Mapping experiences: Understanding pathways to course credit awarding for high school-aged Indigenous youth mentors across Canada

by

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ABSTRACT

Educational attainment is a strong predictor of future health outcomes and overall wellbeing, particularly as education is an important social determinant of health closely interconnected with other aspects of health including employment, food security, and quality of life. However, educational attainment, defined as the highest level of education an individual has completed, is inequitable because of the Eurocentric structure of the education system in Canada influenced by a history of colonization. Due in part to the lasting effects of colonization, Indigenous students in Canada are 28% less likely to graduate high school compared to their non-Indigenous peers. To graduate, students must earn a certain number of credits by completing coursework and meeting learning outcomes. One such way to promote educational attainment for Indigenous students is by providing engaging educational experiences that award high school credit. The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP) has the potential to serve as that engaging learning experience. IYMP is a community-based health promotion program that runs across Canada to engage Indigenous youth in mentorship and leadership opportunities while promoting healthy lifestyle behaviours. Students currently participating in IYMP have expressed interest in earning credit for their involvement in the program, but there is uncertainty in how to award these credits as educational policy differs across provinces and territories. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to provide a comprehensive look at the pathways to high school credit awarding for health promotion programs such as IYMP. Multiple qualitative methods were used to (1) map potential pathways to credit awarding for Indigenous high school students participating in IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba, and (2) understand educator experiences on the existing strategies used in practice for awarding credit to high school students participating in IYMP in Alberta.

Objective 1 used qualitative document analysis to understand the policies and procedures currently in place to guide the high school credit awarding process in Alberta and Manitoba, specifically looking at their potential application to health promotion programming such as IYMP. The collected resources included web pages (n=49), course templates (n=21), guides (n=19), policy documents (n=8), fact sheets (n=5), handbooks (n=3), and other curricular documents (n=20). Conventional content analysis was used to analyze documents and develop categories and subcategories. Three major categories were identified: pathways to credit, student-centered decision making, and essential partnerships for credit awarding. Within pathways to credit, five subcategories that illustrated the specific pathways to credit in Alberta and Manitoba were identified: locally developed credit, dual credit, mentorship and leadership credit, health and wellness credit, and arts education credit. These findings highlight the potential pathways to credit awarding that educators can utilize to provide credit to Indigenous students for their involvement in health promotion programming such as IYMP.

Objective 2 used qualitative description as a guiding method and semi-structured interviews as a data generation strategy. Educators with practical experience with the credit awarding process in Alberta were recruited and participated in interviews. Interviews were transcribed and themes were identified using inductive thematic analysis. Four themes related to educator experiences with the credit awarding process, specifically credits for health promotion programming such as IYMP, were identified. The themes included: essential partnerships, educating educators, student engagement and autonomy, and policy challenges and opportunities. Educators described these themes as extremely important considerations in the credit awarding process to support future efforts to identify the most effective and ideal pathway to successfully award credits in a specific school community.

This thesis serves to address the knowledge gap in our understanding of potential pathways to high school credit awarding for health promotion programs such as IYMP. Findings inform future research, practice, and policy related to credit awarding in Canada. The pathways to credit awarding identified by Objective 1 and important considerations for a successful credit awarding process identified by Objective 2 will be shared with individuals involved in IYMP. This will include teachers and IYMP program leaders. Overall, it is important to provide students with engaging learning opportunities that also benefit them through credits that contribute to their high school graduation efforts. This research has potential to inform and support educators looking to provide credit earning opportunities to high school students participating in IYMP, fostering educational attainment and providing engaging learning experiences to students.

