Growth / Fixed Mindset Continuum Activity

Time: (20 - 60 min)

Purpose - To help participants understand we all have both fixed and growth mindsets about different abilities/traits/skills. This activity can help people explore their own beliefs and hear from others about why they believe what they do.

Materials - Wide masking tape

Facilitation Tips - This activity can be done in a shorter amount of time by shortening the list or by not having the discussion after each round. Be prepared to encounter and discuss the confusion many people have between genetic predisposition and the malleability of traits. Help participants understand that the two are not mutually exclusive. If/when it comes up, you can give examples like the swimmer Michael Phelps, who is well known for having the ideal body for swimming (there was a short segment during the Olympics explaining his “perfect proportions”), but that another swimmer, Katie Ledecky, who is breaking many records actually is noted for not having the “ideal body.” Her success is due to being incredibly passionate about the sport and relentless in learning how to improve. Obviously, Michael Phelps has body mechanics in his favor, but genetics alone is not what determines success.

NOTE: This activity is framed for use with teachers, but it could also be used with students.

Steps:

1. **Set up** (2 min) - Make a line with the masking tape on floor that is long enough to allow participants to all stand comfortably along the line at the same time. You can either explain verbally or put a sign on one end with “Not at all malleable” and on the other, “Very malleable,” and in the middle “Somewhat malleable.” Typically, “Not at all malleable” would be on the left when facing the line.

2. **Introduce the activity** (2 min) - Ask participants to gather in front of the line and explain that you will be asking them a series of questions. After each one, they are to place themselves along the continuum based on their answer. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers; the goal is to explore your own beliefs and to see how others think about these traits/abilities. Emphasize that there should be no commenting about other’s position unless invited to do so.

3. **Begin rounds** (2-6 min Per round depending on how much time you allow for discussion and how many rounds you do).
   - Ask participants, “How malleable do you think _________ is?” (alternate framing: “Do you think ___________ is something that can be improved?”)
   - Begin with a practice round or two using things that might be fun/silly. For example, height or hair color - your natural hair color can’t be changed, but you can change it with dye.
Pick as many of the items that you have time for from the list below, or add your own. The items in bold are ones that tend to evoke the widest range of responses.

- Creativity
- Artistic ability (i.e. drawing or painting)
- Math
- Singing
- Intelligence
- Grammar / writing
- Sports/athleticism (often people think of this as very malleable which can provide a good contrast)
- Extraversion/shyness
- Ability to control impulsivity (or to stay focused)
- Empathy - ability to think about others’ feelings
- Ability to pay attention and stay focused
- Rebelliousness
- Emotionality (ability to regulate/manage ones emotions)

After each question, you can ask a few participants - maybe one on either end, and one in the middle of the line - to talk about why they placed themselves there. Be sure to ask different people to share each time.

After each person shares, ask if anyone would like to change their position after hearing their explanations.

4. **Debrief and reflect** (10 min) - Have participants sit or stand in a circle and ask them:
   - Were there any ah-ha moments or surprises for you?
   - What worked about this activity? What didn’t?
   - Do you think you would use this activity with your students? Why or why not?