Refereed Paper

‘Now someone like me finds me’: Gift Exchange and Reciprocity in Community Arts at Bankstown Youth Development Service

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Abstract
The relationship between artist and participant is central to community arts. It is the nature of this relationship that defines the art form and distinguishes it from mainstream artistic practice. Participation, access, engagement and collaboration are keys to this successful relationship and are concepts that have been identified as integral to the practice throughout the development of community arts (Hawkins, 1993). Theorising community arts through the lens of gift exchange is one way to examine the uniqueness of the artist and participant relationship and its capacity to build community through artistic and social exchanges. Artistic relationships between participants in community arts may be built over years and decades of practice, and the case study organisation presented in this article, Bankstown Youth Development Service, is one example of how career trajectories are developed through community arts. This case study shows that there is a distinct need for more longitudinal studies and evaluations of community artists and organisations, as they offer an illuminating view of the value and effects of community arts beyond immediate economic, artistic or social outcomes.

Biography
Joanna Winchester is Drama Education Lecturer at Australian Catholic University and recently completed her PhD at the Institute of Culture and Society, UWS. Her doctoral research investigated the artistic and social exchanges that community arts organisations facilitate within long term practice in communities. She is particularly concerned with community arts organisations and their engagement with marginalised communities.

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Introduction
This article was developed from research conducted through a PhD thesis. Through the exploration of three key case studies of community arts projects based in western Sydney, NSW, Australia, my thesis considered the diverse ways in which community arts are valued by practitioners and participants, evaluators and advocates. The thesis aimed to provide community arts practitioners with a theoretical framework highlighting the uniqueness and complexity of community arts as an art form, particularly in its capacity to achieve both social and artistic outcomes. By applying the theoretical framework of gift exchange to community arts practitioners’ creative process, I argue that there is a need to refocus attention on the relationship between artist and participant. In order to develop evaluation strategies aligned to the values of community arts practitioners, this relationship must be acknowledged as integral to the creative process in community arts, and therefore essential to the assessment of the social and artistic outcomes.

This article will concentrate on one of those case studies and focus on the value of a longitudinal approach to evaluation for tracking the capacity building of community artists and participants. The theory of gift exchange highlights the process of developing the unique relationship between artists and participants in community arts, which allows the opportunity for long-term social and artistic outcomes. Two terms I use often within this article are ‘artist’ and ‘participant’. When I use the word ‘artist’ in relation to the individuals within the community arts organisations, I am referring to the facilitators of the projects who have instigated or have been employed to conduct the projects in question. The term ‘participant’ is used to describe the members of the community who elect to take part in these projects as co-creators with the facilitator. These two terms have wider meanings across a range of community arts and artistic practice, and I acknowledge that these terms are fluid, as participants become creators and artists alongside the facilitators. This article also discusses at length the complex nature of the relationship between community artists and community participants. When I use the term ‘relationship’, I am referring to any connection that a community arts practitioner or an organisation has with a particular community member or group. This connection with a community member could occur with a participant in a project or within consultation towards and during a project. These connections and relationships can be long-term, built up over many years of artistic work within and about a community, or short term, over just one project. These relationships could be initiated by the artist or by the community participant, and are generally in a state of flux dependent on the circumstances. These relationships are complex and ever evolving, but are, I argue, integral to any analysis of the outcomes of community arts projects.

Methodology
I used a qualitative approach to methodology in my thesis, through a case study–led inquiry. Drawing on Creswell’s (2003) knowledge claim distinctions, the approach I took in the qualitative research design was one of ‘advocacy/participatory’ (p. 6), which implies that the research focus is political, empowerment issue orientated, collaborative, and change orientated. The advocacy researcher approaches research in a collaborative manner, in order to not further marginalise the research participants,
and may provide the opportunity for the participants to have a critical voice or develop an agenda for change (Creswell, 2003). The selection of the case studies in the thesis was determined by their suitability to the aims and outcomes of the research, the ability and willingness of the community arts organisations and artists to be subjects in a doctorate research project, and the long-term relationship each artist and/or organisation had with their community. I also made an early decision to focus the detailed case studies within the geographic limit of western Sydney due to the long-term historical investment in community arts in the area, as well as my relationship with the area as a resident and practising artist.