PREFACE

This Masters thesis is original work produced by McKayla Kirkpatrick. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Human Research Ethics Board under the project name "Still I Rise: Indigenous youth-led strategies as a pathway to wholistic health and health equity" file number Pro00124180. The original ethics approval was obtained on October 16, 2023. An amendment to encompass key informant interview recruitment and interview questions (Objective 2) was approved on March 20, 2024. The project may require ethics renewal prior to the expiry date on October 10, 2024.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CESIP: Cultural Exploration Student-Initiated Project

CSH: Comprehensive School Health

CSSIP: Community Service Student-Initiated Project

CTS: Career & Technology Studies

EAS: Ever Active Schools

HSS: Human & Social Services

IYMP: Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program

LDC: Locally Developed Course

PE/HE: Physical Education/Health Education

SIC: School-Initiated Course

SIP: Student-Initiated Project

SIRCLE: Settings-based Intervention Research through Changes in Lifestyles & Environments

TRC: Truth and Reconciliation Commission

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This introductory chapter will establish the thesis purpose and outline. This chapter will also explore the need to understand high school credit awarding opportunities for students participating in the Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP). This includes exploring the potential pathways to credit awarding in Alberta and Manitoba, as well as understanding the importance of providing credit to students for their participation in IYMP within the context of education as a social determinant of health. Although IYMP runs in 5 provinces across Canada, this work focused on Alberta and Manitoba specifically as these provinces have been identified by the research team as having strong potential for building more sustainable connections between the program and the educational system. IYMP has strong ties to Manitoba as the program began in Northern MB as a pilot study in 2005 before it rippled across Canada (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). IYMP has strong connections to Alberta because the program is directed by Ever Active Schools, a registered national charity based in Alberta that oversees the program under the leadership of IYMP National Director, Dr. Teena Starlight. This introductory chapter will also provide an overview of the research objectives, thesis attributions, researcher positionality, and thesis organization.

1.2 The Importance of Educational Attainment

The social determinants of health are non-medical factors such as employment, income, social inclusion, and education that influence health and wellbeing (Shankar et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2024). These determinants are heavily interrelated and have both positive and negative impacts on an individual's quality of life. Education, in particular, will be explored throughout this thesis as education is heavily interconnected with other aspects of health such as

health literacy, employment, and social/personal wellbeing (Braveman et al., 2011; Dela Cruz et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2008; Pérez-Stable & Webb Hooper, 2023). Thus, education is a foundational element of a healthy, fulfilling life.

Educational attainment is defined as "the highest level of education that a person has successfully completed" (Statistics Canada, 2021). For high school-aged students, educational attainment refers to the completion of high school and the earning of one's high school diploma. Educational attainment is a strong predictor of future health outcomes and is positively associated with healthy behaviours for Indigenous populations (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Korpal & Wong, 2015; Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999; Shankar et al., 2013). The attainment of one's high school diploma opens doors to employment opportunities that will influence higher income security and greater access to resources that improve both physical and mental health (Shankar et al., 2013). Through educational experiences, students will develop employable skills such as leadership, productivity, and teamwork as well as promote attitudes of empowerment and positive self-esteem (Marsh & Martin, 2011; Shankar et al., 2013).

In the 2015-2016 school year, Statistics Canada found that Indigenous youth were less likely to complete high school than their non-Indigenous peers, with 63% of Indigenous youth completing high school compared to 91% of non-Indigenous youth (Statistics Canada, 2023). This inequity may have a ripple effect on other social determinants of health such as employment opportunities, income, housing, food security, and social inclusion. Barriers that disproportionately impact educational attainment for Indigenous students are due in part to the lasting impacts of colonization (Kim, 2019; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). These societal and structural barriers may also influence personal factors that affect educational attainment such as significant responsibilities at home, a desire to quickly enter the

workforce due to money concerns, or a general lack of interest in school (Arriagada, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017).

