Music-based services for young people experiencing homelessness:
The potential for connection, engagement, and opportunity

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Overview

- Study background and development
- Methodology
- Findings and implications
- Research trajectory

Study Background

- Longstanding passion for music
- Played a variety of instruments throughout youth
- Musical mentors growing up
- Scholastic training as audio engineer
- Life as a working musician

Study Background

- Direct practice experience
  - Harm reduction group work
- Doctoral coursework
  - Turning to strengths
- Identifying a research topic
  - Exploring a music studio in a transitional living program for young people experiencing homelessness

Conceptual Framework

Strengths Perspective [1]

Ecological Resiliency [2]

Positive Youth Development (PYD) [3]
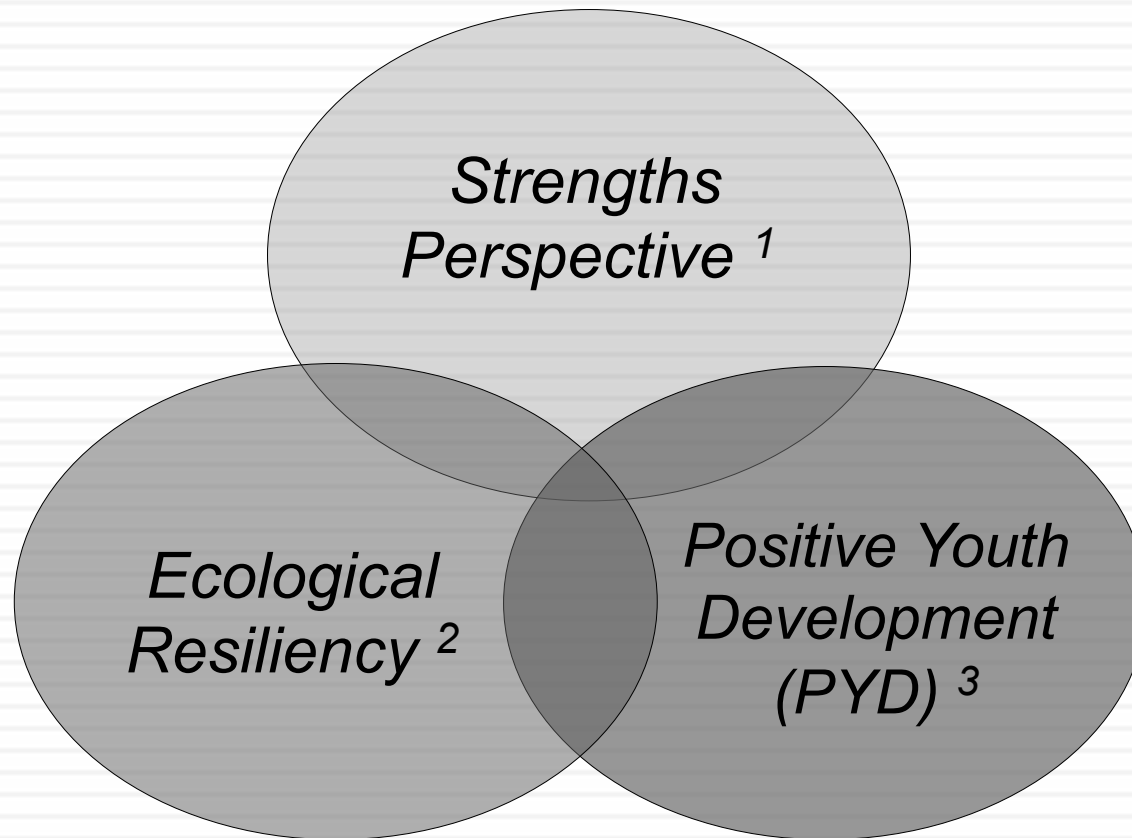
Theoretical sensitivity [4]

- ☐ Through experience, one can give meaning to the data

- ☐ Previous professional experience with agency

- ☐ Personal experiences with the benefits of music

- ☐ Commitment to strengths-based work with young people experiencing homelessness

Bodies of Literature Reviewed

- Youth homelessness
- Homeless youth services
- Recreational, art, and music-based services in social work and related fields