I came across Bankstown Youth Development Service (BYDS) during pilot interviews with community arts practitioners in western Sydney in 2007. Artistic director Tim Carroll was very open to my research, and eager for BYDS to be involved. I continued my contact with Carroll, and began to attend live events run by BYDS, introducing myself to the practising artists and participants. I conducted formal interviews with five current staff members, all of which were digitally recorded and transcribed. I also did numerous informal interviews with staff and participants, the content of which I notated in my field-work diary. I continued my research observations of BYDS until 2010, for 14 months in total. I should note I was a board member of BYDS from 2009–2012. This article focuses on one BYDS staff member, Michael Mohammed Ahmad, and how his relationship with the Artistic Director Tim Carroll contributed to his artistic career.

**Gift Theory and Community Arts**

Affected by a neoliberal approach to policy making, funding agencies and the community arts field have steadily increased their commitment to evaluation, producing evidence for the value of community arts engagement in communities (Belfiore, 2002). Oakley (2006) argues that evidence-based research has been used to justify the existence of public funding in the arts but that there have been a number of problems with the research in existence so far. One key limitation is that research is conducted predominantly by practitioners, leading to a blurring of the line between evidence and advocacy. Oakley argues that the research is often of poor quality and that it lacks a theoretical framework (Oakley, 2005). There is a lack of longitudinal studies, and a tendency to use snapshot data that does not expose systemic issues. Judging impact requires more than just taking ten people and multiplying the results. Oakley suggests that there should be less concern with gathering evidence to respond to government agendas and more emphasis on how to use evidence to inform practice.

Practitioners themselves have identified the limitations of some evaluation practices, as can be seen in the research conducted by the Globalism Research Centre at RMIT University (Mulligan, 2008). In the study, community arts practitioners identified that evaluation requirements have been useful in reflecting and analysing their practice, but that time and funding constraints have limited the evaluation techniques to surveys that only require quick responses (Mulligan, 2008). I have argued previously that the flaw with single-project evaluations is that they may be used to account for the value of community arts more generally, without acknowledging the historical contribution of organisations and artists to a locale (Winchester, 2013).

Oakley's research has been influential in my research design. Her arguments that evaluations lack an adequate theory have been integral to my investigations into providing a theoretical context for community arts. The emphasis I place on artistic practice within this case study is predominately due to her call for evidence-based evaluations to inform better practice. Evaluation may provide an opportunity for community arts practitioners to progress their practice and provide arguments for increases in funding, but evaluation techniques must first represent the artistic processes appropriately. It is my intention to address these issues by focusing attention on the practice of community arts workers, and the relationships between arts workers, organisations and community participants. The importance of the relationships that form from community arts projects – and the connections of these relationships to past and future projects and organisations – are sidestepped in current economic and social-
impact analysis, because not enough attention is given to the long-term career trajectories of community participants and practitioners.

Gift exchange theory offers community arts the opportunity to articulate its creative process and the ways in which it establishes ties and connections with community participants beyond the instrumental. I argue that community arts should be considered as functioning within a gift economy because of participants’ ability to create and maintain social ties. Gift exchange as a theory developed from anthropology, in particular an essay by Marcel Mauss (1922/1990) titled ‘The Gift’, first published in 1922. His essay and the ultimate conclusions he presents from his examination of gift exchange in primitive and modern societies has led to the development of many contemporary theories around exchange.

Mauss investigated the reasons why, in so many societies at different periods of time and in different contexts, individuals and groups feel obliged to give, and, once having received a gift, feel obliged to return a gift either of the same or greater value. From his research, Mauss argued that for gift exchange to occur there must be three obligations present: to give; to accept; and to reciprocate a gift. After conducting research on gift economies within Polynesian and Maori communities, Mauss concluded that exchange develops social ties through reciprocity. I argue that the obligations that Mauss argues are present in gift exchange can be identified within community art practice. This analysis of obligations will allow the community arts field to move forward in theorising the functionality and value of community arts in society.