Improving the educational experiences of Indigenous youth has been shown to support students in achieving their goals of educational attainment while maintaining good health and wellbeing (Shankar et al., 2013). To improve the educational experiences of Indigenous youth, four key areas were identified in the literature. First, strong partnerships between school administrators, teachers, principals, curriculum developers, researchers and other educators were shown to be vital to build effective learning environments for students (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Thackrah et al., 2022). Second, consistent student participation in socially-enriching activities such as sports, arts, clubs, and other extracurricular activities increased the likelihood of students completing high school (Arriagada, 2015). Third, students were encouraged to attend class regularly when their learning space was caring and supportive (Kim, 2019; Leos-Urbel, 2015; Thackrah et al., 2022). Regular attendance enhanced the development of academic and interpersonal skills. Fourth, embedding culturally enriching topics into learning experiences engaged and empowered students (Kenny et al., 2018; Korpal & Wong, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Thackrah et al., 2022). Each of these topics can be addressed through experiences that complement traditional classroom-based learning. This can manifest as afterschool programming that focuses on building strong community relationships and provides a safe space for students to work on skills such as leadership and mentorship. The IYMP is one such program that has the opportunity to address these action items and improve the educational experiences of Indigenous youth.

1.3 The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program

IYMP is a community-based after-school healthy living program that engages Indigenous youth in mentorship opportunities and promotes healthy lifestyle behaviours (Ferguson et al., 2021; Sobierajski et al., 2022). The program is currently run across Canada in communities from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. The IYMP theoretical framework is aligned with a multitude of teachings including Dr. Martin Brokenleg's Circle of Courage and Dr. Verna Kirkness' Four R's which are educational models developed by Indigenous scholars to guide relevant programming (Brendtro et al., 2005; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). IYMP is delivered by Indigenous high school youth mentors for their Indigenous elementary-aged peers with high school youth mentors guided by Community Champions, traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, and Elders (Lopresti et al., 2021; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). The program structure is flexible with many communities running it after school one or more days per week for about 90 minutes. High school mentors and elementary students come together to share healthy snacks and engage in culturally-relevant games and activities that promote increased physical health. The program also serves to build a strong community of peers for all participants. For high school mentors specifically, the program is an opportunity to develop employable skills such as leadership, mentorship, and teamwork (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019).

1.4 Graduation Requirements

Graduation requirements differ in each Canadian province as education is the responsibility of provincial-level governments. This study looks at Alberta and Manitoba specifically. In order to graduate and earn a high school diploma, students must accumulate the appropriate amount of course credits for their province. A passing grade of at least 50% is

needed to earn credit in most cases (Alberta Education, 2024b; Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.). In Alberta, this number is 100 total credits accumulated from Grades 10 to 12 with each course offering between 1 to 5 credits (Alberta Education, 2024a). In Manitoba, this number is 30 total credits accumulated from Grades 9 to 12 with each course offering 0.5 to 1 credits each (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2024). Both provinces have a specific list of core course requirements that all students must complete in order to graduate such as Mathematics, English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science. Additional credits are earned through electives and optional courses, allowing students the flexibility to explore their personal interests. Although programming like IYMP is not considered an official course, the program has the opportunity to align with the existing education systems in both provinces via numerous pathways to educational attainment. These pathways will be explored throughout this study.

1.5 Rationale

By understanding the available pathways for awarding credit to high school youth mentors, this research can aid IYMP communities, as well as with other health promotion programs, in pursuing credit awarding in ways that suit their community and benefit their students. This support is important as many school communities across Canada are already working at full capacity to provide education to students. For educators such as teachers, principals, school administrators, and IYMP program leaders, the added burden of developing new credit awarding opportunities for students may not be feasible with their existing workload. Additionally, if the process of navigating credit awarding is new and unfamiliar, this may pose a daunting challenge for educators. If we are able to develop a “road map” for school communities that assists them in understanding the options available to them, then this work can remove

uncertainty and alleviate the workload for school communities. Additionally, by learning from the experiences of the knowledgeable educators who will contribute to this research through interviews, we hope to guide school communities down pathways they can confidently pursue. This will allow educators that work with students participating in IYMP to understand the resources and time required for success, navigate potential pitfalls, and ultimately make the best choice when deciding how to pursue an IYMP credit awarding pathway.