Youth Homelessness

- Varying definitions of youth homelessness [5-7]
- Prevalence of youth homelessness [8]
- Majority of research is focused on:
  - Risks that lead to young people experiencing [9-11] homelessness
  - Consequences they experience while homeless [12-13]
- Some literature exploring the strengths of young people experiencing homelessness [14-17]
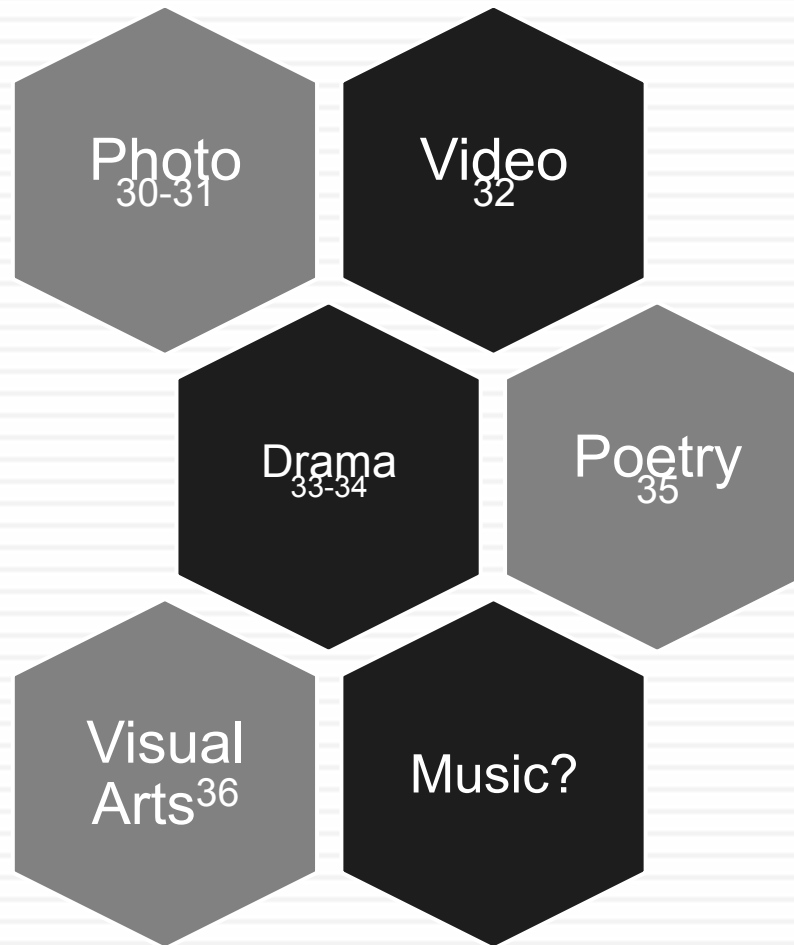
Homeless youth services

- Development of homeless youth legislation and services [18]
  - Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act, Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act
  - Influences risks and consequences perspective
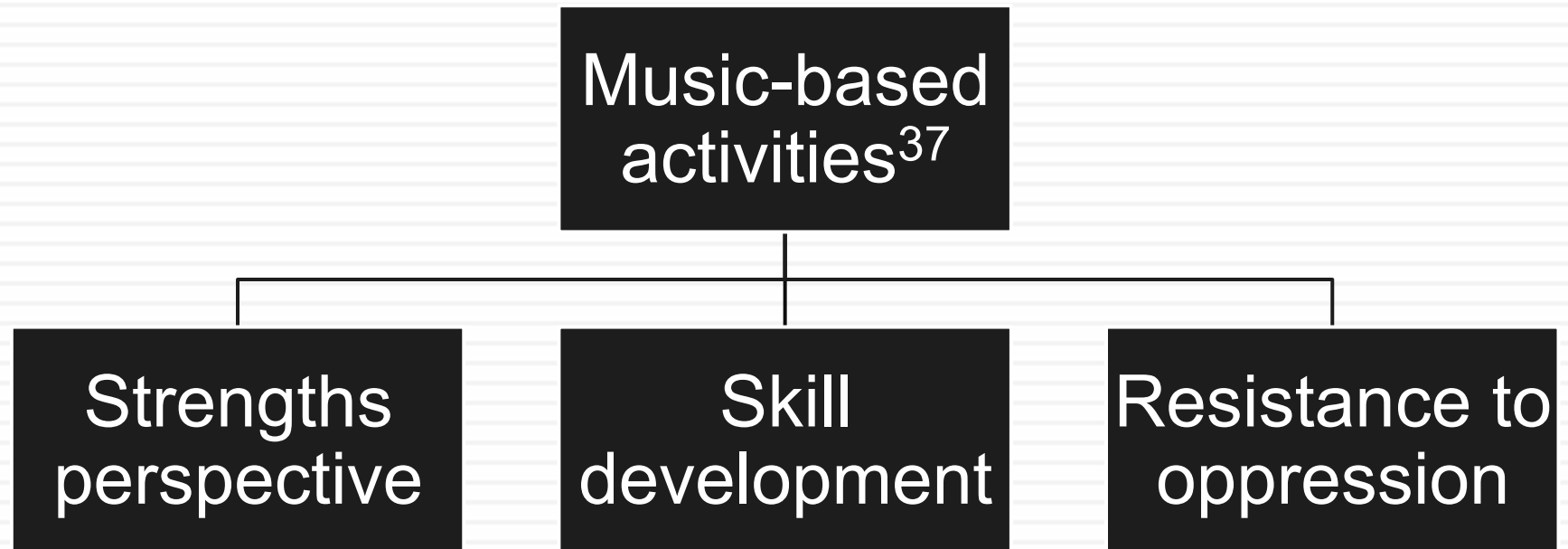- Little research regarding the effectiveness of services for young people experiencing homelessness [19-20]

Recreational, art, and music-based services

- Historical relationship between the recreation movement, group work, and social work [21-24]
- Extensive use of recreational, art, and music-based services in settlement house movement
  - Hull House [25-29]
- Recreational, art, and music-based services continue to be used in social work and related fields today

Recreational, art, and music-based services

Photo [30-31]

Video [32]

Drama [33-34]

Poetry [35]

Visual Arts [36]

Music?

