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# Youth Entrepreneurship at the Robinson Community Learning Center

An Evaluation of Context, Processes, and Outcomes

September, 2009

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MENDOZA COLLEGE OF BUSINESS



*This project is funded by a grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). SBA's funding should not be construed as an endorsement of any products, opinions, or services. All SBA-funded projects are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis.*

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## Executive Summary

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This evaluation sought deeper understandings of how youth entrepreneurship programming works at the Robinson Community Learning Center. Based on data collected through interviews, observations, surveys, and document analyses over an 11 month period, the major findings include:

1. The program's after-school setting, engaging learning environment, and official connection to the University of Notre Dame fundamentally shaped the identity, structure, and delivery of youth entrepreneurship education at the RCLC. These context specific variables appeared to support mostly productive ends.
2. Individual and organizational-level relationships played significant roles in students' learning and growth opportunities. Students forged heterogeneous bonding networks with peers and resourceful bridging networks with adults. While a thriving relationship developed with one high school, attempts to work in tandem with other area schools were not as successful.
3. Entrepreneurship students made significant strides in both their understandings of business and their capacities to effectively communicate and speak in public. Other outcomes that were perceived as noteworthy included the RCLC's increase in community accessibility and vision and Notre Dame students' increased understandings of business and awareness of people from diverse settings.

Framed in capital theory, the discussion section suggests that the RCLC program facilitates the development of human capital, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital (all of which are closely intertwined). The evaluation concludes with several recommendations to be considered as the program moves forward.

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## Introduction

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On April 1, 2009, I entered a computer lab at the Robinson Community Learning Center (RCLC) in South Bend, Indiana and saw six local teenage students who were about to take part in the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Invention Convention Youth Business Plan Competition at the nearby University of Notre Dame campus. Although they were apparently nervous about the impending event where they would each be responsible for presenting a business plan of their own creation in front of a large and distinguished audience, these teenagers – who came from highly diverse backgrounds – seemed to take comfort in each other’s presence. Some of them quietly reviewed notes for their presentations and others laughed and joked around together. Shortly before they were to depart for the competition, Luther Tyson, the program’s director, stepped in to offer the presenters some last minute reminders about how to use the video screen, how to project their voices to the audience, and so forth. After Luther’s talk, as they carefully gathered their belongings and left for the competition, it became quite evident to me that this competition was a noteworthy event in these students’ young lives.

Most of the students carpooled together to get to Notre Dame – about a two minute ride up the road – and, although it was a short drive to their Mendoza College of Business destination, this place was seemingly many miles away from their daily lives. Bustling with accomplished professors and ambitious undergraduate and graduate students from around the world, the well-appointed building on the south end of the manicured campus was one that had never been entered by most of the students in the competition. Wide-eyed as they stepped through the doors, the young students found their way to the large room where the competition was to take place. Over the next two hours, I joined a crowd of over 50 students, professors, parents, and other community residents to watch intently as six original business plans were presented by the teenagers – most of whom had put months of preparation into the competition. They were questioned and critiqued by a panel of Notre Dame business students and, after a lengthy deliberation period, three of the competitors were awarded significant cash prizes. At the completion of the event, all of the students received a resounding standing ovation from the audience and then basked in their accomplishments while enjoying fine food and refreshments that were prepared for the evening’s festivities. The students’ broad smiles indicated that they were proud of the work they had done.

This Invention Convention Youth Business Plan Competition happened toward the tail end of my year-long evaluation of the RCLC's multifaceted Youth Entrepreneurship Program and it re-affirmed much of what I had observed, heard, and read in the preceding months. I noted that these were youngsters (most between ages 13 and 18) who:

- Elected to spend their free time in a structured, intellectually challenging program;
- Were exposed to cutting edge ideas, resources, and facilities;
- Engaged with highly educated, well-respected campus and community leaders in a supportive atmosphere;
- Developed understandings of fundamental elements of entrepreneurship; and
- Were willing to stand before an unfamiliar audience and logically explain their ideas.

I left the campus that evening not necessarily blown away by their specific business plans (all of which seemed solid if not groundbreaking) but highly impressed by the students themselves. On my observation rubric, I summarily noted that this group of teenagers was spirited, motivated, ambitious, mature, committed, composed, and confident.

The purpose of this evaluation was to learn more about the people, structures, and processes that led up to the competition. Specifically, I sought deeper understandings of how the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship's (NFTE) youth program unfolds at the RCLC. Toward such understandings, the following questions were closely examined:

- 1) How is NFTE program implementation influenced by organizational dynamics of the RCLC?
- 2) How do relationship networks affect participants' experiences in the program?
- 3) What program outcomes do leaders and participants perceive to be most noteworthy (at individual and organizational levels)?

In the following pages, I describe the background and context of the program, delineate the evaluation methods that were employed, present the major findings and situate them in relevant literature from the field, and discuss noteworthy implications and recommendations.

## NETWORK FOR TEACHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP (NFTE)

NFTE is a multifaceted program that has reached more than 280,000 young people in 21 states and 12 countries since 1987. Its mission is to “help young people from low-income communities build skills and unlock their entrepreneurial creativity.” According to its website ([www.nfte.com](http://www.nfte.com)), NFTE seeks to achieve this mission by:

1. Creating engaging, experiential curricula and tools to improve academic, business and life skills;
2. Training and supporting teachers and youth professionals;
3. Partnering with schools, community-based organizations, and post-secondary institutions;
4. Offering volunteers meaningful opportunities that connect students to real world experiences;
5. Linking the educational and business worlds in the classroom and beyond;
6. Providing services to program graduates;
7. Demonstrating outcomes of entrepreneurship education through research; and
8. Building public awareness to expand entrepreneurship education.

These guiding principles are applied in hundreds of NFTE programs each year, most of which focus on urban and low income youth between ages 13 and 18.

To date, it appears that NFTE programs have been largely successful in a variety of ways. For example, ongoing research by the Harvard Graduate School of Education (2002-present) suggests that among NFTE program participants, interest in attending college increased 32%, occupational aspirations increased 44%, independent reading increased 4%, and leadership behavior increased 13.2%. Further, research conducted by Brandeis University (1993-1997) and the David H. Koch Foundation (1998-1999) found that 99% of NFTE program alumni would recommend NFTE programs to others and that NFTE positively impacts minority business ownership experiences.

It is evident, however, that while NFTE’s mission and principles guide program structure and implementation at all sites (including places like schools and community centers), there are unique local factors such as community demographics, organizational dynamics, and personnel attributes that ensure that the program will ultimately unfold differently at each site. It is, therefore, vital that the aforementioned research be supported with further inquiry at other sites. Such efforts can help unearth how important environmental variables affect NFTE

processes and outcomes. Accordingly, this evaluation deeply and purposefully examines the RCLC's NFTE program with hopes of furthering productive action at this one site and also providing lessons to others like it.

## **NFTE Programming at the RCLC**

The RCLC is a multifaceted community service center located in the Northeast Neighborhood of South Bend, which borders the University of Notre Dame's campus. First opened in 2001, the RCLC is largely supported by Notre Dame and serves as one of the University's most visible and resourceful outreach initiatives in the local community. In addition to NFTE programming, the RCLC provides a multitude of other educational and social services to South Bend residents, including individualized academic tutoring programs, violence prevention programs, computer classes, exercise classes, and health services. The RCLC also serves as a popular space for neighborhood meetings and social gatherings. Over the past eight years, hundreds of Northeast Neighborhood residents who are diverse in age, race, and religious background have benefited from the RCLC each week.

Like other RCLC services, its NFTE-related programs attract a diverse array of participants from around the community. In 2008-2009, 35 students from various public and private schools around the South Bend area participated in the RCLC's Summer BizCamp and/or its Entrepreneurship class. BizCamp is an intensive two week program that allows a small cohort of students the chance to learn about and apply NFTE curricula in a collaborative and supportive environment. The Entrepreneurship class is a weekly after-school program in the fall and spring that also draws from NFTE curricula to help students learn more about starting and sustaining businesses. The RCLC appears to be an appealing venue for these programs – not just because of its central location (that is easily accessible to most South Bend residents), highly-trained staff (the program director has an MBA and is an experienced NFTE-certified instructor), and its comfortable, well-equipped facilities (complete with modern computer lab and ample gathering spaces), but also because of its Notre Dame connections. The Mendoza College of Business at Notre Dame provides vital support in the forms of human and economic/physical capital. Specifically, Mendoza personnel (an employee/instructor and two paid interns) take on active roles in supporting program instruction and facilitating Notre Dame student involvement in the program. In 2008-2009, 22 undergraduate students (many of whom were members of the University's Entrepreneurship Club) served as formal mentors to Entrepreneurship class participants and several MBA students and undergraduate business students served as judges in the aforementioned Invention Convention contest. In terms of economic/physical capital, Mendoza provides funding to help supplement the cash awards for the innovation competitions

and it opens its doors to program participants, their families, and the wider community as the actual site for the Invention convention.

