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'Third' institution needed to bridge family-school gap for youth

Stephen T. Russell

California's youth of the new millennium will be the first adults to have grown up in a truly multicultural society; their experiences as children will set the stage for the leadership that they will provide beyond our lifetimes. Along with dramatic changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the state's population, the next 50 years will also bring significant changes to family life. These changes have profound implications for public education and civic involvement. A new, "third" social institution is needed to encourage youth in meaningful developmental activities when they are not at home or in school, and to prepare them for life in a diverse society.

As we cross the threshold into a new millennium, we are witnessing dramatic changes relevant to the well-being of children and youth in California. This special issue of *California Agriculture* focuses on population growth and change, with emphasis on the ways that the shifting populations of racial and ethnic groups will forever alter life in our state. Population change has obvious relevance to California's youth population because the first evidence of these shifts will appear in this segment of our society. Perhaps more importantly, California's youth of the new millennium will be the first adults to have grown up in a truly multicultural society; their experiences as children will set the stage for the leadership they will provide beyond our lifetimes.

In addition to changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the state (see p. 11), we also are witnessing continued demographic and lifestyle changes to family life, and hence youth and family well-being. Increasing numbers of nontraditional families and the growing demands of labor-force participation on today's parents are changing the context for childhood and adolescence unlike any other in history. These changes bring with them profound implications for public education, and for managing the lives of young people during the times between school and family guidance. Finally, we are seeing a shift in the ways individuals and communities think about youth and youth development. Rather than viewing "youth issues" as lists of the problems that adolescents experience (focusing on teenage

With changes in family structure and increased work demands on parents, young people are spending more time unsupervised. By 2025, California will have 14.5 million children under 18 such as these Suisun City teenagers, *left*, and Fresno teenagers, *above*. *Photos by Michael Macor*/San Francisco Chronicle.

pregnancy, substance abuse, or school failure and dropout), more people are beginning to imagine youth as resources for their families and communities.

New realities for youth in 2000

Rapid population growth defines many of the changes facing California in the coming decades. Much of that growth will be within the youth population (fig. 1). There are 9.35 million children and adolescents (the population under the age of 18) in California at the turn of the century; that number is expected to grow to 14.5 million by 2025 (US Census Bureau 1999). While one in eight U.S. children under age 17 reside in California today, by 2025 one-fifth of the nation's children will live here (Children Now 1999). This represents unprecedented growth in an average lifetime.

The majority of growth among the nonadult population will be among groups that have traditionally been racial and ethnic minorities. Forty-year projections for California illustrate a dramatically growing youth population, one that will be predominantly Hispanic as early as 2010, and overwhelmingly so in less than 40 years. Over the last 15 years, Asian-American youth have become equal in number to African-American youth; by 2040, there will be 2.5 times more Asian American than African-American. Anticipating these changes, the very meaning of "minority" can no longer be based on nonwhite racial, religious or cultural groups with small population representations. Further, the growing population of nonwhite youth will have strong ties to Hispanic and Asian cultures. As these children grow up in California, they will reinforce community cultures that blend Hispanic, Asian and Anglo-American traditions. Thus, as we look toward the future, California has the potential — and opportunity — to become the first racially and ethnically integrated, and thereby truly multicultural, modern Western society.

In addition to dramatic changes in the cultural composition of the state, other demographic changes are taking place that have important implications for youth. The proportion of children in California growing up in households headed by a single parent is increasing, a trend that shows no sign of reversal (fig. 2). In 1998, 27% of California's children under 18 lived in single-family homes (US Census Bureau 1998). With the growing ethnic and racial diversity, there will also be increasing numbers of large families (see p. 11). The trends toward more single-parent and larger families forecast a future with more families living in or near poverty (Corcoran and Chaudry 1997). Each of these factors represents a risk in the lives of children and youth — risks for compromised health, educational performance and attainment, and ultimately for healthy and successful adult lives.

