility system—as existed in both Germanys and continues to exist today—actually lead to their getting stuck in low-skilled jobs for the rest of their lives.

(e) Stigmatization by Negative Selection

In her research on changes over time in less-skilled individuals' employment chances, Heike Solga (2002a, 2002b) shows that the general scarcity of available jobs and the oversupply of higher-qualified people are not *solely* responsible for less-skilled people's dwindling employment opportunities. Logistic regression analyses instead highlight the increasing risk borne by less-qualified people of finding only a low-skilled, dead-end job—independent of changes in employment supply and demand. Cohort comparisons show, for example, that the difference between those with and without vocational training has increased remarkably over time and is largest in the 1960 cohort (the youngest cohort she has analyzed thus far, see Fig. 4).

The fact that despite holding constant the relationship of employment supply and demand, there continue to be significant, even increasing, effects of less education, suggests that there are additional reasons besides displacement for the lessened opportunities and mobility of less-educated people into qualified work. We have developed four further explanations for this lapse in the displacement hypothesis. Less-educated persons' job opportunities have worsened due to:

- (1) the increased discrediting of less-qualified persons as "unemployable" by employers and society;
- (2) social stigmatization that eventually also leads to self-stigmatization;

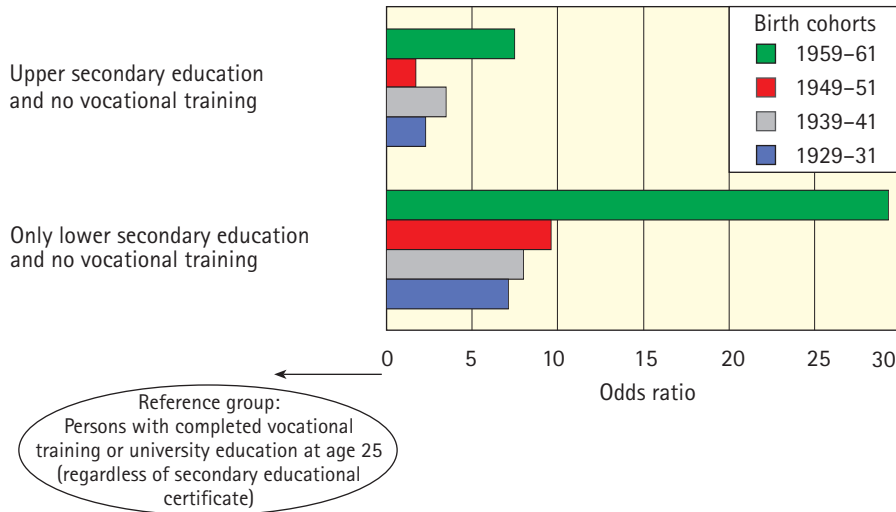


Figure 4. Inner-cohort differences (between persons with and without completed vocational training) in the risk of being in a low-skilled first job (only people of West German origin, cohorts 1929-1961).

Note. Persons who were still in training at age 25 are not counted as having no completed vocational training.
 Controlled for gender: Inner-cohort differences presented can not be attributed to differences in gender distributions.

Source: Solga (2002a).

Data: German Life History Study, Max Planck Institute for Human Development.

(3) structural risks of exclusion caused by institutional practices (e.g., in educational and training systems) that limit the scope of their action in future; and

(4) structural risks of exclusion caused by increasing social homogeneity of less-educated youth's social background and peer networks that reduce their network resources for finding employment.

Publications 2001–2002

Krappmann, L., & Powell, J. J. (in press). Kinder, die besondere pädagogischer Förderung bedürfen. In J. Baumert, K. Cortina, A. Leschinsky, K. U. Mayer, & L. Trommer (Eds.), *Das Bildungswesen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

Powell, J. J. (in press-a). Eugenics. In T. Fitzpatrick et al. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of social policy*. London: Routledge.

– (in press-b). Euthanasia. In T. Fitzpatrick et al. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of social policy*. London: Routledge.

– (in press-c). Grenzen der Inklusion. Die Institutionalisierung von sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf in Deutschland und den USA, 1970–2000. In J. Allmendinger (Ed.), *Entstaatlichung und soziale Sicherheit. Tagungsband, 31. Kongress der DGS in Leipzig*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

– (in press-d). Hochbegabt, behindert oder normal? Klassifikationssysteme des sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarfs in Deutschland und den Vereinigten Staaten. In G. Cloerkes (Ed.), *Wie man behindert wird*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter.

– (in press-e). Special needs. In T. Fitzpatrick et al. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of social policy*. London: Routledge.

– (in press-f). Stigma. In T. Fitzpatrick et al. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of social policy*. London: Routledge.

Powell, J. J., & Wagner, S. J. (2002). Zur Entwicklung der Überrepräsentanz von Migrant*innen an Sonderschulen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland seit 1991. *Gemeinsam leben: Zeitschrift für integrative Erziehung*, 10, 65–70.

Solga, H. (in press-a). Ausbildungslose und die Radikalisierung ihrer sozialen Ausgrenzung. In H. Bude & A. Willisch (Eds.), *Ausgegrenzte, Entbehrliche, Überflüssige*. Hamburg:

Hamburger Edition HIS Verlag. – (in press-b). Jugendliche ohne Schulabschluss und ihre Wege in den Arbeitsmarkt. In J. Baumert, K. Cortina, A. Leschinsky, K. U. Mayer, & L. Trommer (Eds.), *Das Bildungswesen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

– (2002a). "Ausbildungslosigkeit" als soziales Stigma in Bildungsgesellschaften. Ein soziologischer Erklärungsbeitrag für die wachsenden Arbeitsmarktprobleme von gering qualifizierten Personen. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 54, 476–505.

– (2002b). "Stigmatization by negative selection": Explaining less-educated people's decreasing employment opportunities. *European Sociological Review*, 18, 159–178.

– (2001). Jugendliche ohne Berufsausbildung. Die neue Qualität eines alten Problems. *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 52, 41–48.

– (2001). Longitudinal surveys and the study of occupational mobility: Panel and retrospective design in comparison. *Quality and Quantity*, 35, 291–309.

Solga, H., Powell, J. J., & Wagner, S. (in press). Ausbildungslosigkeit: Bedingungen und Folgen mangelnder Berufsausbildung. Aktuelle Forschungsprojekte zur Sozialstruktur und sozialer Ungleichheit. In J. Allmendinger (Ed.), *Entstaatlichung und soziale Sicherheit. Tagungsband, 31. Kongress der DGS in Leipzig*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Solga, H., & Wagner, S. J. (in press). Die Bildungsexpansion und ihre Konsequenzen für das soziale Kapital der Hauptschule. In B. Kraus (Ed.), *Titel-Kämpfe. Bildungssoziologische Beiträge*. Weinheim: Juventa.

– (2001). Paradoxie der Bildungsexpansion. Die doppelte Benachteiligung von Haupt-

schülern. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 4, 107–127.

Wagner, S. J., & Powell, J. J. (in press). Ethnisch-kulturelle Ungleichheit im deutschen Bildungssystem. Zur Überrepräsentanz von Migrant*innen Jugendlichen an Sonderschulen. In G. Cloerkes (Ed.), *Wie man behindert wird*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter.



Left to right: Heike Solga, Justin Powell, Sandra Wagner.