Knowledge translation will be another crucial element of this work to ensure the research findings are shared with school communities and effectively support them in navigating the logistics of credit awarding. It is our hope that this will lead to more students earning the credits they need to graduate high school through a program they are already engaged with. Outside of this research, we are unaware of published work on this topic of credit awarding pathways specifically for mentorship- and leadership-focused programming in Alberta and Manitoba. Thus, this research will provide a comprehensive look at the pathways to high school credit awarding for students participating in health promotion programs such as IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba.

1.6 Research Purpose and Objectives

This research will specifically address the following two objectives and their corresponding guiding research questions:

Objective #1: To map potential pathways to credit awarding for Indigenous high school students participating in IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba.

1. How can IYMP award high school students with course credit for their involvement in the program?

Objective #2: To explore existing strategies used in practice for awarding high school course credit to youth mentors involved with IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba.

1. What successes, failures, challenges, and opportunities have individuals in Alberta and Manitoba encountered in the IYMP credit awarding process?

1.7 Thesis Attributions

This thesis is a component of my Master of Science in Health Promotion and Socio-Behavioural Sciences from the University of Alberta School of Public Health. This work was completed with the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Kate Storey and her research lab, SIRCLE (Settings-based Intervention Research through Changes in Lifestyles and Environments) which is housed within the School of Public Health. This research aims to map potential pathways to high school credit awarding for students participating in IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba. The findings of this research will be shared with school communities and IYMP program leaders to provide knowledge on how students participating in health promotion programs such as IYMP can receive credit towards high school graduation for their involvement in the program.

Objective 1 of this thesis research used document analysis to identify potential pathways for the implementation of high school credit awarding opportunities for students participating in IYMP. Document analysis was an ideal data generation strategy to systematically evaluate and review documents that guide the credit awarding process in Alberta and Manitoba (Bowen, 2009). Objective 2 of this thesis research provided an opportunity to understand the process of credit awarding in actuality. Interviews with key informants, defined as educators involved in the credit awarding process, provided the context necessary to expand the base of knowledge built in objective 1 to better understand credit awarding experiences. Qualitative description with semi-

structured one-on-one interviews as the primary data generation method allowed for the collection of rich experiences and insights on high school credit awarding.

This original body of work was completed with support and guidance from my supervisor, Dr. Kate Storey, and my committee members, Dr. Lauren Sulz and Brian Torrance. The IYMP National Director, Dr. Teena Starlight, also provided integral support to this research. With my committee's support, I was responsible for proposing this research, developing appropriate research objectives, identifying ideal methods, supporting the ethics file in sections that applied specifically to my project, conducting all data collection, analysis, and writing. I presented this research at the Women and Children's Health Research Institute Research Day 2023. This research has also been submitted for presentation at the International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health Conference in March 2025. I was actively involved in all planning and decision-making for this thesis, resulting in a project that proudly presents my original data in partnership with my thesis committee.

1.8 Researcher Positionality

I am a non-Indigenous woman who was interested in studying qualitative research methods because of its boundless potential to answer intriguing questions from new perspectives that I had never encountered in my experiences with quantitative research methods. I have a plethora of long-standing experiences involving youth volunteering, mentorship and leadership. In addition, I have worked closely with local school communities as an elementary student mentor for over five years and I have been employed as a dance teacher for over six years, working closely with many students, including Indigenous students, over this time. The impact of my influence as a positive role model on the youth I interact with has become extremely evident to me in recent years, intensifying my passion for working with and empowering youth.

Although this thesis did not involve direct communication or collaboration with youth, this work aimed to establish new opportunities for educational attainment for youth while enhancing their wholistic wellness through their involvement with IYMP. I was incredibly eager to support this work.