Recreational, art, and music-based services

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            ┌─────────────────┐
            │   Music-based   │
            │   activities[37]│
            └────────┬────────┘
        ┌────────────┼────────────┐
┌───────────┐  ┌───────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
│ Strengths │  │   Skill   │  │Resistance to │
│perspective│  │development│  │  oppression  │
└───────────┘  └───────────┘  └──────────────┘
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Gaps in the Literature

- Youth homelessness literature is primarily framed from a risks and consequences perspective
- Supported by framing youth homelessness as a form of delinquency
- Little empirical knowledge regarding the effectiveness of homeless youth services
- Social work and related fields are effectively using recreational, art, and music-based services to engage youths' strengths

Addressing the Gaps

- Challenge the focus on risks, consequences, and delinquency
- Add to the growing empirical literature on strengths and accomplishments
- Contribute to the growing empirical literature on homeless youth services
- Explore music-based services as a way to engage young people experiencing homelessness strengths

Research Questions

- Q1: What processes are involved in promoting and developing a music studio in a transitional living program for young people experiencing homelessness?

- Q2: What are young people's experiences while engaging in the music studio?

- Q3: What meanings do they attach to their experiences?

- Q4: Does involvement promote personal strengths, and if so, how?

Methodology

- Qualitative methods provide the best fit for the study [38]
  - Exploration is preferred to causation
  - Want to know the *how* as opposed to *why*
  - When little to no data exists
- Ethnographic case study

Case Study [39-40]

Agency

Processes

Studio

Youth and staff

Experiences and meanings
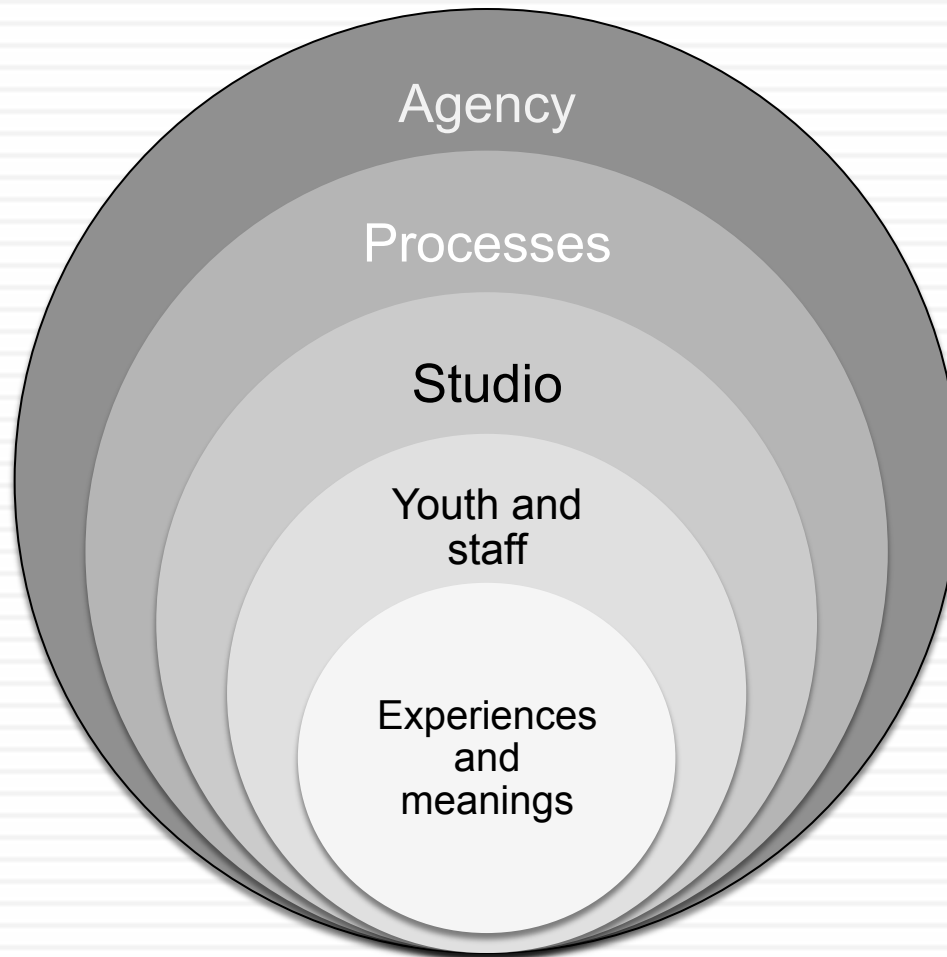
Ethnographic Methods

- Key informant interviews
  - Explored the processes involved in promoting and developing the music studio (Q1)
- Participant observation in the music studio
  - Initially explore young people's experiences in the studio (Q2)
- Semi-structured interviews
  - Additionally explore young people's experiences in the studio (Q2) and the meaning they attach to their experiences (Q3)

Co-constructed audio documentary[41]

- Aurally explores young people's experiences in the music studio (Q2) and the meanings they attach to their experiences (Q3)
- Draws on interdisciplinary and participatory techniques and technologies
- An exceptional supplementary method for this study
  - Brings a participatory dimension to the project
  - Creates opportunities for young people to expand their relationship with media production