Compounding these risks, California parents are laboring more hours to keep pace with the state's rising cost of living (California Department of Finance 1998). For example, adults in California manufacturing occupations worked an average of 41.2 hours per week in 1995, and 41.9 hours only 2 years later; likewise, average overtime hours increased from 4.2 in 1994 to 5.1

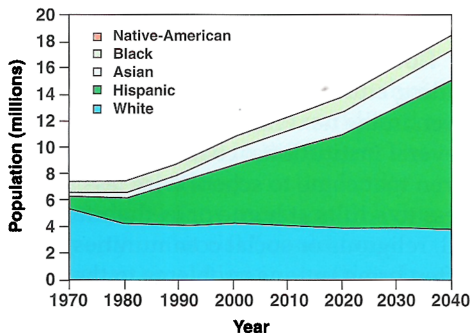

Fig. 1. Population of youth under age 20 in California, 1970–2040. Native-Americans made up 0.4% of the population in 1970 (32,000) and are projected to make up the same proportion in 2040 (71,000). Source: California Department of Finance, 1998.

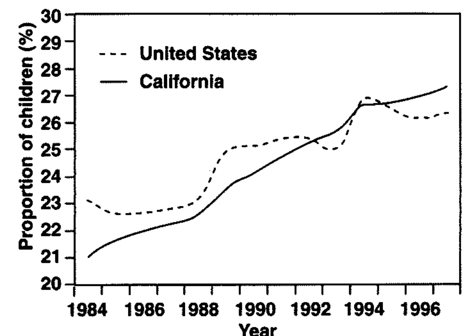

Fig. 2. Percentage of single-parent households with children in the U.S. and in California. Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Suzanne Paisley

Jack Kelly Clark

***Top*, Programs like the 4-H After School Activities Program (ASAP) in West Oakland help to constructively fill the gap of time between school and home. In the Central Valley, a mother helps her son with his homework.**

in 1997. While it is good news for adults that the economy can support this surprisingly high number of hours, the bad news for youth is their parents have less time to spend with their families, increasing the potential for more children to grow up "at risk."

While the work lives of many adults have expanded and decreased their time at home and with family, the corollary for youth — school time — has remained relatively constant for several generations. As parents have less time for family, entertainment and religious or community involvement, youth spend an increasing proportion of their time away from both family and school. Single parenthood, women's work-force participation, and increasing work hours have changed family life, but public education has not changed as quickly in response. To be sure, many schools are responding to the before- and after-school needs of children, and a plethora of private programs are available. However, many such programs cost money, and with 29% of California children under 18 living in families with incomes at or below the poverty level ($16,450 for a family of four), access is often limited to those with the financial means (Children Now 1999). Institutions of formal education have been unable to fill in the increasing gap of time that parents are unavailable to directly care for and supervise their children.

As never before, California communities of the 21st century will face challenges providing for the youth population. At the same time, however, a hopeful shift is taking place in the way many communities approach youth issues. For the past 30 years, the United States has been a largely adolescent-negative society. When discussed at the community or policy level, attention to youth issues routinely implied problems: substance use and abuse, delinquency, sexual activity and early pregnancy. In recent years, these social attitudes have begun to change thanks to research on the developmental assets and resilience of youth (those who "beat the odds") (Braverman et al. 1994a). Notably, Werner, a professor in Human and Community Development at UC Davis, and her colleague Smith conducted some of the earliest and most influential work in this field (Werner and Smith 1992). This research has prompted communities and policy-makers to critically examine how the contexts of youths' lives can be improved to promote safe and healthy development.

Implications for California

Given the forecast for these changes in diversity, family life, and approaches to youth development in California, what are the implications for the lives of youth and their families, schools and communities during the first half of the 21st century?

Family life. Families will face challenges, not only in the practical aspects of family living, but in preparing the next generation for life in diverse communities. Parents who have less time with and for their children are stretched to provide safe, healthy opportunities for their children in nonschool, nonhome hours. Increasing numbers of parents will require options for safe, affordable child care and youth activities. At the same time, more families will be faced with the realities of living in multiracial and multiethnic communities. If the numbers of families living in racially and ethnically segregated (and often literally gated) communities continue to rise, the increasing inequality described by Taylor and Martin (see p. 26) may lead to a polarization between social classes in the degree to which they experience diversity. Nevertheless, whether or not social class insulates families of the future, we all will live in a state that is unavoidably diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and social class.

Public education. For schools, providing education to California's children in the next millennium will bring several institutional challenges. Children that come to school with less access to adults at home or in their familial, religious or social communities often bring unique problems to the classroom and teacher. For many of these youth, teachers play significant roles as caring adults in their lives. Already, teachers and schools are called upon to provide basic nurturing for children and youth; the degree to which they will be required to do this

Michael Macor/San Francisco Chronicle

This 'third institution' would literally fill in the daily gap between school and home life, engaging youth in meaningful activities and opportunities for physical and emotional development, while preparing them for adult roles in a diverse society.

