



Education as socialization

Education is a major instrument of socialization. In simple societies it may be almost exclusively what we may call 'primary' socialization- the training of children in the appropriate forms of behaviour and skills required by all members of that society. Secondary socialization — the preparation of children for particular roles in society — will be largely restricted to those societies whose complexity allows their members to pursue a much greater variety of interests and to specialize in the development of specific talents. Such complex societies in particular require individuals to undertake a great variety of occu-

pations to maintain the division of labour which characterizes them. It is in these latter societies, therefore, that formal provision for secondary socialization is made in the institution of an education system, which prepares youngsters for a variety of future roles. However, whether education consists simply of the passing on of a unified body of skills necessary for survival, often by elder siblings or, at the other end of the scale, is transmitted through the highly bureaucratized, elaborate and costly system which complex industrialized societies have typically evolved to provide for the wide range of specialist skills they require, some kind of assessment procedure will be necessary. Not least because the willingness of the individual to submit to assessment reflects and reinforces his commitment to joining that particular society. Thus in simple societies the prevalence of *rites de passage*, often coinciding with puberty — the time at which a child is able and expected to take on the full obligations of an adult member of society — reflect the kinds of formal assessment procedures instituted in such societies. These are essentially 'qualifying' tests, the time at which a youngster can demonstrate his mastery of the norms and skills necessary for effective participation in that society, thereby allowing the existing members of that society to judge his fitness to belong to it. In such a situation the assessment procedures will be largely undifferentiated, except perhaps between boys and girls, since this is the only significant division of labour. Thus the questions posed above of who to assess, what to assess, when, how and why, will be equally unproblematic. All aspirant members (who) — and this will be almost exclusively children, since it is rare for adults to move from society to society in such situations — will be adjudged at the same stage of their life (when), on the same relevant criteria of basic competence in necessary skills (what), in order to ensure the continued survival of the society (why). The remaining question — how — will be largely determined by the need for validity in the test, that is, that the skills assessed match as closely as possible the potential real life requirements. Thus the Red Indian boy was traditionally required to slay his own buffalo and demonstrate his ability to provide all the essentials of life for himself from its carcass. Masai youngsters are required to demonstrate their ability to



survive alone and unprovisioned in the bush for a substantial period of time. In many societies boys must demonstrate their ability to be the courageous warriors needed to defend their society by submitting bravely to the pain of circumcision. It is important to note, however, that in such simple societies it is expected that *all* members should pass the test: the emphasis is on qualifying, not selection.

I have digressed at some length from the contemporary school situation in order to clarify by the most simple examples the relationship between educational assessment and society. That the *rites de passage* of our own society are highly complex and problematic, differentiated and continually changing, is a direct reflection of the similar nature of the mechanisms of secondary socialization which provide for the division of labour characterizing our society. We now turn, therefore, to a consideration of the much more complex issues involved in the decisions to be made about assessment practices in advanced industrial societies.