Komter (2005) integrates theories of gratitude with gift exchange. She illuminates the dependency between gift exchange and gratitude, and provides an analysis that highlights the function of gratitude as an important aspect of community building. By examining how gift exchange creates community connection, Komter’s work enables an analysis of the community building that is argued to take place in community arts. She argues that reciprocity is one of the underlying principles behind gift exchange and that the associated feelings of gratitude function as the moral cement of human society and culture. As she states:

Gratitude is part of the chain of reciprocity and, as such, it has ‘survival value’: it is sustaining a cycle of gift and counter-gift and is thereby essential in creating social cohesion and community. (p. 57)

Komter’s analysis allows us to argue for the importance of fostering gift exchange by recognising the circumstances in which it takes place in our society. Komter (2005) gives weight to the premise that recipients must have the capacity to appreciate a gift and to ‘enjoy the good things’ (p. 66) offered to them before they are able to reciprocate the gift. The ability to experience gratitude is essential, according to Komter, for a gift to move, as it fosters a desire to reciprocate. She argues that the breakdown of gift exchange leads to the withdrawal of social bonds and disconnection from community life, which leads to a decrease in individual wellbeing – something that Arvanitakis (2007) argues leads to a community breakdown. To be grateful is to give, to give is to receive, and to continue to give expands relationships with others.

Gratitude comes with a price, however, and the relationships fostered throughout gift exchange can be problematic. Some relationships must be considered in terms of power relations and the potential for debt to have negative consequences. The act of giving simultaneously creates solidarity and superiority as the recipient is appreciative of the gift but also remains in the debt of the donor. This can create a double bind between donor and recipient (Godelier, 1999). Komter (2005) argues that the subtle balance between interdependence and dependence that is involved in gift exchange causes power and control to be entrenched. There are expectations developed between donor and recipient that can quash the good intentions of the original donor.
Godelier (1999) shows that there is a possibility of power imbalance between donor and recipient within gift exchange. He argues that giving can legitimise the power imbalance if a hierarchy is established, and I argue this should be considered within the context of community arts and its impact on the creative process. Nicholson (2005) argues that gift exchange theory can be used to analyse the positive and negative consequences of social interactions in applied drama and analyses discourses that place gift exchange within particular systems of value, and emphasises the importance of questioning the values of practitioners. In her analysis, she argues that gift exchange theory allows the opportunity to acknowledge the risks and uncertainties of the relationships, and uses gift exchange theory to highlight ethical concerns within the process of community drama.

Nicholson draws on Derrida’s challenge to Mauss and his circles of obligation by identifying the distortion of the gift’s altruism when it is inevitably bound up in systems of value. Derrida (1992) argues that while it is possible to give a selfless gift, the practice of giving distorts the gift’s symbolic value. Nicholson takes Derrida’s premise and examines a practitioner’s intention throughout the process of community arts. Nicholson (2005) highlights the benefits of continuing to question a practitioner’s intent when working with community participants, and to ensure openness:

... in which practitioners recognise that their role is not to give participants a voice – with all the hierarchical implications that phrase involves – but to create spaces and places that enable the participant’s voices to be heard. (p. 163)

Nicholson’s analysis points to the tensions between the participant and the artist in community arts, and leads the way to discussions on the importance of this complex relationship to the efficacy of the community arts process. By incorporating Derrida’s analysis, Nicholson destabilises the premise that community artists work only from altruistic motives, and emphasises the importance of understanding the broader motivations of the artist and how these motivations might impact on the artist’s relationship with the community participants.

While Nicholson opens up the possibilities of the link between gift exchange theory and community arts, a limitation is that she overlooks the wider implications of the theory for community arts practice beyond individual projects and participants. As she states, applied drama has a historical connection with reflection and creative and critical questioning, and so it would be beneficial for her analysis to extend to the changes in the practice of community arts organisations over time, and how the participation of community members has influenced those changes. For while the power imbalance between practitioners and participants – between donors and recipients – deserve to be questioned, gift exchange theory allows us to acknowledge the influence that participants have on that process. It is important to realise that recipients affect the ability of the gift to move, as the quality of the gift given, and whether it is desired by the community participants, will affect the depth of the obligation to receive and reciprocate. Launching from Nicholson’s analysis, we might ask the question: What can gift exchange theory, and its application to artist–participant relationships, tell us about long-term practice within community arts organisations and communities? The consideration this question is the basis of this article. To contextualise the argument for gift exchange as one way to argue for an increase in longitudinal evaluation strategies in community arts, I will present a case study of a community arts organisation in western Sydney.