As a researcher, I align with a constructivist inquiry paradigm. This perspective influenced the research from inception to completion. Constructivists believe "knowledge is created in interaction among investigator and respondents" and the ultimate goal is to achieve understanding on a particular topic or phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mayan, 2023). For a constructivist, would-be knowers can create new knowledge based on experiences and reflections of those experiences. A relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology are applied to constructivism, two ways of thinking that I also align with. Through relativism, reality is constructed through experiences of the would-be knower. In the context of this thesis, reality was constructed through my experiences learning from and interacting with the data. With subjectivism, the researcher (myself) and their topic of interest or phenomenon are interactively linked "so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The final piece of this inquiry paradigm puzzle, methodology, is hermeneutical in nature. Thus, interactions between the researcher (myself) and the research are intentionally leveraged to construct and interpret knowledge. Guba & Lincoln (1994) also state that "ethics is intrinsic" to the constructivist paradigm due to "the inclusion of participant values in inquiry." While additional steps were taken to ensure appropriate ethical considerations were addressed at each stage of the research, this inherent quality of the paradigm was relevant throughout the study.

1.9 Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter two provides an in-depth review of relevant research to situate objective 1 and objective 2 within current literature. This literature review discusses education as a social determinant of health, high school graduation requirements in Alberta and Manitoba, and IYMP as the program this research is framed around. Chapters three and four address objectives 1 and 2, respectively. This includes the research objective, methods, data generation, data analysis, rigour, results, strengths and limitations, and implications of each objective. Chapters three and four will be submitted as original academic manuscripts for publication. Chapter five provides a summary of the research findings, implications, and future directions of this body of work. References and appendices are included at the end of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This literature review will provide appropriate context and background for this study. The purpose of this literature review is to establish the need to address education and educational attainment as a social determinant of health for Indigenous youth, to explore the process of earning credits towards a high school diploma in Alberta and Manitoba, and to highlight the valuable characteristics of the Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP).

Educational attainment is a crucial element of health and wellbeing, as will be discussed in this chapter (Shankar et al., 2013). Health promotion programs, such as IYMP, have the opportunity to engage students in educational experiences that support their wholistic wellbeing while also serving as a potential opportunity to promote education attainment. IYMP is a communal, relationship-based, after-school healthy living program where high school youth take on a mentoring role for elementary school youth. The program emphasizes healthy living and is guided by culturally relevant programming. As IYMP is not directly embedded in school curriculum, it is unclear how school communities can go about utilizing IYMP as an opportunity to award high school credits and enhance educational attainment for their students.

An important level of educational attainment is graduating from high school and earning a high school diploma. In order to receive a high school diploma and successfully graduate, high school students must earn a certain number of credentials (or credits) when they complete coursework (Alberta Education, 2024b). Credits are the units used by school authorities to track a student's progress as they accumulate the requisite total needed to receive their high school diploma. As will be explored in this chapter, IYMP has the potential to serve as an opportunity for students to earn high school course credit for their participation and engagement with the

program. Thus, this research aims to explore how health promotion programming such as IYMP can go about supporting students as a pathway to earn the credits necessary for high school graduation.

2.2 Education and Health

2.2.1 The Social Determinants of Health

The social determinants of health play an essential role in an individual's health and wellbeing (Shankar et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2024). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the social determinants of health as the "non-medical factors that influence health outcomes" (World Health Organization, 2024). This encompasses the conditions where people live, work, and play, including the systems that shape their environment such as political systems, social norms, and community values. Social determinants of health are interconnected facets of daily life that can both directly and indirectly impact an individual in both positive and negative directions (Braveman et al., 2011; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020). These determinants are often more influential on one's overall quality of life than the healthcare system or individual lifestyle choices (Braveman et al., 2011; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020; World Health Organization, 2024). Examples of social determinants of health identified by the WHO include: income and social protection, unemployment and job security, food insecurity, housing, early childhood development, social inclusion and non-discrimination, access to affordable and adequate quality health services, and education. The impact of education as a social determinant of health will be explored further in this literature review.