Together, then, these organizational, community, and collaborative factors significantly influence the way youth entrepreneurship classes unfold at the RCLC. I next proceed to describe how these and other pertinent elements of programming were specifically examined.

## METHODS

To reiterate, the central questions that guided this evaluation were:

- 1) How is NFTE program implementation influenced by organizational dynamics of the RCLC?
- 2) How do relationship networks affect participants' experiences in the program? and
- 3) What program outcomes do leaders and participants perceive to be most noteworthy (at individual and organizational levels)?

Data collection and analysis took place over an eleven month period. The procedures that were used are explained next.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Beginning in October, 2008, data were collected through interviews with participants and stakeholders, observations of classes and other program functions, and review of program documents and literature. The interviews were conducted both at the RCLC and at Notre Dame with current and former student participants in the Entrepreneurship Class, Entrepreneurship program leaders, Notre Dame student mentors, and parents of student participants. (Two interviews with program leaders were conducted via telephone.) In sum, over 30 interviews were conducted between October 2008 and May, 2009.

Supporting the substantial interview data, the observation, documental, and survey data were gathered in order to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the evaluation's findings. Observations of class sessions at the RCLC were held on five different occasions over a six month period and the Invention Convention Youth Business Plan Competition was observed in early April, 2009. Documental data were gathered from RCLC program records, Mendoza College of Business records/press releases, and NFTE curriculum guides. Finally, survey data were collected from pre- and post-class surveys that participants in Summer BizCamp completed.

## LIMITATIONS

Like all research reports, this evaluation is limited in a number of ways. First, while the qualitative nature of this inquiry provides rich narrative descriptions of program features, experiences, and outcomes, it is not geared toward making a broadly generalizeable statement of findings that is universally applicable to other NFTE programs. Rather, the study aims for a clear description and articulation of major program processes, experiences, and perceptions that can help promote improvement of the RCLC program and, appropriately transferred to other contexts, provide helpful insights to others who are engaged in similar work.

Second, while I had full access to RCLC and Notre Dame-based information and activities relating to the youth entrepreneurship programming, I did not have access to students' official school records, which would have been helpful in informing me if and/or how their participation in the program affected their school performance.

Finally, the small number of Summer BizCamp participants (9) limited the extent to which the survey findings could shed generalizeable insights into students' experiences in the program. The surveys did, however, remain valuable in lending broad insights into students' perspectives about the program.

## FINDINGS

The substantial depth and range of data that were collected over an eleven month period could be framed in a variety of ways. In the writing of this section, then, I make a purposeful effort to focus on the findings that are tied most closely to the research questions. In response to the first question (how RCLC dynamics influence NFTE program implementation), it appears to be most noteworthy that the program's elective, after-school identity and its formal connection to Notre Dame each present several advantages. In response to the second question (how relationship networks affect students' experiences), it appears that the program avails participants with opportunities to develop supportive bonding and strategic bridging relationships. Finally, in response to the third question (what are perceived to be the most noteworthy outcomes), it appears that RCLC students, Notre Dame students, and the RCLC organization itself all derive significant benefits from the program. Each of these major areas of the findings is described below.

### THE INFLUENCE OF RCLC DYNAMICS

As previously mentioned, NFTE's youth entrepreneurship programs are implemented in a wide variety of sites – each of which influences the way programming unfolds. In the RCLC case, it

became clear that several elements of its setting are especially notable in shaping its processes and outcomes, including its after-school hours time slot, its environment, and its Notre Dame connection.

## After School Setting

There is a substantial body of literature which indicates that quality after-school programming can have a positive influence in students' lives (Grossman et al., 2002; Hirsch, 2005; Marshall et al., 1997; Posner & Vandell, 1999; Riggs, 2006). This research suggests that well-conceived after-school programs can assist students' social and cognitive development and expose them to caring adult and peer relationships. After-school programs also tend to benefit from freedom and flexibility that can heighten student engagement and learning. The youth entrepreneurship programming at the RCLC appears to support this literature, for, as I spoke with program staff and participants and observed them in action, it became quite apparent that its "outside of school setting" was advantageous in a few ways.

First, many of those interviewed claimed that the fact that the program is held in an elective, outside of school environment ensured that those who were in attendance were highly engaged and willing to work hard. Nobody was forcing students to attend – they chose to be there for the specific purpose of learning more about entrepreneurship and, in turn, were willing to focus on class content and cooperate with peers and instructors. Luther Tyson<sup>1</sup>, the program director, explained:

"We don't have the same restrictions that schools have. We don't have the same collective culture. Everyone in my class is here for entrepreneurship. It's an elective after school activity. They all want to be here. The environment is different. The way the teacher manages class is also highly different. People have chosen to be here and that matters."

Most of the students in the weekly Entrepreneurship class echoed Luther's sentiments and they seemed to appreciate being in an environment where everyone was interested in learning. For example, a student named Perry explained:

*"In high school they give you a set of classes but not everybody works well within those boundaries. Not everyone is going to relate to that. Not everyone is going to learn best like that..."*

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<sup>1</sup> Since his name is widely known and associated with RCLC youth entrepreneurship programming, Luther Tyson's actual name is used throughout the evaluation. Pseudonyms are used for all other interview participants in order to protect their anonymity. This anonymity allowed participants to speak openly and honestly about their perceptions of the program.

*Students here are more engaged because if they weren't they wouldn't be here. You showing up here means that at least your mind is percolating ideas."*

In addition to attracting this highly-engaged pool of students, participants also noted that RCLC's outside of school context was helpful in that it allowed for curricular flexibility and more direct adult-student interactions. For example, when asked to compare how the outside of school setting at the RCLC is different from their school-based experiences, summer BizCamp participants' survey responses included:

"There is more freedom, which allows you to learn the best way you know how."

"The atmosphere was a lot more personal than the one at school. Self-learning was encouraged, and an emphasis was definitely placed on putting in how much you wanted out of the program."

"Everyone got an adult that was their own mentor so when they needed help, there was no confusion in who to go to. The other thing I liked was that there weren't that many students, which gives you a better opportunity to learn."

"It was more like a one on one thing (learning at the RCLC) where in school it was like one teacher to 10 or 25 kids."

In describing the after-school benefits of the RCLC's entrepreneurship programming, it should also be noted that the program's timing also has great utility in providing students with a safe and productive place to spend their afternoon/early evening hours. These weekday hours – between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. – have been shown to be the time periods when teens are least supervised and most prone to accidents and serious behavioral problems (Hirst, 2005; Zhang, et al., 2002). Some of the students I interviewed raised this point. When I asked them what they would be doing if they were not in the Entrepreneurship Class, one student named Anthony said that he would likely be "out on the street." Another student named Anna similarly explained:

*"Sometimes I do want to do stuff that I probably shouldn't be doing...especially now that I'm in high school, the pressure to fit in with the cool people...it's like the stuff they talk about doing or the stuff that they do, I could easily jump into that and be like, 'let's go!'"*

The RCLC's NFTE programming, then, is advantaged not just because it invites highly-engaged students and flexibly meets their individual needs, but also because it provides them with a way to avoid the pressures of "finding trouble" after school.

Along with the many positive remarks about the after-school timing of the program, however, a few challenges were also noted by Luther Tyson and another staff member. They noted that a

number of students struggle to maintain timely and consistent attendance each year due to other after-school obligations (jobs, sports, etc.). This is particularly an issue in the fall during the initial weeks of Entrepreneurship Class when students are still working to figure out their schedules. After those early weeks, the number of consistent attendees tends to drop a bit until leveling off in the later fall and early spring sessions that lead up to the Invention Convention. (Mr. Tyson noted, for example, that 25 students signed up for Entrepreneurship Class in the fall of 2008, but the number of regular participants eventually leveled off at around 17 students.) One of the problems with infrequent attendance (attendance can be sporadic even among some of the students who did stick with the program) is that it has forced the instructor to repeat certain elements of the curriculum. In fact, one of the few critical remarks students made about the program was that the lectures/class topics were redundant at times in the fall.