**Bankstown Youth Development Service**

Bankstown Youth Development Service (BYDS) is a non-profit, community-based cultural development organisation. It was located in the centre of Bankstown, western Sydney, NSW, at the time of my research but moved to a purpose-built arts centre in Bankstown in December 2010. Since 1987, BYDS has initiated arts and cultural projects among the communities and young people of Bankstown and south-west Sydney. Initially funded by a three-year Western Sydney Arts Strategy (WSAAS) grant,
the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts (now Arts NSW) adopted the BYDS program in 1994 and continues to fund the artistic director’s position on an ongoing basis. For its cultural programs and additional staff members, BYDS sources funds from a variety of places in addition to Arts NSW, including the Australia Council for the Arts, Bankstown City Council and philanthropic foundations. The organisation actively seeks to financially remunerate artistic workers who are employed on BYDS projects. The majority of BYDS’s work is with young people from diverse cultural backgrounds and Indigenous communities, but it is also recognised for its expertise in producing community arts projects unique in their cross-disciplinary, cross-generational and culturally diverse nature (T. Carroll, personal communication, September 15, 2008). BYDS works in partnership with other organisations and institutions such as Urban Theatre Projects, Bankstown City Council and the Sydney South West Area Health Service.

The artistic director, Tim Carroll, provides a space within BYDS for young and emerging artists that allows the opportunity for ongoing engagement in creative projects. I argue that community arts have the potential to facilitate the desire of participants to belong to a community by connecting individuals through a collaborative creative process. Nicholson (2005) argues that community arts provides marginalised members of local communities the space and place to be heard. This space acts first to establish a gift exchange between small groups of people; then, through continual exchange of creative ideas, there is the potential to continue the gift across many more community participants and even beyond the creative project.

The physical space provided by arts organisations can be seen as the first gift and is without obligation; however, continued reciprocity is contingent on the relationship between the participants and the artists. The gift relationship binds the recipient to the donor in a way that commodity exchange does not, as the obligation to continue to reciprocate gifts develops and sustains relationships. Many different forms of relationships are developed in community arts, and not all participants will continue to reciprocate gifts with artists. Some community participants may only become involved in a single project, and so the gift exchange remains localised between the donor and the recipient, and contained within a particular space and time. Other participants might continue to be involved in projects, perhaps across various arts organisations and with multiple artists. These recipients within the gift exchange remain as participants within this process, although their involvement may increase their capacity for gift exchange relationships beyond artistic projects. Then there are the recipients of the first gift whose relationships with artists and the community arts process manifest into multiple gift exchanges that continually garner new recipients of the gift.

This article is most concerned with these last recipients of the gift. I argue that there is a distinct lack of recognition in community arts literature on the impact that participants-turned-artists have on organisations and their community constituency. These community participants’ obligations to the gift exchange are fundamental to their creative practice, and it is the ongoing indebtedness between themselves and the organisation that leads to a perpetual widening of access to new forms of gift exchange. I will now turn the discussion to the particular career trajectory of one artist and his continual relationship with BYDS.

The community arts career trajectory of Michael Mohammed Ahmad is, I argue, an example of the capacity of generalised gift exchange to develop long-term relationships between artists and participants. Ahmad began his involvement in gift exchange as a young participant in BYDS projects, and now continues to expand the gift circle to include new participants and artists. Ahmad’s actions in the gift exchange are an example of Komter’s (2005) position that a donor’s motivations are a mixture of generosity and self-interest.