Children from the Arbuckle Child Development Center play soccer in a San Jose park.

in the future will have a significant impact on the quality of public education. Beyond the issues brought on by growing numbers of children with special needs, the very definition of what constitutes appropriate public education for children living in a multicultural society will continue to be controversial. For example, does "appropriate" education for a diverse population include instruction in multiple languages? More generally, schools will be expected to provide education about diverse populations in ways that accurately portray multiple current and historical perspectives. Multicultural education in the next century will carry with it lasting implications for future generations of Californians.

Communities. The forecast for communities could be quite pessimistic. Existing levels of racial and ethnic tension among teenagers could lead to dramatic problems in the future. The demographic changes in the family that produce many more youth living in poverty or "at risk" could foreshadow an escalation in youth problems across the state. No doubt, the potential for these problems will challenge the recent positive changes in attitudes about youth. On the other hand, if communities continue to approach the issues of youth with a focus on community solutions rather than on youth and their problems, many of the potential difficulties can likely be avoided.

The University's role

Through expanded research and outreach, UC should play a major role by helping families, schools and communities understand these coming changes and develop effective ways to plan for them. In general, parents are best able to encourage youth to embrace the opportunities of a diverse society. But parents and other caring adults need resources to help them talk with their children about diversity, and they need to know the importance of having these conversations. Through the 4-H program, UC has long played a leading role in providing high-quality learning tools for use in informal settings (Junge et al. 1994; Braverman et al. 1994b). About 135,000 California youth and 18,000 adults participated in 4-H programs during 1999, while thousands more benefited from staff collaborations and research activities. Many of the tools developed by 4-H focus on complementing the learning that takes place in formal education (scientific, analytical and verbal skills). In the future, more attention should be placed on resources that foster learning about diversity.

As noted by Price and Cardullo (see p. 56) UC can and should lead efforts in local schools to prepare youngsters for the UC system. Indeed, each UC campus has active K–12 outreach for underrepresented populations. In addition to this fundamental work, a critical issue faced by practitioners is how to determine which youth interventions work. For instance, while all evidence indicates that school violence has been on the decline (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice 1998), the school shootings in recent years have raised public awareness about the need for programs to prevent such tragedies in the future. Schools need to know which violence prevention and intervention programs work, in which contexts, and why. Finally, there is an urgent need to determine the best methods of teaching tolerance and the values of multiculturalism and diversity.

UC must play a leading role in research and outreach that aims to develop civic engagement among groups that have not traditionally been the most active in governance. What are the effective models for educating youth and encouraging their involvement in civic life? These models undoubtedly vary across cultural and social class groups. What kinds of institutional changes need to take place to accommodate and encourage civic participation and ownership by diverse groups? How can engagement

specific "best practices" with ongoing field research, ANR can work to strengthen the capacity of schools and community agencies in their pregnancy-prevention efforts.

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California Department of Health. 1995. Report of final natality statistics, Center for Health Statistics. Monthly Vital Statistics Report 45:11.

[PPAC] Program Planning Advisory Committee–Human Resources. 1999. University of California. p 23.

Program Recommendations, National Council of La Raza:

- Involve families, especially in cases where the teen mothers live with their families.
- Recognize and sensitively respond to cultural values regarding male-female roles.
- Have specific strategies for targeting young men, and have at least one male counselor.
- Conduct active outreach to involve the girl's partner or baby's father. Be prepared for resistance.
- Consider gender roles in relation to the importance of working. Some Latina teen mothers might not immediately see the importance of becoming self-sufficient.
- Emphasize education and support high aspirations since some Latinas may see becoming a mother as the end of their formal education. Encourage it in the context of providing a future for their children.

The Animal Ambassadors program, created by Veterinary Medicine Extension, is an example of how UC can better serve children by encouraging meaningful developmental activities.

be encouraged among groups that do not share a history or culture of participation?

