

When I applied to the B.Ed. professional program at Lakehead; looming in the back of my mind was the competency test. Math has surely not been a strength of mine and several years had passed since my last math class. Preparing as much as I could prior to my university journey became a daily goal. The day of the test I had no real confidence. I would probably 'just' pass. It ended up that I would re-write the test four times; the maximum rewrite limit permitted. With each attempt my score improved.

Subsequently, following the first attempt, I enrolled in S G's math class. In this class, SG guided us through the questions posed and, most importantly, taught us about "math mindsets." In the beginning, I viewed math as this barrier I would never be able to break through. It had come to a point where I was giving up. Then SG taught me about this idea of a "math mindset" and how easily it can be changed. From this, I decided to change my mindset from "I can't do this" to "challenge accepted!" This small change was the key to my success. Because I viewed math as a challenge, I was able to take on any problem SG posed. Even if it was a question I was unable to solve right away, I knew that if I kept working on it, I would be able to find the correct answer.

When I failed the second time, I was very discouraged, but did not give up. I hired a tutor over the summer and worked on math at every opportunity. I would calculate the percentage increase/decrease of things while I went shopping, and would google math problems while I was at work. Any moment of free time was spent working on my math skills. I went into the third attempt very confident I would pass with flying colours.

When I found out I had failed by such a small margin, I fell back into my "I can't do this" mindset. I was so sure I would not pass my fourth attempt and would, subsequently, not graduate. I reached out to the Practicum Experience Coordinator in hopes that she could provide some suggestions or support. LL encouraged me to keep trying. She called me in to assist me in creating an action plan for success. In this plan, was the name of a math tutor, who I hired that same day. We met once or twice a week for an hour or two. I re-enrolled in SG's class (which took place every Friday) and also worked on a package of math questions every night. It was a lot of hard work and dedication, but the result was well worth the work. In my fourth, and final, attempt I passed with a 92%!

My advice to any teacher candidate feeling anxious or discouraged would be to communicate your feelings to the faculty; they are always willing to help. Hire a tutor to work with you, practice, and most importantly, alter your math mindset. Looking at math in a positive light can change everything. The key to my success was a combination of the support and dedication of the faculty and my new "math mindset." I cannot stress the importance of perseverance and determination. What was once a struggle is now my rising strength and for the first time in my life I love Math!

*Written by Francesca Caputo, 2-Year Program Graduate, 2017*