Data Collection

Participant Observation
- 10 young people
- 1 staff
- 80 hours
- 30 sessions

Interviews
- 7 young people
- 2 staff
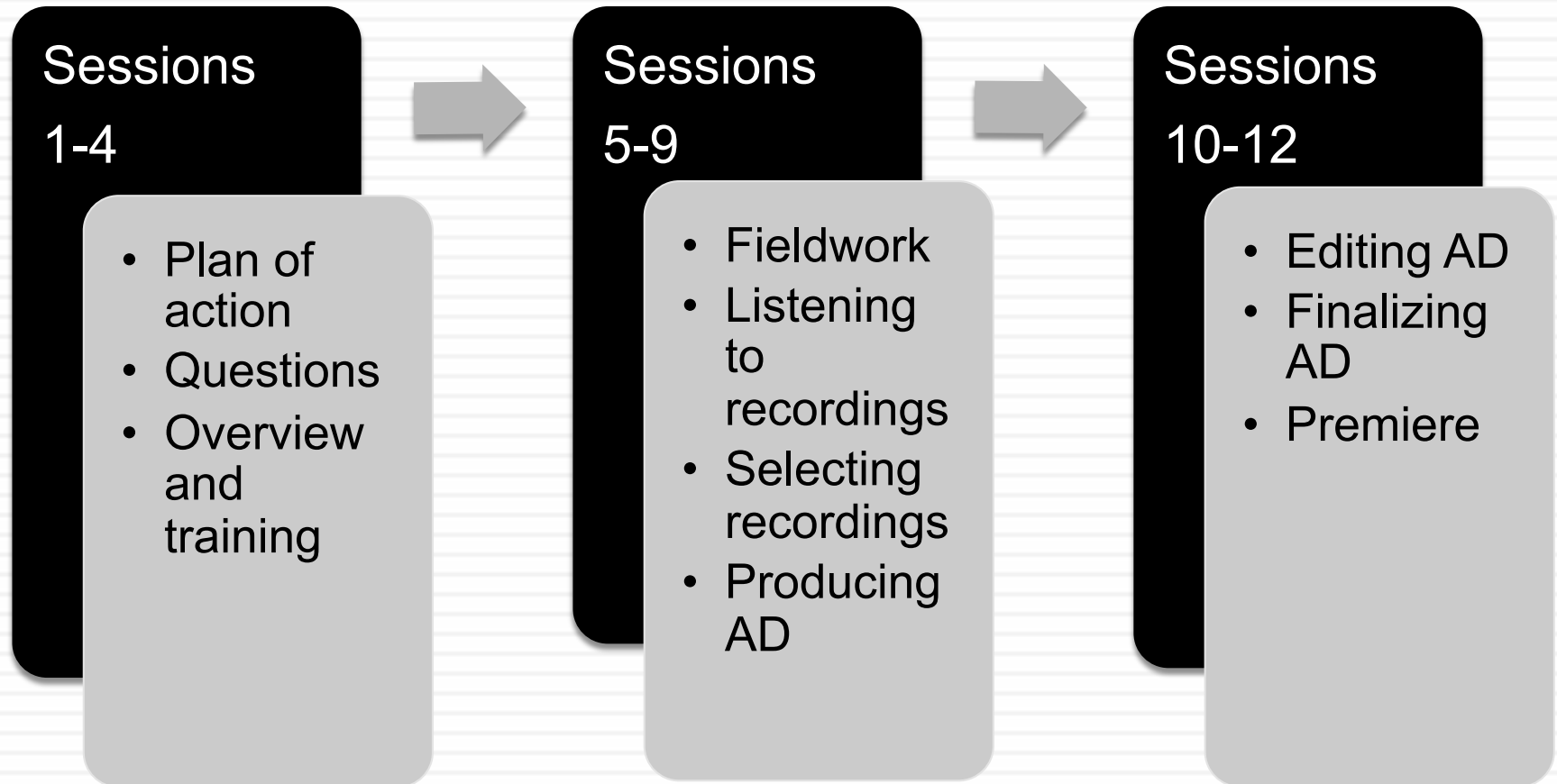- 6 key informants
- Incentives

Audio Documentary
- 4 young people
- 10 sessions
- Incentives

Data Collection: Audio Documentary

- Young people engaged in training, fieldwork, and production
- Fieldwork explored several questions
  - Challenges?
  - Lessons?
  - Greatest thing about the studio?
- Final audio documentary includes fieldwork, original music, and spoken word work
- Incentives for participation

Audio Documentary Development

Sessions 1-4

- Plan of action
- Questions
- Overview and training

Sessions 5-9

- Fieldwork
- Listening to recordings
- Selecting recordings
- Producing AD

Sessions 10-12

- Editing AD
- Finalizing AD
- Premiere

Data Analysis

- Iterative, recursive two-phase model of coding and memoing

- Fieldnotes and interview transcripts

- Phase I
  - Treat data as an entire set
  - Ask questions of the data
  - Openly code
  - Create initial memos