Ahmad’s first encounter with a community arts gift exchange was at the age of thirteen when he published a story in Westside, a magazine produced and distributed by BYDS.
In 1992, BYDS began a series of youth writing projects; these were consolidated into the magazine *Westside* in 1998. It is the only ongoing literary publication that features western Sydney writers, visual artists and photographers. At the time of my interview with him, Ahmad was 22 years old and editor of that magazine.

*Westside* developed from an endeavour to combat the negative publicity about Bankstown in the media and to promote an alternative view of the area. Roslyn Oades and Tim Carroll were the first editors of *Westside* and visited local schools to recruit writers for the magazine. Oades recounts:

> When I was editor at first I was probably working on it for free … it was just a bit haphazard I think whereas now it’s such an organised thing, like yeah … it had that background which I think helped it get to that point and … for me what is fascinating is that Ahmad was a contributor when he was in Year 7 – now he is the editor. (R. Oades, personal communication, August 26, 2008).

Ahmad enjoyed writing as a youth but was not confident of his skills. Despite this, he decided to show one of his short stories to his teacher, who then submitted it to *Westside*. Ahmad was published again in *Westside* two years later, and went to the BYDS offices to get a copy of the magazine and introduce himself to Carroll. His reaction to having his work published shows how integral these early opportunities are for emerging artists to build confidence in their artistic abilities. As he says:

> [I was] pretty excited because the opportunity was open to everyone in the school. I was the only guy in my whole year that got published. And so you got a micro world and you think that is the whole universe like … I am not thinking, ‘Oh my god, I’m famous’ … It was just kind of cool knowing that I was the only guy in this year, in this form – which is my world – who did this. (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008)

Komter (2005) argues that gratitude from the recipient of the gift is essential for reciprocity. In the example of Ahmad, it can be seen that this early gratitude enabled him to continue within the gift exchange. Once he left school, Ahmad went on to complete a degree at the University of Western Sydney with a major in text and writing, and sub-majors in history, philosophy and politics. He worked freelance as an actor – some of those projects with BYDS – and also part-time in his family’s business. *Westside* ceased publication after the fourth edition in 2000 until Ahmad ventured back to BYDS in 2006 to ask Carroll whether *Westside* was still in existence:

> And [Carroll] said there was no one with the qualifications to make it anymore … and I was like … ‘Did you know I am doing a degree in editing?’ And he said: ‘No, I didn’t know that’. And I said: ‘Well, can I do *Westside*?’ And he was like: ‘If you want to give it a try!’ And he said: ‘If you want to give it a shot, we can devote some of our resources to you giving it a shot’. (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008)

Ahmad’s quote shows gratitude and his willingness to reciprocate a gift with BYDS in the form of re-establishing *Westside*. Ahmad had remembered his past association with BYDS and through the initial experience was able to recognise that BYDS could be the place to foster his writing skills. Early on, Ahmad’s engagement in the gift exchange shows motivations of self-interest. The first gift of the BYDS space was accepted by Ahmad, who then reciprocated with his writing and editing skills to redevelop *Westside*. The combination of Ahmad’s confidence to put himself forward as a possible editor of BYDS and Carroll’s faith in Ahmad’s artistic ability led to the rebirth of *Westside*.

It is important to emphasise the speed with which the *Westside* project developed again after Ahmad’s initial request for its resurrection. Carroll and BYDS were able to seize on Ahmad’s enthusiasm and provide a work space and printing costs to enable the project to make a start, although there was not funding at this stage to pay him for his time.
Often young artists are prepared to sacrifice a wage in order to develop their skills in their craft, showing that there is more of an exchange relationship than a commodity one. A place like BYDS can provide essential tools towards the goals of young artists, such as physical space, technology and mentorship. This initial trust in BYDS by Ahmad, and in Ahmad by BYDS, fostered reciprocity that is still in place at the time of writing. BYDS’s open-door policy as the first gift allows emerging artists the opportunity to practise their creativity. Ahmad was eager to establish Westside again as he wanted an outlet for his writing; he sheepishly admits that the first edition of Westside he published was filled with his own writing, and that he was originally motivated by self-interest. In hindsight, however, he uses himself as an example to explain why Westside is important as there is an identified need for writers in western Sydney to have access to a literary journal:

That is why my job is so important, like, that is why I feel it’s important. Before it was like someone like me is asking for an outlet and can’t find one. Now someone like me finds me. ’Cause you know anyone that is walking around saying, ’I need to publish my stories, I need a voice’; well they can be led to me. (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008)

Despite his early motivations of self-interest, Ahmad recognises that his position as editor on Westside is an opportunity to provide the mechanism for other emerging writers to also improve and publish their work. Instead of continually editing magazines that feature his own work, Ahmad creates the space for the inclusion of more participants in the gift exchange. His motivations in establishing this space are a combination of generosity, altruism and self-interest, all of which Komter (2005) and Mauss (1922/1990) argue are essential for the gift to move.

After the first two years as a voluntary editor, Ahmad wanted to continue to act and write, but realised that he needed a secure career with financial remuneration to accompany his work in those areas. He saw an opportunity at BYDS to develop a career in editing and when BYDS was successful in obtaining a grant to fund three arts workers for one day a week, Ahmad was given the title of editor and writing coordinator of Westside:

It wasn’t planned that BYDS would give me a job, but I think Carroll picked up on my skills before anyone else did. So he was like, ‘Quick, we will keep you here doing this’. (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008)

I put to Ahmad whether his career would still be on the same path if there was no BYDS. His answer provides an insight into how he sees his career development and its relationship to BYDS:

I kind of grew up here [at BYDS] like a little baby taking its steps and then finally running … I don’t really know, I probably wouldn’t have become a writer … who really knows? I can’t really pinpoint at what point I wanted to be a writer, at what point I wanted to be an editor, but I know that there are links between BYDS and that. (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008)

However, Ahmad also acknowledges the importance of his work in a wider context:

There is also the research and actually creating an outlet and a relationship for writers in western Sydney which actually doesn’t really exist for most of western Sydneysiders. There is no outlet … I guess I kind of wanted to be a coordinator for writing and to facilitate young writing as well as just editing what was already there. (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008)

Through professional guidance from his mentors, Ahmad realises that he needs to foster writers and provide younger writers with the opportunities that were available to
him. Alongside his editing job, he coordinates and facilitates writing groups at local schools, discovering and nurturing young writers and in turn publishing their work professionally in *Westside Jr.* These writing workshops continue the gift exchange; by contributing to the literary development of young writers, Ahmad and BYDS provide a service to the individuals, the schools and in turn the wider community. The aim of *Westside* is to promote an alternative view of Bankstown and western Sydney to the predominantly negative one portrayed in the media. In this way, *Westside* as a magazine is a gift to the community of south-west Sydney.

Ahmad’s answer to the question of why he runs the writing workshops is illuminating because it shows the obligation to reciprocate the gift once it has been received: ‘I think I have to do it’, he says (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008). Ahmad’s gratitude for the opportunity that BYDS offered creates the obligation to reciprocate the gift, and to continue to exchange gifts with new writers. Without the development of new writers and new audiences, *Westside* would not be published. Ahmad needs to provide workshops so that in return he receives authors and audience. But Ahmad also acknowledges the contribution that BYDS gave to his working career, and feels the need to perpetuate that gift:

> I go in there, and say to the teachers, ‘Give me your five best students and I will work with them for three weeks’. And it’s like putting the wheels in motion to getting them to become what I became. It’s like a kid, amongst a whole lot of drowning kids, who nearly sank but *Westside* kind of saved my life. (M. M. Ahmad, personal communication, September 15, 2008)

While employed on a full-time basis, Ahmad flourished at BYDS, receiving several grants, including a grant from the Australia Council for his project *Performing/Writing* and one from the Australian Film and Television Office for a script he wrote that was made into a film, *The Pizza*. In 2012, Ahmad was awarded a prestigious Kirk Robson Award, bestowed by the Australia Council to a young person who displays leadership in community arts and cultural development in the areas of inclusiveness, consensus, self-determination, reconciliation and social justice. Ahmad has since left BYDS to further his academic studies and is currently completing a doctoral project through the Writing and Society Research Centre at University of Western Sydney.