Another challenge that was described by both Luther Tyson and Jessica McManus Warnell, the Mendoza College faculty representative, was that, in comparison with school-based entrepreneurship classes, the RCLC class has less contact hours with students. School programs, for instance, often get to work with the kids multiple times each week whereas the RCLC program usually meets just once a week. This “lack of time” issue can be exacerbated by the previously mentioned attendance issues. Somewhat mitigating the time issue, however, is the flexibility that is built into the RCLC’s program. For example, students can spend time during the week working with their individually assigned Notre Dame mentor. Or, in another instance, a business teacher from a local high school agreed to allow her students to work on their RCLC entrepreneurship projects during their homeroom time at school. (In fact, she even allowed the students’ Notre Dame mentors to come into her classroom to work with the students.)

## **The RCLC Environment**

The second major influence of RCLC dynamics upon NFTE program implementation was tied to the RCLC environment. Specifically, the well-appointed facilities, community atmosphere, and exemplary personnel provided the program with a solid foundation. In terms of the RCLC’s physical space where the Entrepreneurship Class and BizCamp meet, it is a safe, clean, well-organized, easily accessible building (not too far away from any part of South Bend, plenty of parking, not too much traffic in the neighborhood, etc.). The space is equipped with an amply-sized computer lab that has most of the modern features that the students need. Many after-school programs – and some school-based programs – lack such learning tools and spaces.

Importantly complementing this productive physical space is the overall “vibe” of the RCLC. It is a bustling hub of community where people of highly diverse backgrounds gather to learn and share with one another. Every time I visited the RCLC for observations, I saw

community residents who were over age 60 (often taking a computer class), residents who were under ten (often getting school tutoring), and many others in between (taking part in programming, volunteering, etc.). I saw people from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds (African American, Latino, White, Asian, and others) and educational backgrounds (preschoolers, professors, high school students, college students, etc.). Usually, most of the diverse crowd was engaged in lively discussion and/or productive learning and growth. With these residents packing RCLC rooms every day starting shortly after 3:00 p.m. (one of these rooms being the computer lab where youth entrepreneurship takes place), it is a lively, even invigorating atmosphere filled with laughter, smiling faces and palpable purpose. It is a stimulating learning environment for all.

A third element of the RCLC environment that shaped the program was the personnel. From the RCLC's director, to its other staff members, to the many student and community volunteers that help keep the Center running, I sensed a genuine commitment to providing the best possible youth programming. Even though most of these individuals had little or no direct influence on the instruction or administration of youth entrepreneurship programming, they all appeared to be critical contributors to the RCLC's impressive child/learning-centered ethos. Entrepreneurship students spoke with uniform praise about RCLC staff. The most common recipient of these remarks was Luther Tyson, who heads up youth entrepreneurship programming. Students appreciated his intelligence and expertise in the area of entrepreneurship (his teaching experience, MBA, NFTE training, and ongoing professional development make him a highly qualified instructor), but commented most frequently about his approachability, engaging manner, commitment, and creativity. They appreciated Mr. Tyson's pedagogical style – he provided adequate structure without trying to make the program too “school-like.” The following student quotes are representative of the many made about Mr. Tyson and his influence upon the program's structure:

*“It's a really nice environment to be in. The class is fun. If I were learning this material in school I'd probably be sleeping or talking with my friends. I just think Mr. Tyson has a great way of teaching material. Because he makes it funny and fun and enjoyable. It's not just sitting there and taking notes. There's a lot of interaction with other people. Just the environment is really one where people try to help each other. I think these relationships and the environment here have been most helpful in this program.”*

*“He's not like a teacher, per se. He doesn't make you feel like you're in school. He doesn't just sit there and lecture. If you need help, he's willing to help you... It's not the same old textbook, reading, and lecture.”*

*“The way Mr. Tyson presents things is much different from school... He’s tricky – you never quite know what he’s got up his sleeves.”*

My observations of Mr. Tyson teaching and my interviews with him affirmed the students’ sentiments. Referring to the Entrepreneurship Class as an “idea factory, not a conventional classroom,” Mr. Tyson said he wanted to hold them accountable for reaching lofty outside-the-box goals. He told me that his philosophy with the students is that “Your only limitations are your creativity and your commitment.” Importantly, I witnessed him providing ongoing support so that these lofty goals could be attained through both individual and collaborative means. I witnessed him working with students in a thoughtful way while also allowing them to work on their own and with small groups of peers. During interviews he repeatedly described the RCLC commitment to meeting the students’ diverse needs on a one-to-one basis:

*“We work closely with them, the classes are relatively small, and we go out of our way, all of us do, to help them. Whether it’s transportation, talking with their parents, or whatever it takes.”*

The survey data indicated that Mr. Tyson’s approach to instruction was much appreciated by BizCamp participants. Before taking the class, only 14% of students claimed that they learn effectively “through one-on-one discussions with the instructor” and only 43% claimed that they learned well “through independent activities.” After the class – having experienced Luther’s supportive hybrid-pedagogy, 71% of the students indicated that they learned through one-on-one discussions with the instructor and 71% indicated that they learned through independent activities. The structure of the program then, spurred by Luther Tyson, influenced not just *what* students learned (key ideas about how to start a business, etc.), but also *their perceptions of how they can best learn* (through independent action and through working in concert with talented others).

## **Notre Dame Connection**

The final major area where RCLC-specific dynamics appeared to affect NFTE program implementation was through its official connection to Notre Dame. Youth entrepreneurship programming at the RCLC clearly benefits from tangible physical resources (meeting spaces at RCLC and on campus) and financial resources (support for winning students’ cash prizes and their trip to New York for the NFTE convention) that are derived from this connection. Interview and observation data, however, suggested that the more profound impacts of the program’s affiliation with Notre Dame were seen in intellectual, professional, and social domains. Intellectually and professionally, the RCLC’s entrepreneurship students appear to be advantaged in their opportunities to be mentored and taught by highly skilled Notre Dame students

(graduate and undergraduate), staff, and faculty. This mentorship and teaching occurs on a one-on-one basis, as RCLC students are paired with a Notre Dame mentor with whom they work for the duration of the program. Such intensive exposure to creative, intelligent, and experienced experts is perhaps one of the hallmarks of NFTE programming at the RCLC. Students' understanding of entrepreneurship blossoms here in contexts of ongoing relationships with knowledgeable mentors rather than solely through lectures by overburdened classroom teachers (as might be the case in some school-based programs). An RCLC board member who is involved with the Entrepreneurship program stressed the importance of this mentorship and suggested that this element of the program actually draws students to the class:

“They (entrepreneurship students) know that Notre Dame is involved. They know that they’re going to get some Notre Dame students to help them. They’re going to get to learn some things that they probably wouldn’t learn in a high school.”

The “social” influence of the Notre Dame connection was evident to me in the philosophy of altruism and social consciousness that seemed to underlie the entrepreneurship program’s structure and delivery. The theme of “making society a better place” – which is broadly consistent with Notre Dame’s Catholic Christian ethos – appears to be a major part of the RCLC program. When I asked Luther Tyson about this, he emphasized that “Your business plan is not complete unless you’re sharing with others, in our opinion.” The students in the program appeared to take this message to heart. For example, a student named Mark explained to me:

*“Mr. Tyson really emphasizes the way your business can do good for others. In every business plan we make we have to include a philanthropy plan – how we’ll give back to the community. And in that philanthropy plan we emphasize how in giving to the community can help us, help our business. And really you’re never going to lose anything by helping others. Helping the community is the best way to advertize. If you do something good for somebody, they’re going to spread that word and even if you did something that’s not that much related to your business, your business name still gets out there. Mr. Tyson also gives us a lot of ideas about how to use the way our business works to help the community directly with whatever our business does. Whether you’re like a barber who gives free haircuts to kids right before school starts or whatever it is, helping out with little kids and teaching them about business or anything like that... sharing your talents and finding a way to incorporate that into the community...”*

While the writing of philanthropy plans is not unique to NFTE at the RCLC – many other programs have similar features – it does appear that the central ideas of being good to others and working to make the world a better place are fundamental aspects of programming here and that

the Notre Dame connection reaffirms and furthers such outlooks. Charlie Grace, a Notre Dame faculty member who was interviewed, for example, commented:

*“I don’t know why, but there is this need for the (Notre Dame) students to want to do more than just be a student. There’s this need within the students to want to help give back... There’s this strong feeling at Notre Dame that you’re here at Notre Dame to help others. I watch how many Notre Dame students mentor kids after school. They’re in there helping them read and with math. The entrepreneurship mentoring is similar. The students just want to get involved... I’ve never seen a group of students as willing to give their time and get involved.”*