Data Analysis

- Phase II
  - Select themes
  - Focused coding
  - Integrative memoing
  - Develop thematic narrative
- Second coder
- Member checks

Bronzeville [43]

Photo credit: http://www.explorechicago.org/city/en/neighborhoods/bronzeville.html

Participants

- Ten young people (ages of 18 to 21)
  - Six young men and four young women
  - All African American
- Seven staff members
  - Two Men
    - One African American
    - One Caucasian
  - Five Women
    - Two African American
    - Three Caucasian

Findings – Q1

- Processes involved in promoting and developing the music studio
  - Organizational commitment to PYD
  - Promotion of holistic supportive services
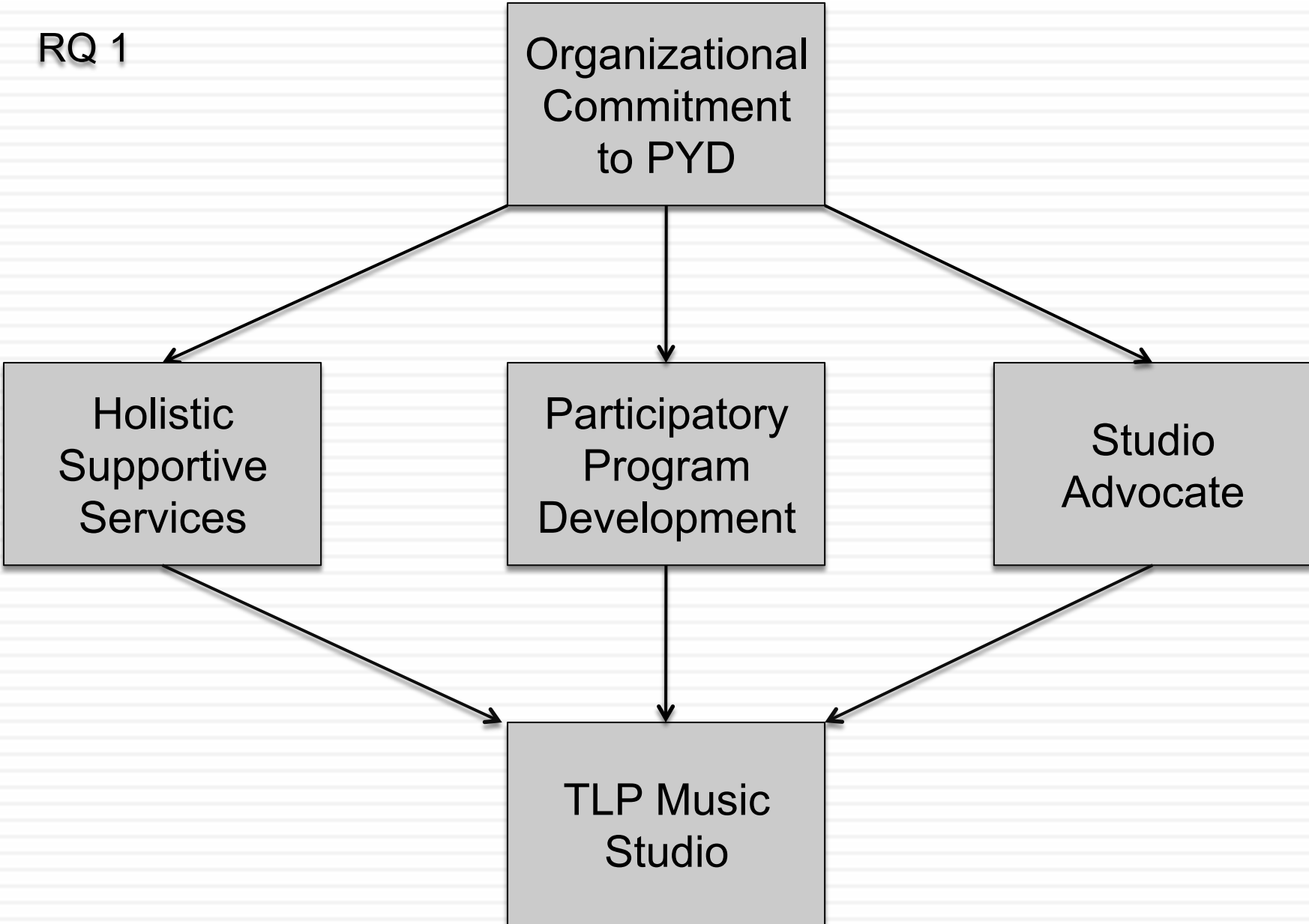 - Studio advocate

