



The Benefits of Baselineing

The tools we use and methods of gathering data creatively.

By Meldra Guza, Wavelength Music Leader, Quench Arts

There are numerous benefits of baselineing to create a more accurate and relevant understanding of the processes that have taken place during one's developmental journey on a community music project.

Where we see the young person and where the young person sees themselves

One of the benefits of doing the baseline activity is for us to understand where and how the young person sees themselves. While someone could seem confident or carefree, the baseline activity can reveal areas of the young person's life where they don't feel particularly confident or safe. For example, while a young person might feel confident working with others, they might lack self-efficacy and belief that they can create a new piece of work all by themselves and vice versa. Doing baselines allows the music leader to establish a better understanding of the areas where the participant might need more ongoing support. While we might feel that the young person is progressing well at a specific skill, what truly matters is that the young person themselves feel that they are progressing.

Opportunity to understand intrinsic motivation, perceptions and standard for self-comparison

Another benefit of doing the baseline activity is gaining a greater insight into the motivators of a young person. For example, what specificity they feel passionate about and what might allow the music leader to facilitate higher quality engagement because the young person is intrinsically motivated. Wanting to take part in a particular activity indeed allows a greater enthusiasm rather than feeling that one has to take part. Additionally, doing the baseline activity allows the music leader to appreciate the standard that the young person sees as sufficient or not, their perception of the world around them, and their place in it.

How to create a smooth evaluative baselineing process?

In most cases baselineing could be a good activity for the 2nd session, once the young person has a reasonable familiarity with you as their music practitioner. However, there are times when the conversation about confidence naturally starts and then it is worth going with it, even if that is in the first session. The decision to go through the initial baselineing activity has to be a reactive decision based on the young person, and each music leader needs to use their emotional intelligence to read the best moment for that conversation. Additionally, some participants might feel overwhelmed by seeing the process, so it can be beneficial to explain the questions and consider the best way to collect the data needed.

What tools we use and how we can do this creatively

Presenting a young person with a form that looks cold and official can bring a session to a full stop, so Quench Arts are using a variety of creative tools to make the process more relaxed and fun. For example, the baseline is informed by the values of a Likert scale but, rather than having a basic Likert scale questionnaire, the scale is expressed through more exciting means, using music-related devices. For example, having a picture of a piano or a real piano during the session, a young person can play can use the keyboard to indicate if they feel low or if their mood is elevated and happy. They can also use a fader tool on a mixer to show if their levels of anxiety are high or low. There is also the visual element of seeing one's development as an organic process, blooming just like a flower, so the participants can answer questions about their hopes in overall progress by writing on the picture of flower petals (which represent the Five Ways to Wellbeing).

Good, Be Better

Numerous authors have discussed the importance of basing one's development on their own progress rather than by comparing themselves to others. Baselining would be a beneficial tool in any field of life where a person wishes to improve. Very often we have a so-called fixed mindset with the side effect of comparing ourselves to others, while working towards a growth mindset, the outlook of getting better rather than just being good or bad at a specific skill can be life-changing. The baselining process allows us to set the tone and for the young person to compare their success with the previous version of themselves rather than with a different person. Finally, baselining allows the young person to evaluate their personal journey and reflect retrospectively. Often young people achieve more than what they hoped for at the start of the project, so revisiting the baseline at a mid-point and then at the end of a project strengthens the young person's belief in themselves and also offers an opportunity to reflect critically on their view and expectations of themselves.

References and further reading

Dweck, C. S. (2008) *Mindset: the new psychology of success*. New York: Ballantine Books
Goleman, D (1996) *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. London: Bloomsbury
Halvorson, H., *Nine Things Successful People Do Differently*.