So, in addition to being affected by Notre Dame’s physical and intellectual resources, entrepreneurship programming at the RCLC is shaped to a degree by Notre Dame’s social outlook – specifically its commitment to giving back to others. A brief summary of these and the rest of the findings pertaining to the first research question is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Summary of findings to research question #: How is NFTE program implementation influenced by organizational dynamics of the RCLC?*

<b>After-School Setting</b>	<b>Environmental Variables</b>	<b>Notre Dame Connection</b>
Engaged students	Accessible, safe location	Physical resources
Programmatic flexibility/freedom	Updated computer lab and technology	Financial resources
Individualized attention	Stimulating learning atmosphere	Mentoring
Avoidance of afternoon “problems	Committed staff	Socially conscious disposition
Challenges: inconsistent attendance, limited students contact hours	Excellent program director/instructor	

## **Relationships**

In their research on after-school programs, Hirsch (2005), Zhang, et al. (2002), and others repeatedly suggest that enduring and caring relationships are among the most important of factors in ensuring that students have successful after-school experiences. Their work indicates that productive relationships between and among children and adults can, in many instances,

mitigate other programmatic shortcomings (in budget, space, time, etc.). On the other hand, programs that lack productive relationships (even those that are rich in other resources) are less likely to have deep and lasting impacts upon students. Accordingly, the second major research question that guided this evaluation examined the relationships present in RCLC entrepreneurship programming. The findings suggested that RCLC students were able to establish quality relationships with adult staff members, fellow students, and Notre Dame student mentors. In addition to these relationships among individuals, I noted some other interesting issues relative to the organizational-level relationships between the Entrepreneurship program and community institutions.

### **Bonds With Peers**

During my first observation of the Entrepreneurship class in October 2008, I carefully watched the students to see if and how they interacted with one another. Considering that the students had been together as a group only a couple times, it was not surprising that there was not much conversation or casual interplay among them that afternoon. In the five or ten minutes that led up to Mr. Tyson's lecture for the day, in fact, it was virtually silent in the room. The students occupied themselves on their computers and hardly acknowledged each other's presence. I noted that they were a highly diverse group of ten students (in terms of race, age, gender, school, etc.) that, for the most part, had never met each other before this class. In my ensuing four observations of the Entrepreneurship class, I noticed that the students' comfort and familiarity with one another seemed to gradually progress with time. They did not all become close friends through their participation in the program, but they came to know each other by name and appeared to be valuable sources of learning and support for one another. For example, when asked if she had gotten to know her classmates, one participant named Mary said, "I have met different people that I might be able to work with in the future." Similarly, a student named Brian said, "I developed fun, relaxed relationships with fellow participants in the program."

From my observations, this relationship development among the students was at least partially a result of purposeful rapport-building efforts made by the instructor, Luther Tyson. In several instances, for example, Mr. Tyson designed class activities that required students to work in pairs and small groups – a strategy that appeared useful as a relationship-developer. It was also noted by Mr. Tyson and other program leaders that, over the course of the RCLC program's history, various "team-building" activities were used to help unite the class. There was indeed a noticeable difference in student closeness between that first session I observed and the (previously described) night in early April when they gathered for the Invention Convention at Notre Dame. Their months of entrepreneurial engagement together clearly helped them to develop a degree of appreciation for one another.

Jessica McManus Warnell, the Mendoza College faculty member who serves as the primary Notre Dame representative to the RCLC's entrepreneurship programming, described the importance of such intentional efforts to bring the students together:

*“We’ve certainly seen that when we just jump into things without these team building activities, we would see the same people sitting together. We even saw racial and age division with how people were sitting and interacting. So we kind of recognized that and tried to engage it with some lighter activities where they have to work together. Part of it also is that we have students from each of the high schools in South Bend and we would see each school sticking to itself...It’s our great challenge and a great opportunity that we have such a diverse group of people. Sometimes the type of gelling that we’d like doesn’t happen as quickly as we’d like. This year and last year we made explicit attempts to encourage communication and help people get to know each other more quickly in the limited time we have together... These are diverse kids in age and skill level, so I think it is our task to structure things so communication begins really quickly. Because we’ve seen circumstances where we don’t make those efforts where it didn’t flow as we’d hoped.”*

While “friendship development” among participants is obviously not one of the major goals of the Entrepreneurship class or Summer BizCamp, programs like the ones at the RCLC that are able to allow for – or even *facilitate* – productive horizontal bonds among students appear to be significantly advantaged. Specifically, literature in education and sociology indicates that supportive and purposeful relationship networks can vitally undergird knowledge and skill development (Coleman, 1988).

It appeared to be especially noteworthy that the entrepreneurship program helps students develop *heterogeneous* bonds. That is, they met and got to know students who were from backgrounds that were different from their own. Almost all interview participants noted this as a major asset of the program. For example, Lindsey Polamalu, the mother of a student named Michael (an eighth grader from a local Catholic School) explained that her son’s exposure to older students from different schools and racial backgrounds “expanded his horizons.” Charlie Grace, an RCLC board member and Notre Dame faculty member voiced similar sentiments about the program’s diverse composition:

*“It builds relationships across schools. That’s good for the program and for the students. They’re working with kids and building relationships with kids who they normally might not work with – kids with different backgrounds.”*

## Bridges to Adults

Perhaps even more advantageous to the students than the heterogeneous horizontal bonds they form with peers in the entrepreneurship programs are the strategic “bridging” relationships they forge with adults. Putnam (1995) and others refer to bridging relationships as those that expose individuals to potentially life-enhancing people, resources, and opportunities that had theretofore been unavailable or at least *perceived* to be unavailable. Considering Lin’s (1999) suggestion that exposure to relational bridges is especially critical for women, people of color, and those who are from lower socioeconomic status, such relationships are an especially important element of the RCLC program (which, per the NFTE mission, draws many students who fit these backgrounds).

In terms of who the students forge bridging relationships with, it appeared most notable that the program exposes them to Notre Dame students, RCLC staff, and Mendoza College faculty/staff. Program participants’ relationships with these individuals vary in nature and intensity, but all appear to present certain resources and advantages. For example, as noted earlier, each of the entrepreneurship students is paired up with a Notre Dame student who acts as his or her mentor throughout the program. They spend time together both in class and outside of class in working toward the development of logical and cohesive business plans. From these relationships, RCLC students gain practical wisdom, but also ground-level support, motivation, and hope. The relative closeness in age between the students and their Notre Dame mentors (usually no more than four or five years difference) appeared to help create a peer-like dynamic that was helpful for the RCLC students. They viewed their mentors as approachable friends who knew a lot about business – not as intimidating adults. Several of the RCLC students even described their Notre Dame mentors as role models whose success could be emulated. These relationships opened their eyes not only to the subtleties of entrepreneurship, but also to the world of being a college student (how college “works,” why it is important, how it can be accessed, etc.). Luther Tyson and Jessica McManus Warnell, respectively, emphasized the strength of these mentor-student bonds and their importance in shaping student outcomes in the program:

*“It certainly helps them (the RCLC entrepreneurship students) with their motivation and sustainability. They don’t want to let their mentors down and the mentors want to have protégés who do well... There is a bond there. That bond is strong.”*

*“We rely on exchange of information between the students and their mentors that we hope are happening outside of the classroom...We have a premise that the learning outcomes are directly related to the relationships they have with their Notre Dame mentors. We noticed that those who are connected with their mentors, me, and/or Luther*

*have had much greater success in the program. And those who were less connected didn't tend to stay involved with the program or to enjoy much success."*

Clearly, then, from these comments, my observations in classes and at the Invention Convention (where I witnessed the impressive rapport between students and mentors) and my interviews with eighteen Notre Dame mentors and RCLC students (who described their relationships as highly positive ones that they intended on sustaining past their official program "requirements"), I saw these student-mentor relationships as a strength of the program.

Students' bridging relationships with RCLC and Notre Dame-based staff members also emerged as being highly important. *Every student interview participant* emphasized the benefits they derived from coming to know Luther Tyson, Jessica McManus Warnell, staff interns, and/or others. They spoke of how these individuals inspired personal growth, network development, and a host of other positive impacts. The following student quotes typify their sentiments as expressed in the interviews:

- "I developed really good and helpful relationships with Luther, Jessica, and my student mentor. I have problems with organizing and they've just helped me so much in getting better with that."
- "I developed strong mentor relationships with staff here at the RCLC – relationships I plan on coming back to for advice and ideas as I start my business."
- "I think these relationships and the environment here have been most helpful in this program. I've made connections other places as well. With some of the Notre Dame students who helped us out, with people I met in New York at the convention. With people I've conducted business with...I've gotten a lot of phone numbers from people in the community who said, 'Hey, if you ever need any support or help, please contact me'...Even people from school who I would have never met in my life have come up to me and said, 'Hey, you're that kid that won the competition.' And some of them are my friends now."