2.2.2 Education as a Social Determinant of Health

Education is an essential social determinant of health that influences quality of life for all Canadians (Braveman et al., 2011; Murray et al., 2008; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020; Shankar et al., 2013). As explored next, education is heavily interconnected with other aspects of health such as health literacy, employment, and social/personal wellbeing. This demonstrates the necessity for education as the foundation to building a healthy, fulfilling life.

Health Literacy. The more education an individual has access to, the greater their opportunity to acquire health literacy (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Dela Cruz et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2008). Health literacy is defined by Braveman et al. (2011) as informed decision-making regarding medical care and illness management, nutrition, and exercise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides a more wholistic and broad definition, describing personal health literacy as "the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others" (CDC, 2023). This increase in health knowledge leads to a better understanding of health-related information and the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to use that information to maintain good health (Braveman et al., 2011; Korpal & Wong, 2015; Murray et al., 2008; Shankar et al., 2013). This may involve reading and understanding nutrition labels, following medication dosage instructions, and adopting primary care provider health recommendations sooner. Health literacy can also be an important predictor of an individual's willingness to be an active participant in their local community (Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999). Individuals can acquire health literacy through educational attainment, a vital social determinant of health in promoting the knowledge necessary to make healthy

lifestyle choices (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Dela Cruz et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2008).

Employment/Income. Education also influences quality of life through its interconnectedness to other social determinants of health such as employment and income. General trends show that more education leads to improved employment opportunities (Braveman et al., 2011; Murray et al., 2008; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999). This positively influences health by allowing individuals to access employment with safe working conditions, higher income potential, and strong work-related resources such as health insurance, sick leave, and retirement benefits (Braveman et al., 2011). The interconnection of health outcomes continues as higher earnings lead to better housing, food security, and a healthier neighbourhood environment (Braveman et al., 2011; Heflin et al., 2022; McIntyre et al., 2018; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020; Shankar et al., 2013).

Social/Personal Health. Increased education also leads to improved social and personal health (Braveman et al., 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007; Shankar et al., 2013). For example, an improved knowledge base leads to a better understanding of how society operates. This leads to a stronger sense of personal control and empowerment. Education also improves social standing and access to social support (Braveman et al., 2011; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020; Pérez-Stable & Webb Hooper, 2023). This is a result of higher earning potentials and the ability to access social resources that enhance quality of life such as new friendships and community connections. When combined, these factors all contribute to positive outcomes such as lower stress levels and improved personal control over health-related behaviours.

2.2.3 Educational Attainment

Statistics Canada defines educational attainment as "the highest level of education that a person has successfully completed. Successful completion of a level of education refers to the achievement of the learning objectives of that level, typically validated through the assessment of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies" (Statistics Canada, 2021). At the high school level, this refers to "whether or not the person has obtained a high school (secondary school) diploma" (Statistics Canada, 2021). Educational attainment is a strong predictor of future health outcomes and overall quality of life (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Shankar et al., 2013). Literature has also shown that educational attainment also leads to positive life satisfaction and a longer life expectancy (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999; Shankar et al., 2013). It is important to note that educational attainment can occur at multiple levels from primary and high (secondary) school, to trades certificates, to post-secondary degrees and professional programs. The Public Health Agency of Canada (1999) found that Canadians who do not complete high school will likely make an income less than half that of their university-educated peers, further emphasizing the need to encourage educational attainment in order to achieve a high quality of life (Shankar et al., 2013).

