

Creating Career Paths through Education and Green Job Training: Lessons from Austin and Oakland

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Research questions:

- What is the impact of Casa Verde Builders and the Oakland Green Jobs Corps on equity and environmental sustainability?
- What can be learned about achieving a positive impact?

Environmental Health and Equity: Global Strategies and Innovation

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McGill University



Overview

- Casa Verde Builders and the Oakland Green Jobs Corps are educational programs targeting disadvantaged people
- Both include environmental awareness and green job training aspects
- Field work: 1 month each in Austin, TX and Oakland, CA
 - 38 semi-structured interviews



Background

- **Education** in the United States:
 - significant inequalities persist (69% dropout rate in South-East Austin vs 8% national average)
 - education is a strong predictor of material success
- United States, energy, and the **environment**:
 - US is responsible for close to 20% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions
 - 28% of US population believe that addressing global warming should be a top priority for the government

Main program features

Casa Verde Builders
(est. 1994, ~70 members/yr)

- part of a charter school
- incoming members are low-income + dropouts
- general classroom education + green construction training



Oakland Green Jobs Corps
(est. 2008, ~200 members in 2010)

- community college + training centre + workforce intermediary
- less strict income and education requirements
- specific training in energy efficiency and renewable energy



Approaches to green education

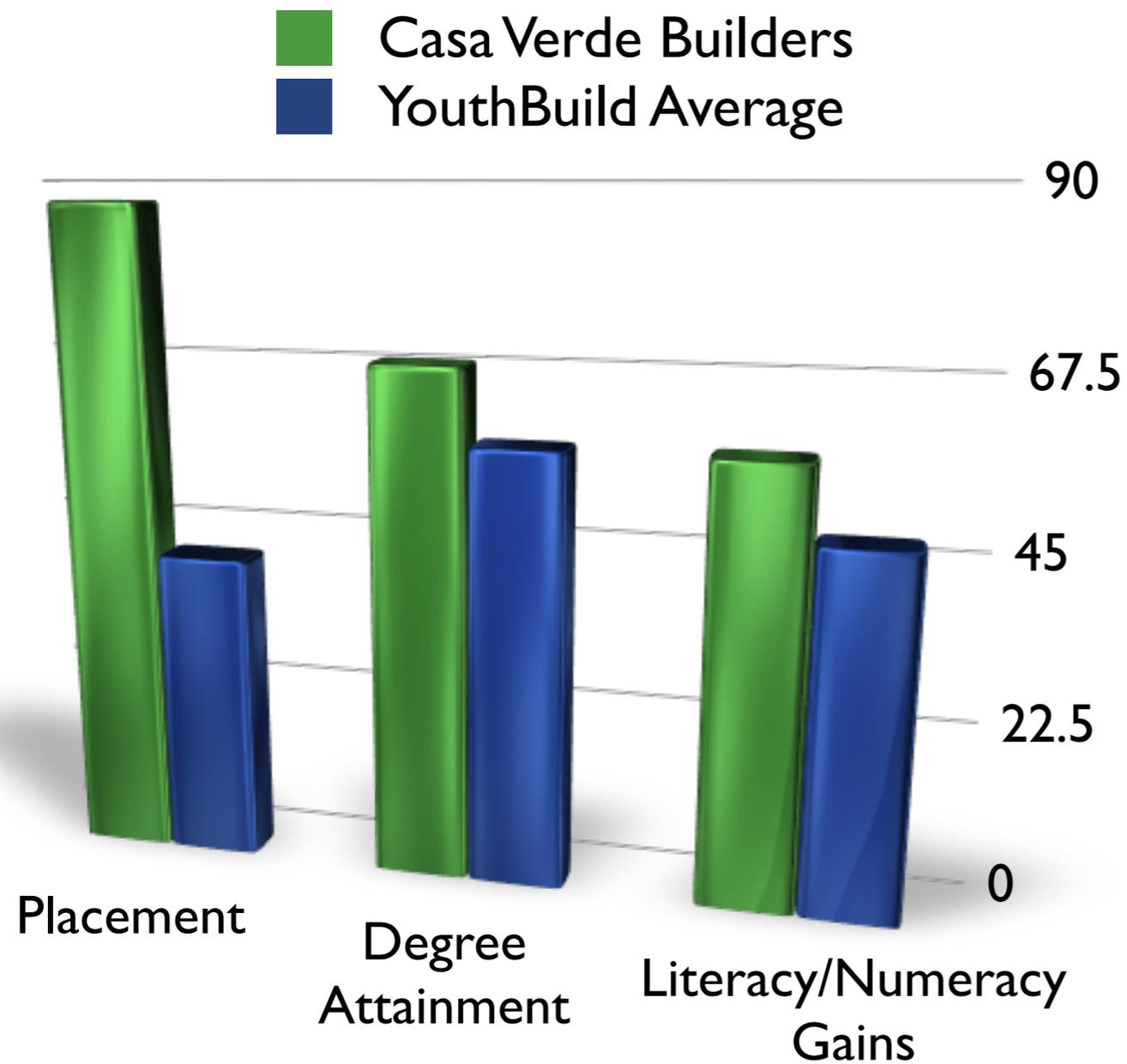
Casa Verde Builders

- main goal: jobs or higher education for grads
- curriculum has green elements
- graduates can follow a variety of career paths
 - likely to need additional training for green jobs

Oakland Green Jobs Corps

- main goal: place grads in “green” jobs
- curriculum built around green job training
- graduates’ fate closely tied in with green job market
 - training specific to the green industry’s needs

Assessing the impact - CVB



- overwhelmingly positive views, some areas for improvement
- members more aware of water pollution or climate change
- ★★★★★
house ratings by Austin Energy

Assessing the impact - OGCJC

currently **45%** placement in **green** jobs

“there are a lot more people getting trained to do green jobs work than there are jobs”

“There is no training and there are no skills.”

VS

*“I'm learning more than I expected to learn actually.
It's very good.”*

“this wasn't very successful at communicating and at teaching these specific students with their learning issues”

“the way their lives have changed through the exposure to this knowledge was amazing.”

Lessons learned

- The risk of focusing training on green jobs:
 - greater benefits for participants and the environment if the industry is doing well
 - potentially serious problems if the sector is weak
- Relying on industry surveys and government commitments can be misleading
- People who join these programs are interested in jobs

Lessons learned

- Working with members who did not succeed in regular schools:
 - engagement on multiple levels
 - Example:
cellulose insulation →
 - intensive case management
 - self-paced learning



(photo courtesy of Casa Verde Builders)

Topics for discussion

- Under what conditions should these programs receive funding? When should funding be withdrawn?
- How can an educational program's environmental impact best be measured?
- Transparency of government programs
"I get the impression that outcome data is more tightly held than income tax data by the programs" - CVB staff member

Acknowledgements

- IHSP
- everyone who took time to do interviews



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- Austin for only being over 100F once during my stay