I found it noteworthy that several students described how the productive relationships they formed with adults through the RCLC entrepreneurship program are not typical of those that they or their peers usually have. For example, consider the following two quotes from my interviews with students:

*"Me being young and being from that side of town, you've got to break away from those who aren't helping you as you're trying to move forward. I want to be an example and give hope to those who are hopeless."*

*“There are plenty of people who are my friends who would never be in this program because they’ve never heard of something like this.”*

One student, Louis, seemed to be especially appreciative of his relationship with RCLC and Notre Dame personnel. He was grateful to be around “smart and successful people” and explained to me that, “I don’t really know too many people like that.” So, these relationships appeared to be important not just because they helped the students learn about how to start and sustain businesses, but also because they exposed the students to new opportunities and instilled newfound hope in their lives.

It should also be noted when discussing the “instilling of hope” that I observed the staff-student relationships to be marked by high levels of mutual support, for not only did the students have glowing words for Luther Tyson and the other staff members, but these affirmations were regularly returned by the adults. The introductory remarks that were offered at the start of the Invention Convention, for example, illustrated the supportive perspectives of RCLC and Notre Dame staff members. When describing the students and their work, Mr. Tyson shared student-supporting statements with the audience such as:

- “They are all winners.”
- “These students have the courage of conviction.”
- “They’ve persevered through constant criticism and constant change.”
- “They’ve made something out of nothing.”
- “They are finding the intersections between their talents and society’s needs.”

After Mr. Tyson’s remarks, Charlie Grace, the Notre Dame faculty member and RCLC board member declared, “We are very thankful to have you all here...We need a bunch of new ideas – new ideas for a new time. The ideas you present here tonight are a start.” Together, such comments appeared to increase students’ confidence that they could become successful in whatever they chose to pursue. Also, importantly, survey data indicates that this remarkable support contributed to students’ desires to stay connected to the RCLC in the days ahead, thereby ensuring that staff-student relationships forged during youth entrepreneurship programming would be sustainable even past students’ enrollment in the class. (Whereas only 28.6% of students regularly partook in RCLC programs/ services *before* their BizCamp experiences, 100% of them claimed, upon completion of BizCamp, that they were going to use RCLC services on a regular basis in the days ahead.)

## Relationship Challenges

While interpersonal relationships seemed to be mostly thriving, Jessica McManus Warnell, the primary Mendoza College-based connection to the programs, mentioned that some relationships at the organizational-level have unfolded with mixed results. Specifically, Jessica stated that the attempts that she and Luther made to establish sustainable relationships with South Bend-area high schools have not enjoyed widespread success. She said that despite their efforts (school visits, phone calls, etc.), only one neighboring school (Central High<sup>2</sup>) had become a consistently active partner in recruiting students to RCLC's programs and providing time and space for students to devote to their entrepreneurship projects. At length, Jessica described the success of the organizational-level relationship at Central as well as the difficulties she experienced in trying to get other schools involved.

*“Polly Lincoln at Central High – she’s built time into her business class to allow students to work on their plans. We have two of our interns who go work there one-on-one with kids. And they’re also accompanied by three Notre Dame mentors weekly during their homeroom period. She’s been really supportive. We keep a stack of the textbooks in her classroom too... We actually did outreach to the business chairs at each of the (high) schools inviting them to participate on a variety of levels. Polly always came and it evolved into her inviting us (to Central). Her students who come from Central are always very strong because they have her support. We have no qualms about replicating this model in other schools. We just haven’t found a champion in the other schools.... There’s been turnover at Walker High (the former business teacher is no longer there) and the same kind of situation at Rooney High – there’s a new teacher there. This year we did not make visits, but last year we visited each of the schools with printed materials and invitations. It was not a consistent response from the schools.”*

The success of the Central partnership (in recruiting student participants and providing them with in-school opportunities to complete entrepreneurship work) suggests that opportunities to collaborate with local high schools should be continually pursued. However, as Jessica noted, such efforts look to be largely dependent upon finding individual “champions” like Polly Lincoln to take the lead at the high school sites.

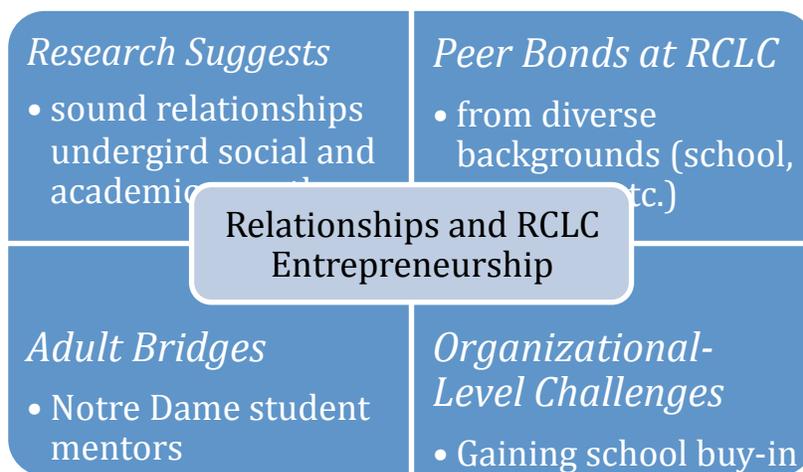
A final point to make in this consideration of organizational relationship development relates to bonds that are made with local businesses. Specifically, considering the seemingly plentiful benefits that could be derived from connections between a youth entrepreneurship class and local entrepreneurs, I was surprised to have heard very little about efforts to cultivate such

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all school names

relations. I did not witness any community-based entrepreneurs participating in class activities<sup>3</sup>, nor did I observe them taking on visible roles in the Invention Convention. While the wealth of knowledge and experience among active RCLC and Notre Dame staff/mentor participants ensures that all entrepreneurship students are exposed to highly talented individuals, it seems that additional infusion of “examples of practice from the field” could provide a rich addition to the programs. Certainly, however, the RCLC program’s already tight time constraints would have to be thoughtfully engaged to make such relationships a meaningful part of the program.

*Table 2: List of key findings/considerations addressing research question #2: How do relationship networks affect participants’ experiences in the program?*



## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

As previously noted, the third major question that guided this evaluation was: What program outcomes do leaders and participants perceive to be most noteworthy (at individual and organizational levels)? This question overlaps with the previous two guiding questions in that both the structure and attributes of the RCLC (addressed in question #1) and the relationships at play in the youth entrepreneurship programming (addressed in question #2) shape – and in some instances are shaped by – program outcomes at multiple levels (to be addressed in question #3). Accordingly, this last section focuses on other program outcomes (in addition to relationship development) that were perceived by participants to be most noteworthy, including RCLC student outcomes, Notre Dame student-mentor outcomes, and wider RCLC-level outcomes.

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<sup>3</sup> This point is made with recognition that I only attended six meetings. It is possible that community entrepreneurs attended other sessions.

While analyzing the outcome data, it struck me that, before listing apparent student outcomes, it would be helpful to provide a bit more background information about the RCLC students themselves. That is, to appreciate where they ended up during and after the program (the outcomes) it seems logical to know where they started. Broadly speaking, the student participants in the youth entrepreneurship programming appeared to be “regular students.” For example, when I asked each of the student interview participants to tell me a bit about how they do in school, most of them offered responses similar to Luke, who said, “I’m pretty good. I’m an average student. Not much better than anybody else... I’m not the brightest kid or the dumbest kid.” In addition to their qualitative descriptions of themselves as “typical students,” survey data provided some interesting insights into the students’ school achievement backgrounds, their knowledge of entrepreneurship (before entering the RCLC program), and their hopes upon entering the program (what they wanted to get out of the program). Their responses to some of these survey questions are summarized below in Figures 1-2 and Table 3.