There is a positive relationship between educational attainment and healthy behavioural patterns (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Shankar et al., 2013). As previously discussed, educational attainment promotes employment opportunities that lead to improved economic prospects and access to essential resources such as safe housing (Shankar et al., 2013). Additionally, educational attainment leads to lower levels of food insecurity (Heflin et al., 2022; McIntyre et al., 2018). Through educational experiences, students are able to develop more employable skills such as higher productivity, innovation, leadership, and a stronger sense of

community. These experiences also teach students the skills necessary to ensure they demonstrate agency over health-related decision making, promoting empowerment and positive self-esteem (Marsh & Martin, 2011; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Shankar et al., 2013). Higher levels of education are positively correlated with more physical activity and healthier eating habits as well as improved mental health (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999; Shankar et al., 2013). This also leads to improved social supports such as access to peer emotional support, an increased comfort with disclosing personal struggles, and more confidence when reaching out to others for help handling difficult situations (Mickelson & Kubzansky, 2003; Shankar et al., 2013). This is a particularly important skill for high school-aged youth as learning to navigate strong emotions is essential for transitioning into the adult world. Individuals with higher levels of education are also more likely to positively contribute to their communities and stay involved in local events (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999; Shankar et al., 2013). When examined collectively, the literature demonstrates that these health outcomes all work together to emphasize the wholistic role of educational attainment in enhancing health and wellbeing.

2.2.4 Indigenous Youth and High School Education

Similar to the general population of Canadians, education remains a robust predictor of health outcomes for Indigenous populations (Korpal & Wong, 2015). Education is associated with health literacy and self-care which both contribute to overall health and wellbeing for Indigenous individuals (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). Education also remains associated with other determinants of health such as employment and income security which provides individuals with greater control over life circumstances and maintains

good mental health (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Shankar et al., 2013).

Although education is imperative to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities, Statistics Canada published findings that "First Nations youth aged 19 to 30 are less likely to graduate from high school or pursue a postsecondary education than non-Indigenous youth" (Statistics Canada, 2023). In the 2015-2016 school year, 63% of Indigenous youth in Canada had completed high school compared to 91% of their non-Indigenous peers. This is further broken down into 73% of Indigenous youth living off reserve earned their high school diploma while 46% of Indigenous youth living on reserve earned their high school diploma. These lower percentages of educational attainment may have ripple effects to other social determinants of health such as employment opportunities, income, housing, food security, and social inclusion. This underrepresentation at the high school level continues to the post-secondary level (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Shankar et al., 2013). While post-secondary education is not the goal for all individuals, post-secondary education is often vital for certain employment opportunities that will improve one's access to social, economic, and personal resources. Collectively, the underrepresentation of Indigenous students at both the high school and the post-secondary level of education presents a concerning barrier to Indigenous quality of life (Shankar et al., 2013). Therefore, it is valuable to address educational attainment specifically within the context of Indigenous students and to promote initiatives that support their journey to earning the credits they need to graduate.

There are numerous factors that create a barrier to educational attainment for Indigenous students in Canada. Experiences of racism and discrimination, lack of access to health and social services, living in poverty, an overcrowded home, and facing food insecurity can decrease a

student's likelihood to attend school and prioritize their education (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Pérez-Stable & Webb Hooper, 2023). Additionally, personal factors such as significant responsibilities at home, a desire to quickly enter the workforce due to money concerns, or a general lack of interest in school may lead to students struggling to complete their high school education (Arriagada, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). Inequitable funding for education can also present a challenge that disproportionately affects rural and remote communities such as schools on reserves (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). In many cases, students may have to attend high school outside of their local community. The added complexity of traveling far distances to attend high school can pose a substantial barrier to high school completion. Indigenous educational attainment is also impacted by a lasting history of colonization as the current education system is largely shaped by hierarchical Euro-Christian values (Kim, 2019; Korpal & Wong, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). Although the last residential school in Canada closed in 1996, the Eurocentric structure where teachers bestow institutionally sanctioned knowledge on students still exists (CBC News, 2008). This does not inherently promote community connections or build supportive relationships. These limiting factors negatively influence education attainment for Indigenous youth in Canada.