RQ 1

Organizational
Commitment
to PYD

Holistic
Supportive
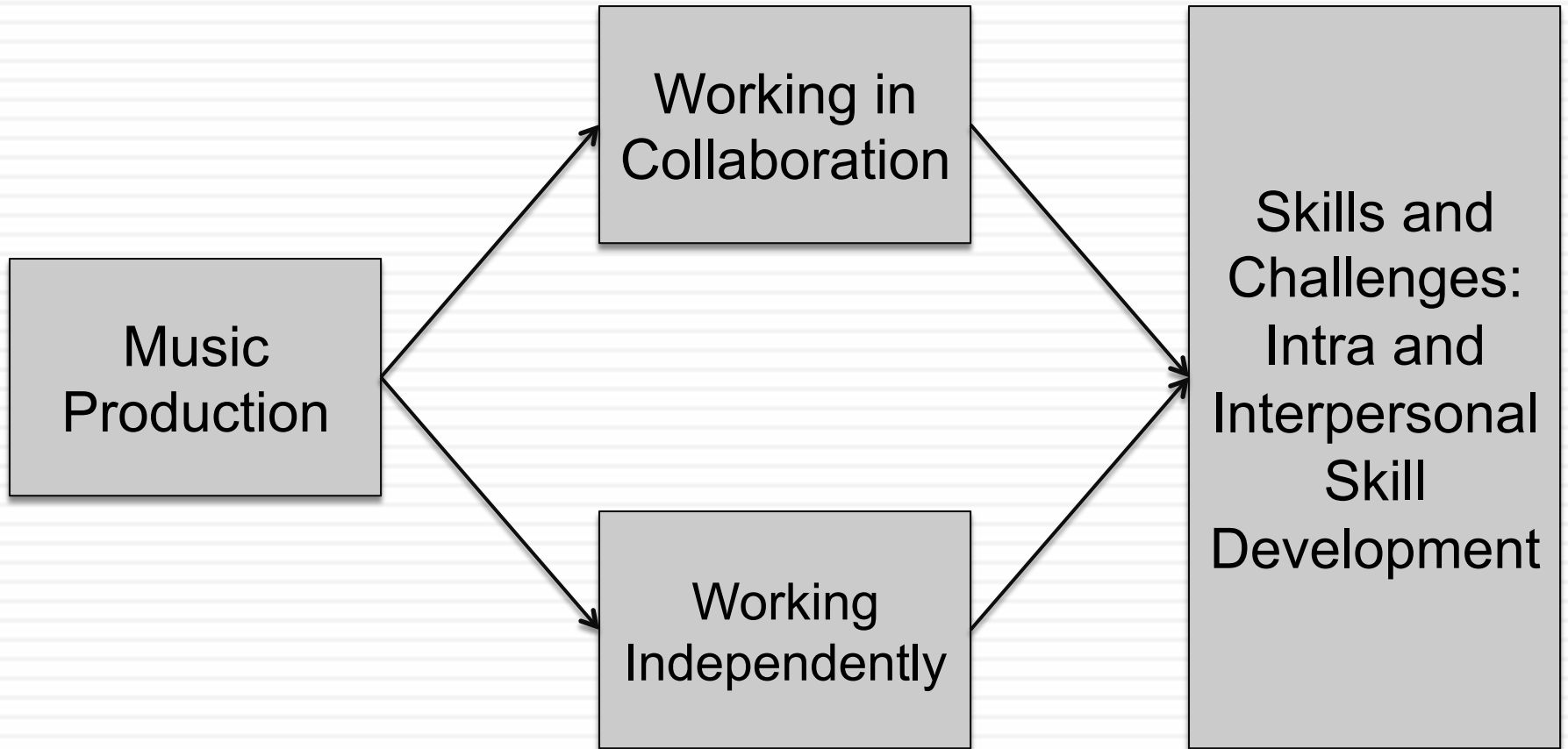Services

Participatory
Program
Development

Studio
Advocate

TLP Music
Studio

Findings – Q2

- Young people's experiences in the studio
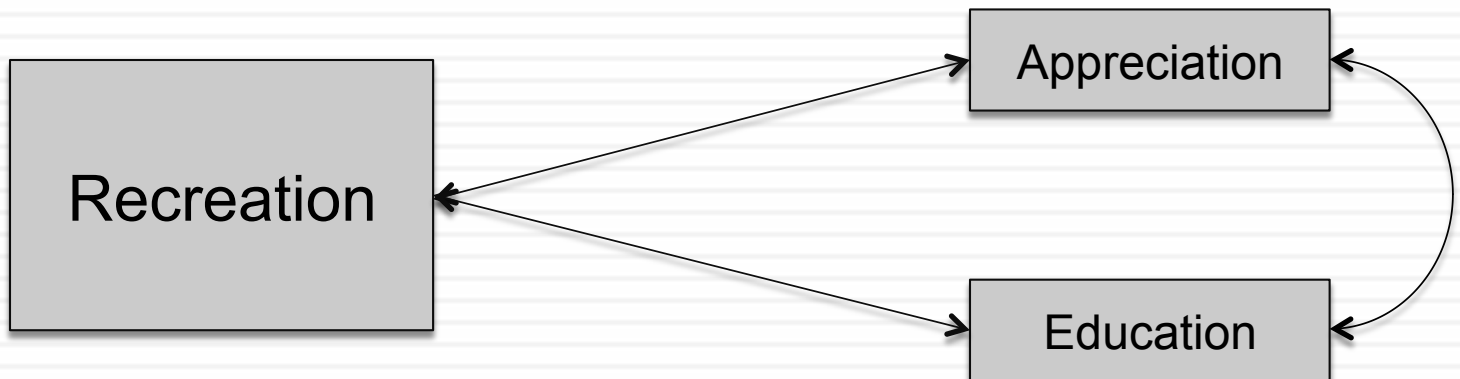 - Music production
  - Music education
  - Music appreciation
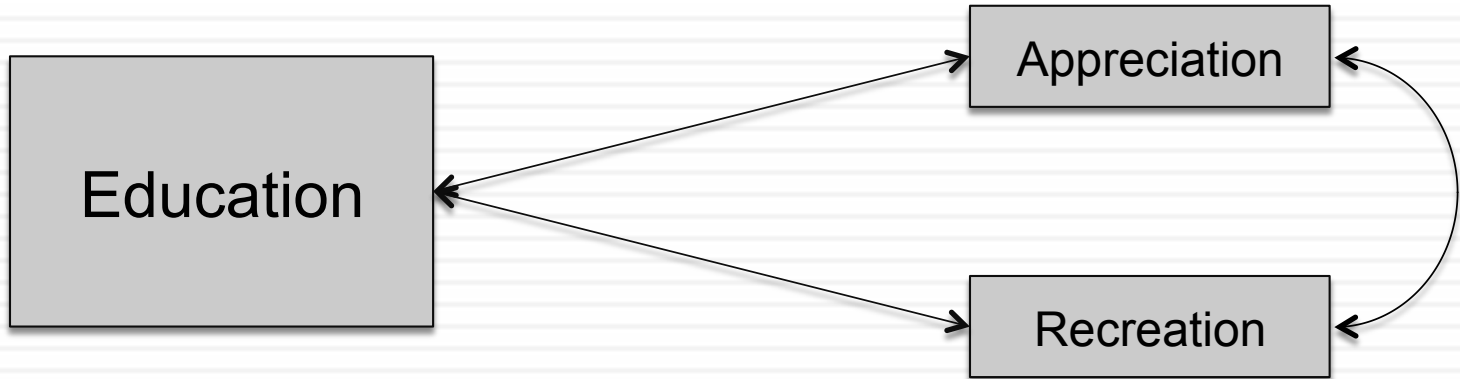
RQ 2

Staff

Young People
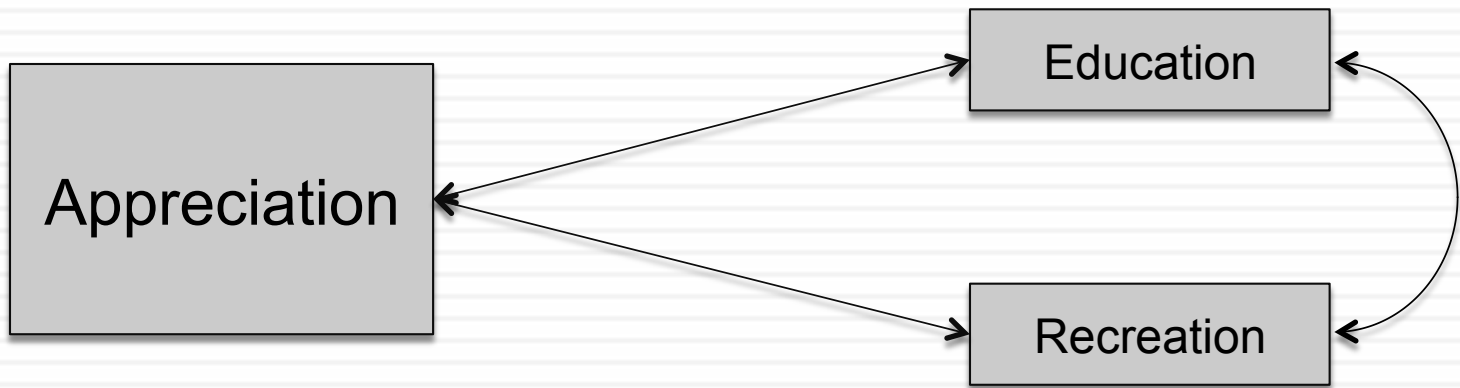
RQ 2

Findings – Q3

- Meaning young people attach to their experiences
  - Sense of connection and engagement
  - Space for expression
  - Challenges and frustrations
  - Opportunity

Audio Documentary – Sample

- Outlaw*
- Theo*
- Smurf*
- Marcus*
- Brian (me)

*Pseudonyms

Audio Documentary – Sample

Summary

- RQ1
  - Studio is a demonstration and embodiment of the agency's ongoing organizational commitment to PYD
- Implications
  - Challenges the dominant risks and consequences narrative
  - Adds to the small but growing body of literature exploring young people experiencing homelessness strengths
  - Highlights the potential for the implementation of a strengths-based, PYD informed approach

Summary

- RQ 2 & 3
  - Young people experience the studio as a space to collaboratively and independently engage in music production, education, and appreciation
  - They describe their experiences as opportunities for connection, engagement, and expression
- Implications
  - Building on a rich history of using recreational, art, and music based services
  - Extending to use with young people experiencing homelessness