*Figure 1: What types of grades do you typically receive in school?*

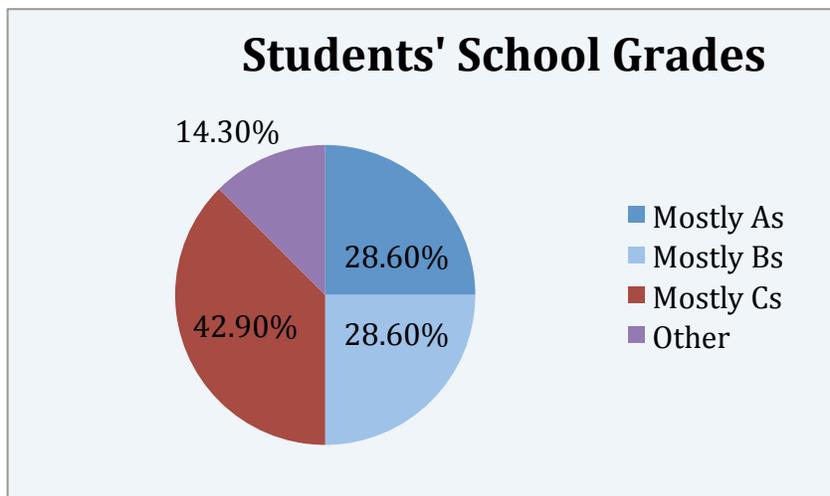


Figure 2: How much do you know about starting a business? (before taking the BizCamp class)

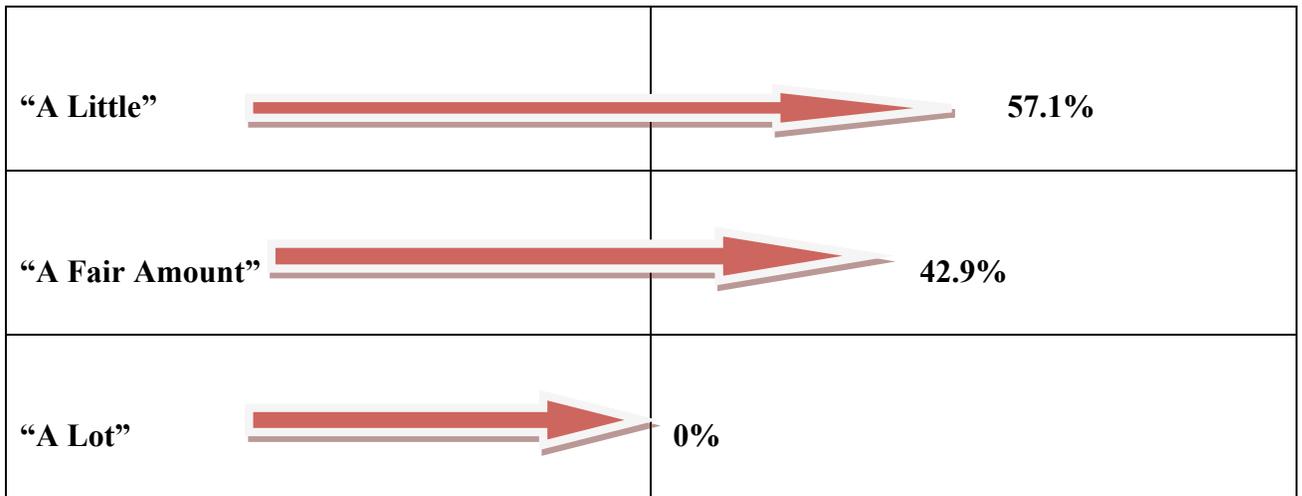


Table 3: What do you hope to gain from RCLC Bizcamp?

1. First of all, I would like to win some of the prize money and then I would like to just learn some more about becoming an entrepreneur.
2. Business knowledge and a chance to launch my business.
3. I hope to catch the "entrepreneurial spirit." I want to develop a good work ethic, to learn how to be creative and work with others and write a business plan. I don't know exactly what I'm going to do in my life, and knowledge about starting a business will prove invaluable no matter where I go or what I do.
4. I really hope to gain responsibility, trust, knowledge, friendship, and to give speeches in the correct way without choking.
5. How to go into your own business and not have to work for anybody else.
6. A good foundation of knowledge for what is to come and some references to say I know what it takes to know how to run a well-rounded business.
7. The business skills to help me realize my goals.

It is clear then, that while most of the students were not the highest of academic achievers in their schools and they did not initially know a lot about entrepreneurship, they entered the program as

decent students who had specific (and varying) reasons for participating in the youth entrepreneurship course. From this starting point, the two most significant “outcome findings” at the student level – in addition to the previously described bonding and bridging relationships that they developed – were: 1) students’ increased understandings of entrepreneurship’s fundamental elements and 2) students’ development of communication and public speaking skills.

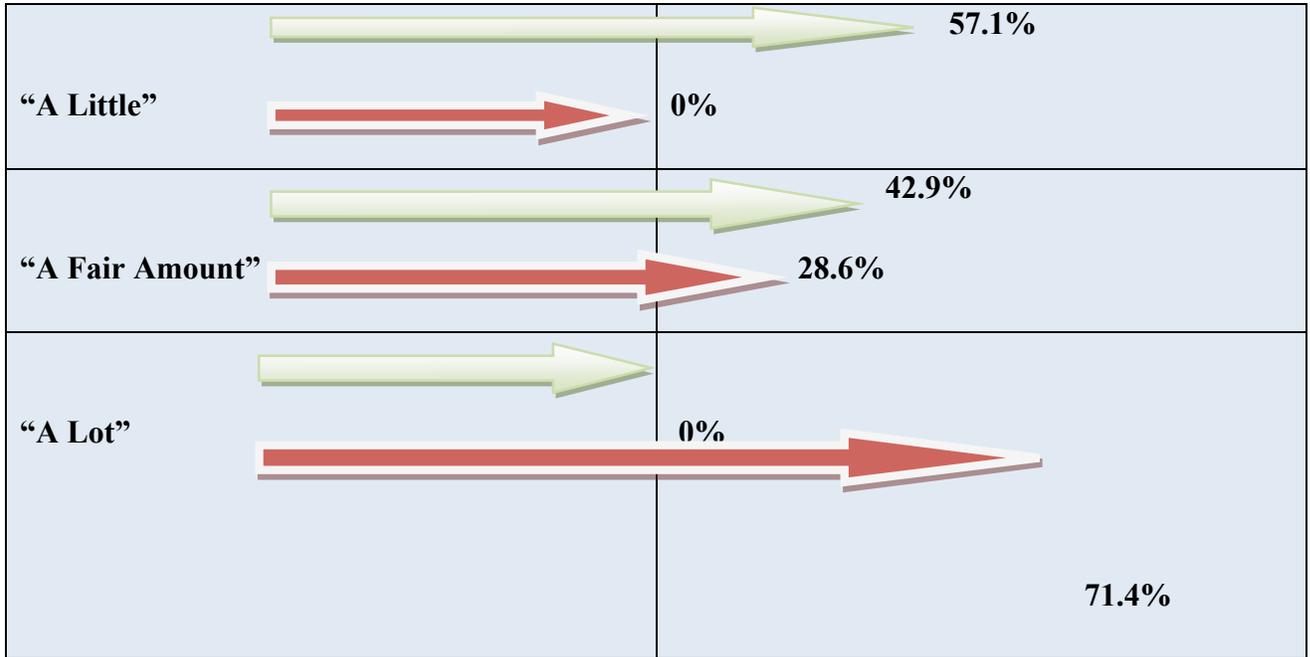
### *RCLC Student Growth in Understandings of Entrepreneurship*

As I reviewed the NFTE curriculum guide prior to my initial observations of the RCLC Youth Entrepreneurship Class, I wondered if the “vernacular of entrepreneurship” that it posited could be effectively translated to the RCLC setting. Terms like “variable costs,” “gross profits,” and “monthly sales projections” did not strike me as ones that would be of immediate interest to a classroom full of teenagers. It was remarkable to observe, then, in the following months, as Luther Tyson and others led the students to not only understand the vernacular of entrepreneurship but to actually apply it to their own contexts in focused and coherent ways. Mr. Tyson’s student-centered approach to instruction appeared to be a critical factor in this growth. He explained the program’s philosophy in developing young entrepreneurs:

*“The most basic goal we have is to help them get in touch with what they’re about. Because everyone has their own unique set of personal gifts. Defining what these gifts are and what the needs of the world are and finding out where they overlap – that’s what we shoot for. We want people to do ventures that reflect who they are. If someone is artistic, I don’t want you just doing a lawn care business because it’s easy to understand – I want you doing art. If you’re a writer, I want you to understand the business of being a writer. How to reach out to an editor, to market it, and so on... the business of it. Because whatever it is you have, it can be turned into a business. And I try to show them a lot of unconventional businesses.”*

This assets-based pedagogical style resonated with students like Luke, who said: “There’s just something about this environment that helps me thrive. I’m not the best student, but the way things are taught here makes sense to me.” Things appeared to “make sense” to most other students as well. Marvin, for example, asserted that “I learn new things every time I come here” and survey data indicate that students perceived their understandings of entrepreneurship to have grown significantly as a result of their RCLC experiences. Whereas not a single respondent claimed to know “a lot” about entrepreneurship before taking the class, over 70% of them claimed to know a lot after the class (refer to Figure 3).