The career trajectory of Ahmad signifies the possibilities of continual reciprocity in a gift exchange relationship. He was introduced to BYDS at a young age and was able to use it as a platform to develop his creative interests and skills. The initial introduction to the possibilities of BYDS is the first gift. BYDS’s gift of creative space within the Bankstown community – discovered by Ahmad in the school context – is open to any community participant without obligation. Once a participant accepts that gift, they are obligated to exchange gifts in order for the creative process to take place. Since accepting this first gift, Ahmad has continued to advance his creative talents through his relationships with Tim Carroll and BYDS. The relationship and trust are built over a long period of time.

As discussed through the above example, the concepts of trust and hope have been identified by Arvanitakis (2007) as essential to the formation of an authentic community. BYDS offers trust and hope to participants, enabling the long-term exchanges of gifts through the creative process. For Ahmad, this began at the age of 13 when he accepted the first gift of contributing writing to a journal. The gift of hope – that his writing would be published and developed through participating in BYDS programs – and his gratitude and trust in the relationship with BYDS facilitated his writing and leadership skills. Now aged 26, Ahmad has a creative career that is still burgeoning and developing through further professional and community opportunities. BYDS has the capacity to continue to offer gifts to Ahmad because of its 20-year presence in Bankstown, solidified in the last three years through its housing in professional artist offices and studios.
Ahmad’s ongoing artistic contributions to established and new projects are examples of his gifts back to BYDS. As an artist he also continues to mentor and encourage new community participants. Ahmad in turn trains and employs writers who have contributed to Westside to assist him in facilitating writing workshops. The gift circle is maintained and widened as Ahmad continues to engage with creative practice and the Bankstown community.

Komter (2005) argues that feelings of gratitude act as a moral cement in society, and the capacity of a recipient to experience gratitude is an essential element required for a gift to move. Ahmad shows multiple signs of gratitude, within the analysis above, to the role BYDS has played in his career development; this has fostered in him the obligation to reciprocate the gifts and encouraged a desire to create community.

The capacity for gift exchange to move beyond an initial localised project between artists and participants is enhanced when an organisation can offer participants continual engagement with new projects. The case study of BYDS highlights that the ongoing gift of space and relationships built through trust produces the obligation of gift exchange, strengthening reciprocity and ties within community.

**Conclusion**

Applying a gift exchange theoretical framework to this case study allows the opportunity to present new directions in evaluating community arts projects. Gift exchange theory highlights the artist–participant relationship as an important element in determining the outcome of a project. Therefore evaluation strategies should focus on the process between artists and participants, which may lead to further understanding of how community arts produce a desire to create community. I have argued that evaluation strategies should particularly consider how an artist builds trust between themselves and the other participants through workshop and artistic outputs (Winchester, 2013). The attention on process should also consider how organisations as a whole are structured and how that structure impacts on the artist–participant relationship at a project level (Winchester, 2013). Evaluating the process of community arts in this way will allow the beginnings of an in-depth theoretical understanding of the social impact that community arts may have on participants.

In order to capture the extent of the impact of community arts, evaluations should be conducted at the organisational level, not on single projects. Thus far, there has been limited critical investigation into how individual projects within a single organisation connect to each other. Each individual project is the result of the cultural memory of an organisation, an artist’s continued experience and a participant’s possible continual involvement in multiple projects. Evaluations that occur on an organisational level will identify the extent of reciprocity throughout the organisation and how the organisation can further develop connections between artists and participants.

It would be useful to have discussions about the value of community arts if evaluations begin to consider the extent to which community arts organisations have produced new artists or new cultural workers. As I discussed above, an artist’s process is developed through multiple experiences within an arts organisation, through any education and training they may have undertaken and through their involvement across organisations. A narrative inquiry that investigated the journeys of established and emerging individual artists who have developed their artistic process through community arts and compared these with the journeys of artists who developed their process through mainstream artistic organisations would illuminate the distinct qualities of an artist who develops directly from community arts practice.

The tangible creation of relationships that develop between artists and community participants drives practitioners to continue to engage with community. Maintaining reciprocity through a gift exchange allows community arts to foster positive social and artistic change, which enables a desire to create community.
References