Findings– Q4

- Does involvement promote personal strengths, and if so, how?
  - Various demonstrations of young people engaging their strengths and talents in the studio
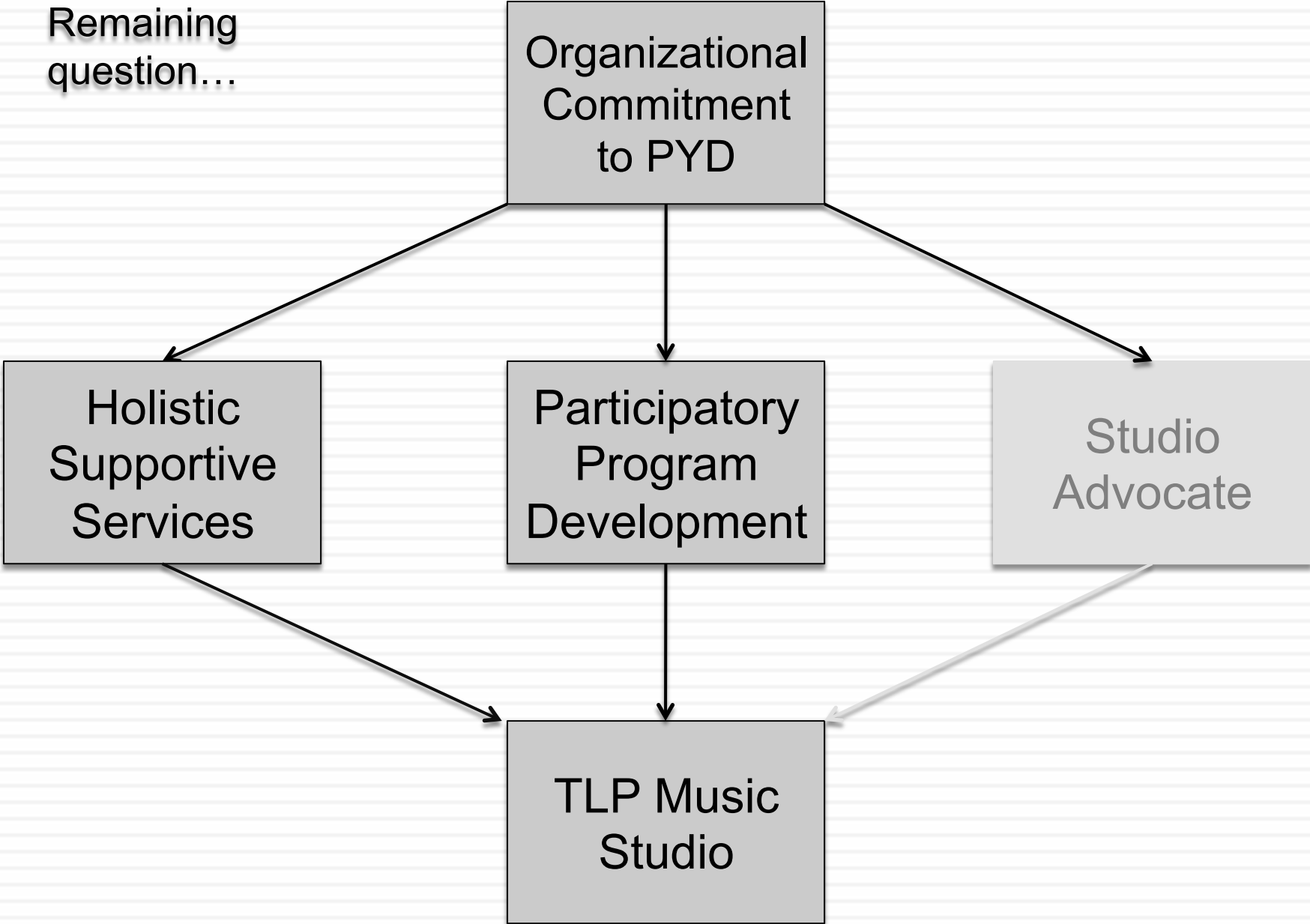 - The studio is also a space to foster and develop strengths and talents

Remaining question…

Organizational Commitment to PYD

Holistic Supportive Services

Participatory Program Development

Studio Advocate

TLP Music Studio

Potential for Increased Mentorship and Support

- Observations
  - Lack of mentorship and support in the studio and the notion that young people may be missing something as a result of it
  - My perceptions of young people's positive response to my presence in the studio
  - Young people's assertion that the audio documentary was the first project they completed in the studio due to the inherent structure…
- What might young people's experiences in the studio look like with increased mentorship and support?

Potential for Increased Mentorship and Support

- Complicated proposition in that the studio is a young person centered space

- Investment in keeping it that way - a space for young people to be free to express themselves as they see fit

- Potential solution in the peer educator model

Next Study – Aims and Questions

- Exploration of the TLP drop-in center studio with a particular focus on:
  - The development and implementation of the peer educator role
  - Young people's experiences in the studio and the meaning they attach to their experiences
  - The transactional (and potentially reciprocal) process of intra and interpersonal skill development
    - How does this happen in the studio?
    - Important as it we know that intra and interpersonal skill development leads to better educational and vocational outcomes for young people

Next Study – Methods

- Similar to previous study
  - Ethnographic methods
  - Observation 2X/week
  - Interviews with young people and staff engaged with the studio
- May also include
  - Co-constructed audio documentary work
  - Participatory action component (peer research model)

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