Figure 3: “Comparing the before and after:” How much do students claim to know about starting a business? (The top numbers/arrows refer to students’ knowledge before BizCamp and the bottom numbers/arrows refer to students’ knowledge after two weeks of BizCamp.)



My observations of numerous classes and the Invention Convention confirmed this growth in understanding. I watched students develop and present multidimensional business plans that demonstrated sound grasps of the main ideas put forth in the NFTE Curriculum. (Refer to Table 4 for examples of students’ business ideas.)

Table 4: Examples of students’ business ideas

Business Name	Focus
“Gonzalez Audio Specialists”	Car stereo installation/service
“BJ’s Way: The Basics of Money Management”	Urban financial consultation
“Deanna’s Dance/Exercise Program”	Community exercise and entertainment

"JT's Rain Gardens"	Environmentally-conscious irrigation
"Bonnie's Fashion Companion"	One-on-one fashion consultation
"A.D. Translation Service"	Direct service translation

As noted earlier in the report, most of the business plans presented by the students appeared to be solid, but not necessarily groundbreaking. More important than learning the lingo of economics or coming up with "the next big idea," however, was the fact that most of the students' fundamental ways of viewing money and work were changed. Luke's extensive comments illuminate this shift in thought:

*"I've taken this class and it has just really changed the way I think about things. Now I find myself thinking of ways to spend my money to help myself to make more money. Before I would get money and just blow it on whatever – video games, clothes, shoes, consumer goods. But now I look to make that money work for me. I've started saving so that I can, I've had this recent idea of going to an auction and getting a damaged vehicle for very cheap, fixing it for cheap, and then selling it and making a good profit. So that's really got me really saving my money and I've almost reach my goal to have that money to be able to get started to get that first car and take that plunge. And things like that, before I would have spent it on a consumer good...Now if I get \$500 I try to turn it into \$1000. It has totally changed my mentality. It has changed the way I think about money. I don't let money control me anymore. Before, I used to work just so I could get money to buy more things. But now I find myself giving away more money. And not just because I've got a lot of money, but because I don't let it control me anymore. It's only money. And if you let it control you, you're working for your money. Your money's not working for you. Before, it used to hurt me to give to others or it hurt to buy something...Now it's just like, "whatever," because it will come around again. It doesn't affect me very much."*

In summary, the findings suggest that students' hopes to learn about starting a business (examples of which were presented in Table 2) were largely fulfilled. Both students who were selected for the Invention Convention finals and those whose plans did not gain widespread acclimation made demonstrable progress in learning the basics of entrepreneurship.

## **RCLC Students' Development of Communication Skills**

In addition to increasing their understandings of business (and, once again, broadening their relationship networks) the other major student-level outcome of the program that I noted was the development of students' communication and public speaking skills. I witnessed an impressive transition, in this regard, among many of the students. In the Entrepreneurship Class context, the students were extremely reserved and reticent to acknowledge one another during the first few class sessions in the fall, but by the early-April Invention Convention, six or seven of the participants displayed confidence and communicative capacities that had blossomed noticeably. They were able to effectively convey their creative visions to a crowd of over 50 people – even responding appropriately to challenging questions such as “How are you going to improve the scope and scale of your project?” One of the class participants, a quiet high school senior named David explained that, “For some reason I felt really comfortable up there (in front of the crowd). All my nerves went away... Everything flowed way better than I expected it to.”

When I asked program leaders about the growth in communication and public speaking that I had observed among the students, they suggested that similar results are achieved each year. Charlie Grace, the Notre Dame professor, for example, said:

*It builds their communication skills...I'm not sure that I would have had enough nerve when I was in high school as they do. Some of them do a great job...They're doing things that most kids just wouldn't do and that's great.*

It would indeed seem that students' growth in this regard will serve them well as they move forward educationally and professionally – regardless of whether or not they choose to become entrepreneurs.

## **Notre Dame Student-Mentors' Heightened Academic and Social Engagement**

It was evident that productive outcomes were also enjoyed by the Notre Dame student mentors. Jessica McManus Warnell, the Mendoza College of Business representative, suggested that, through their mentoring of RCLC students, the Notre Dame mentors' own understandings of business were increased:

“I think that the adage that teaching is such a good way to learn is really appropriate for what they do. Because it's one thing to have to memorize a bunch of concepts, but another to teach it to a 16 year old. It's a whole different level of understanding that they have...I definitely see them practicing patience, communication skills, and taking the time to learn something in such a way that they can articulate it to someone else.”

She further described these mentor relationships as ones that the Notre Dame students deeply appreciate and find rewarding:

“My impression is that they get a lot of joy out of this. I think they really do connect with the person who they’re mentoring. Some of the students have even stayed in touch with their mentors beyond the program. Some of them have stayed in e-mail contact and become a source of enjoyment and growth for both of them.”

Jessica’s statements were supported by those of the mentors themselves. A Notre Dame sophomore student named Tony, for example, described the RCLC experience as “one of the very best parts of my time here (at college).”

Charlie Grace claimed that the mentors’ intellectual growth and personal enjoyment were joined by expansions of their social perspectives. He said that their close partnerships with South Bend-area students – who came from diverse socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds – allowed Notre Dame students to learn more about life beyond “the bubble” of their pristine college campus:

*“Taking something that they know and teaching it to someone else is so very rewarding... The other thing is that a lot of Notre Dame students come from economic means that are much greater than the day-to-day kids at the RCLC, so for them to see that those kids aren’t much different from any other kid except that he doesn’t have the finest clothes or Ipod or eat fancy meals... But you know, inside, he’s the same kid. If, in fact, they (the Notre Dame students) have any hidden prejudice, a lot of that is probably broken down by working with those kids.”*

### **RCLC Increase in Visibility and Accessibility**

Finally, in addition to the RCLC student and Notre Dame mentor outcomes, it appears that the RCLC itself benefits from its youth entrepreneurship programming in that its visibility in and accessibility to the wider South Bend community are heightened. Unlike many of the other programs and services in the Center that predominantly involve residents from the surrounding neighborhoods, the youth entrepreneurship programs draw students from around the entire South Bend community. RCLC board member Charlie Grace explained:

*“It’s an important thing because it involves students and schools not just in the RCLC zip code, but also schools and kids throughout the county...From a board standpoint, it increases the reach of the Center and allows other people to see what the Center does and can do. “*

The wider community visibility (i.e., more people hear about and learn about the RCLC) that accompanies this increased accessibility, while not a directly stated goal of the youth entrepreneurship programming at the RCLC, is certainly an agreeable byproduct at the least.

To summarize the findings that relate to research question #3, it appears that interview participants perceived program outcomes to most noteworthy at the RCLC student level (increased understandings of entrepreneurship and improved communication/speaking skills), the Notre Dame student level (deeper understandings of business, personal fulfillment, and expanded social consciousness), and the RCLC level (increased accessibility and visibility). Table 4 provides a brief visual summary.

*Table 4: Participants' perceptions of major program outcomes*

RCLC Student Outcomes	ND Mentor Outcomes	RCLC Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Increased understandings of entrepreneurship</li><li>•Improved communication/public speaking skills</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Increased understandings of entrepreneurship</li><li>•Personal fulfillment</li><li>•Heightened social consciousness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Broader community accessibility</li><li>•Increased community visibility</li></ul>

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## Discussion

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This evaluation sought deeper understandings of how youth entrepreneurship programming works at the RCLC. Past research indicates that NFTE programs can lead to a number of valuable ends, but how do NFTE ideals unfold at the RCLC site? How do the RCLC’s organizational dynamics shape youth programming at this site? What role do relationships play here? What do program participants perceive to be the most noteworthy outcomes? These questions guided the inquiry.

The interview, observation, documental, and survey data that were collected led to numerous findings which, on the whole, indicated that the youth entrepreneurship program at the RCLC (including both the weekly Entrepreneurship class and the Summer BizCamp) draws upon its unique environment, personnel, and affiliations to provide area teenagers with highly valuable opportunities for growth and advancement. These findings have implications for practice – most directly at the RCLC, but also in other NFTE sites.

While the discussion of the findings could be framed in a number of ways, one that seems appropriate and that has potential to offer particularly interesting insights into community-based after-school practice comes from the field of sociology. Specifically, I will draw from some central tenets of “capital theory” in this summative discussion of the RCLC’s youth entrepreneurship programming. Leading to this discussion, I offer a succinct overview of several key ideas from capital theory.