Filling the gap

The two primary social institutions that exist in our society to provide caring and nurturing for youth — families and schools — have become less able to meet their full needs. It is simply no longer the case that a parent will be available to see a child off to school in the morning or be waiting when she returns home. Not surprisingly, the hours between the end of the school day and the time when parents return home from work are the ones during which many of the problems associated with teenagers are likely to occur (Belle 1999).

Current efforts to fill the gap between family and school time are broadly defined as "youth development." Before- and after-school programs, whether operated in private homes or churches, or through public agencies such as schools or 4-H, generally attempt to provide structured activities outside of the formal educational environment of the school system. Research has begun to demonstrate that these types of nonformal education are essential for healthy youth development (Walker 1998). Further, the adolescent problems that we hear so much about are best solved through youth-development approaches (Kirby 1999). Nonformal education encourages youth to be active participants in their education and develop their own solutions to problems they face; it can also provide the most meaningful exposures to diverse cultures, ideas and experiences.

Innovative organizations and programs serving youth around the state include the California 4-H Youth Development Program, California Conservation Corps, Scouts, YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs. There are also numerous programs in California communities that work to involve youth in sports, religion and mentor relationships. In the past, many of these programs actively engaged youth in civic and community life *with their families*. In other words, family participation was central to much of the youth development that took place a generation ago. But much of the youth development that takes place today is designed to fill in the gap between parents and school, rather than augment it. Further, most existing youth-development efforts do not specifically focus on diversity and multicultural understanding in their programmatic efforts.

The most radical solution to the widening gap between home and

school life would be the development of a new social institution. This "third institution" would literally fill in the daily gap between school and home life, engaging youth in meaningful activities and opportunities for physical and emotional development while preparing them for adult roles in a diverse society. This institution would develop innovative collaborations with employers and schools to involve families in regular civic and community activities with children. Youth and their families would be viewed as important resources for their communities, with the potential to make lasting contributions to civic goals.

The third institution could be conceived for the purpose of taking the lead in providing young people in California with the understanding and resources they will need to live as adults in multicultural communities. Such an institution could coordinate the multitude of activities that currently exist for youth. This coordination would serve to formalize the many examples of nonformal education that currently exist only in a patchwork fashion, providing opportunities for all children and youth to actively engage one another in their diverse communities. Rather than replacing existing organizations, such an institution would facilitate communication, coordination and replication of successful efforts.

Again, UC should play a leading role in such efforts, in collaboration with the existing array of youth-development organizations across the state and policy-makers. California is already the first state in the nation to have a legislative Assembly Select Committee on Adolescence. It would not be the role of UC to manage such an institution. The role of the land-grant university, and thus of the 4-H Youth Development Program, is to link research on youth and families to practical applications in communities across the state. California's 4-H Youth Development Program has provided national models for re-interpreting the 4-H program for the realities of contemporary life. Cross-aged teaching methods, new models for school-aged child care, and innovations in agricultural literacy are examples of some of the contributions California 4-H is making to youth development activities across the nation (Braverman et al.). Through research on effective programs and education, UC can provide leadership for guiding the third institution toward optimal education on diversity. This education could be carried out in collaboration with policy-makers and youth-development programs that span the state, including 4-H.

The notion of creating a new social structure on the level of public education may seem far-fetched. However, the idea that a society would provide education to every single child in the nation was also a radical notion when public education began in the United States. An opportunity currently exists to prepare youth for the diverse communities of the future.

California voters recently showed their commitment to children with the passage of Proposition 10, a tobacco tax earmarked to promote early childhood development. Perhaps they would also be willing to support a well-funded new institution which promotes research and the dissemination of information on youth welfare, and, more importantly, provides counseling and after-school programs for every young person in California who needs them. A collective effort to organize the unstructured time in young lives could provide a strong foundation through which to nurture children while educating them about how they will one day provide leadership for an integrated, diverse society.

Future in focus: Youth in the new millennium

California will see dramatic growth in the youth and racial/ethnic minority populations in the next 100 years. Accompanying these population shifts will be large-scale changes in family life, bringing with them imperatives for the increased availability of coordinated alternatives to formal education. California families, educators and policymakers must meet the challenges of a future defined by diversity through effective, coordinated youth-development experiences. Schools and families are already becoming more flexible as they manage the growing time young people spend between formal schooling and time with parents. This challenge will continue into the new millennium. A third institution would provide additional alternative activities, offering organized efforts for healthy growth and development within the context of multicultural communities.

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