### CAPITAL THEORY

According to Spillane, et al. (2003), “Broadly speaking, *capital* can be defined as resources that are acquired, accumulate, and are of value in certain situations or, to use the lingo of economists, are of worth in particular markets” (p. 3). Numerous forms of “capital” have been described by sociologists, but those that appear to be most relevant in this discussion of youth entrepreneurship at the RCLC include: 1) economic capital, 2) human capital, 3) cultural capital, and 4) social capital. Economic capital – a concept that is commonly addressed in discussions of entrepreneurship – includes material resources (such as money, goods, products. etc.) that can help individuals better their life situations. Human capital entails the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are used to advance through life. A couple examples of human capital include the

technical skills that electricians possess and utilize to re-wire houses and the software understandings that programmers have and use to set up computer systems. Cultural capital, a concept that is usually tied to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, generally refers to individuals' capacities to understand and navigate complex social and organizational settings. Cultural capital is a context-specific construct, meaning that one's understandings of how to be successful in one setting are not necessarily transferable to another. For example, a teenager who thrives in his local neighborhood's social setting (knows how to stay safe, act cool, get respect and admiration from peers, etc.) might struggle greatly in his school setting (poor grades, infrequent attendance, disruptive behavior, etc.). Finally, social capital refers to the relationships that provide individuals with trust, information, and other supports that can help them make educational and/or professional advancements.

These forms of capital certainly overlap and work in concert with one another. Coleman (1988), Bourdieu (1990), and others (including Lin (1999), Portes (1998), Warren (2005)) describe how extensive amounts of one capital can lead to increases in other capitals. (For example, Coleman claims that social capital undergirds human capital and Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital is intertwined with economic capital). These thoughts on capital theory are useful in considering the RCLC's youth entrepreneurship efforts because the program tacitly adheres to this notion that the multiple capitals work in concert with one another. In fact, after months of data collection, analysis and writing, my overriding impression is this: The RCLC program is fully engaged in a pursuit of comprehensive capital development.

### **Capital Development Through Youth Entrepreneurship**

It is plainly evident that human capital is developed as RCLC entrepreneurship students learn the basic ideas, skills, and requirements of starting a business. The NFTE curriculum, Luther Tyson's instruction, and Notre Dame student mentoring all contributed to RCLC students' impressive growth in technical knowledge and usable business skills. This growth in human capital is naturally directed toward increases in economic capital, for, as students come to understand business plans, market analysis, and other such concepts (thereby elevating their human capital stores), they can make more money and acquire material resources (economic capital). These findings were consistent with what one might have expected from a youth entrepreneurship program.

However, I found that the program does not emphasize academic drilling, skill-development, and money-making to the exclusion of broader life considerations and pursuits. Importantly, the unique setting, structure, philosophy, and resources of the RCLC's entrepreneurship program concurrently facilitate cultural and social capital development. The foundation of this program,

in fact, appeared to be its provision of resourceful relationships. These relationships, which created both bonding and bridging social capital, provided students with information, behavioral cues, and insights into unwritten “ways of being” – all of which could provide significant guidance and/or support in students’ business pursuits. Perhaps more importantly, the social capital and cultural capital described here could also be invaluable to students’ broader life development (educationally, socially, etc.).

A final point to be made in this discussion of the RCLC entrepreneurship program as a facilitator of capital development is that the “capital benefits” were not reserved for just the RCLC students. The Notre Dame student-mentors improved their human capital through teaching (deepening their understandings of entrepreneurship through their tutelage of RCLC students) and their social and cultural capital through relationships (meeting new people and maturing their understandings of how to contribute to and navigate through a diverse and complex society). Additionally, the RCLC developed social capital at the organizational level through its partnership with Central High School and, by increasing its accessibility and visibility to the wider South Bend region, elevated its potential for developing strategic heterogeneous bonds in the future. Table 5 provides a summary of some major ways/areas where the program is acting as a facilitator of capital development.

*Table 5: Capital Development in the RCLC’s youth entrepreneurship program.*

<p><b>Facilitators of human capital development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NFTE curriculum</li> <li>• Classroom instruction</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Dynamic learning setting</li> <li>• Experiential opportunities</li> </ul>	<p><i>Considerations:</i> RCLC and Notre Dame students’ increased skills and understandings of “business-starting” were largely dependent upon relationships and practical experiences.</p>
<p><b>Facilitators of economic capital development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of prize money</li> <li>• Understandings of entrepreneurship concepts and philosophies</li> <li>• Relationships with strategic people (social capital)</li> <li>• Examples of “how things get done” (cultural capital)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Considerations:</i> The RCLC program allowed each of the other forms of capital (human, cultural, and social) to contribute to students’ potential increases in economic capital.</p>

<b>Facilitators of cultural capital development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure to successful individuals (instructors, mentors, etc.)</li> <li>• Experiential understandings (learning how things work by actually doing them)</li> </ul>	<i>Considerations:</i> Students learned some valuable “soft skills” and informal behavioral codes of business through their project-based work with successful adult instructors and mentors.
<b>Facilitators of social capital development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small class size</li> <li>• Individualized instruction</li> <li>• Regular interaction with diverse peers</li> <li>• Mentor structure</li> </ul>	<i>Considerations:</i> The individual and organizational-level networks that developed were heterogeneous and provided participants bridges to new opportunities.

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## Recommendations and Future Directions

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The findings suggest that the entrepreneurship program should continue its comprehensive capital development efforts. The RCLC’s capacities to draw upon its unique organizational attributes to create opportunities for educational, professional, and relational growth have contributed to the formation of an excellent youth entrepreneurship program. While continuing these pursuits, I posit several recommendations that, if pursued, might help the program productively address some of its ongoing challenges. Although some of these recommendations have already been deliberated by program staff<sup>4</sup> and some would be difficult to implement due to uncontrollable external variables, they each merit consideration as future iterations of the youth entrepreneurship program unfold in years ahead.

1. *Pursue and cultivate partnerships with local high schools.* The highly successful partnership with Central High School suggests that similar arrangements should be consistently sought with other high schools (both public and private) in the area. A pivotal challenge here is the identification of a “champion” within each school who can supplement and support youth entrepreneurship efforts on a regular basis. In addition to increasing the time students can devote to their entrepreneurial pursuits, such partnerships would also improve the program’s ability to recruit and retain new students.
2. *Emphasize collaboration and team-building throughout the Entrepreneurship class.* Providing students with ongoing opportunities to work together and get to know one another – particularly during the early phases of the program – can instigate social capital formation. Such social capital undergirds student learning and would likely also lead to higher class retention rates. The program’s efforts in this area have been solid to date, so there is a foundation upon which to build.
3. *Invite community-based entrepreneurs to take on substantive roles.* Valuable “real life” lessons could be drawn from local individuals and businesses that put entrepreneurial tenets to practice each day. They could be invited to class as guest speakers and/or the

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<sup>4</sup> Recent developments to the program include the reincorporation of weekly team-building activities in the Entrepreneurship class and the establishment of a “school credit option” for students.

class could visit the entrepreneurs in their actual places of practice. In addition to insights about “technical” business issues, community business people could engage timely issues such as ethics, technology, and the U.S./world economy. Community entrepreneurs could play particularly effective roles during the early fall sessions of the Entrepreneurship class when irregular student attendance patterns tend to predominate (thereby providing students with rich learning opportunities while avoiding content redundancy).

4. *Purposefully match RCLC students with Notre Dame mentors based on common interests.* The already-rich relationships between youth entrepreneurs and mentors might reap even further rewards if the current random assignment process was replaced by informed matching that considers students’ and mentors’ particular business interests/specialties, personality types, schedules, goals, etc. This process could be facilitated with simple questionnaires and/or interviews.
5. *Provide post-class support to entrepreneurship students.* The wealth of time and resources that are devoted to learning about entrepreneurship and designing business plans could be appropriately complemented by systematic support for students who complete the Entrepreneurship class. Regardless of the form/structure that such support would ultimately take (periodic workshops, mini-grants for start-up support, individual consultation, etc.), it could help provide students with the ongoing capitals (human, economic, cultural, and social) that are needed to put their ideas into practice in sustainable ways.
6. *Engage in continual evaluation and reflection.* Like other NFTE programs that utilize ongoing research and evaluation to improve core processes and outcomes, the RCLC’s youth entrepreneurship programming should be critically examined on a regular basis. The utilization of both narrative and statistical methods would likely provide the most utility to program staff.

In conclusion, as the highly effective youth entrepreneurship program moves forward at the RCLC, there is much reason to expect that its general state of thriving should continue. With continued attention to comprehensive capital development and careful consideration of the recommendations listed above, countless area students (and the key organizations that support them) will benefit immensely.

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