Numerous actions can be taken to improve the likelihood of Indigenous youth earning their high school diploma. First, researchers, curriculum developers, policy-makers, school administrators, principals, teachers, and other educators must work together (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Thackrah et al., 2022). These partnerships are vital to provide strong learning environments for students. Second, student participation in extracurricular activities, sports, and arts must be encouraged (Arriagada, 2015). Arriagada

(2015) found that consistent participation in clubs and other socially enriching activities increased the likelihood of students finishing high school. Third, school communities should focus on building a nurturing school environment that encourages students to attend class (Kim, 2019; Thackrah et al., 2022). A caring and supportive learning space promotes quality education, allowing students to develop academic and social skills, improve their health literacy, and enhance the development of their interpersonal skills. Fourth, a culturally appropriate learning environment must be established for students to have a fulfilling educational experience (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Thackrah et al., 2022). For Indigenous youth, this may involve learning experiences that focus on cultural activities, studies of traditional languages, or a strengths-based approach to history lessons. Korpal & Wong (2015) believe "that in order for education to serve as a positive social determinant [of health], education must empower" (Korpal & Wong, 2015, p. 141). This means that the academic system must embrace different ways of knowing, reflect cultural values and identity, focus on positive learning outcomes, and embrace the personal growth of each individual student (Korpal & Wong, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Shankar et al., 2013). It should also be acknowledged that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action #6 to #12 and #62 to #65 are connected to education (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). This emphasizes the need for a focus on education to improve Indigenous health outcomes. While many of these calls to action focus on increasing funding to support Indigenous education, Call to Action #63 specifically addresses the need for culturally affirming learning. This Call to Action specifically requests a commitment to developing learning resources that address Indigenous Canadian history, a commitment to best practices for teaching that acknowledges residential schools, and a commitment to "building student capacity

for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, p. 7).

These areas of need (partnerships, extracurricular activities, a nurturing school environment, and culturally affirming learning) can be strengthened through experiences that complement traditional classroom-based learning such as afterschool programming that focuses on building community connections and provides an opportunity for students to continue developing their interpersonal skills such as leadership and mentorship (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). IYMP, explored in the third section of this literature review, is one such program that has the potential to promote wholistic wellbeing and create a safe space for students to learn and grow (Sobierajski et al., 2022; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). However, to address the topic of credit awarding and educational attainment for Indigenous students, it is important to first understand high school graduation requirements in Canada.

2.3 High School Graduation Requirements in Alberta and Manitoba

In order to graduate and earn a high school diploma, Canadian students must accumulate course credits. High school is primarily a responsibility of provincial/territorial governments, meaning specifics on the credit awarding structure will vary from each province or territory. Generally, this structure will include core courses such as English, Social Studies, Science, and Math along with a mix of optional courses that allow students to explore other areas of interest.

2.3.1 Graduation Requirements in Alberta

In the province of Alberta, high school course credits are accumulated from Grades 10 to 12 and are only awarded when students receive a passing grade of at least 50% in a course (Alberta Education, 2024b, 2024a; Edmonton Public Schools, 2024). A minimum of 100 total

credits are needed to successfully graduate in Alberta but students have flexibility on how they achieve this. Courses can be worth a varying number of credits with most awarding 3-5 credits. Typically, 1 credit is equivalent to 25 hours of work. Coursework must be completed sequentially at the 10-, 20-, and 30-level. Fifty-six credits come from core courses that all students are required to take (Alberta Education, 2024b, 2024a). This must include English Language Arts and Social Studies up to the 30-level, Mathematics and Science up to the 20-level, Physical Education at the 10-level, and Career and Life Management (CALM). Ten additional credits must come from a select pool of electives such as Second Languages, Fine Arts, Career and Technology Studies (CTS), or locally developed courses. Ten more credits must come from other 30-level courses. The remaining 24 credits are flexible and can come from a mix of other courses and elective opportunities. Due to this flexibility, there are numerous potential pathways for additional programming such as after school programs, culturally-affirming programs, and programs that focus on wholistic wellbeing to fit into this education system and serve as niche credit earning opportunities for high school students in Alberta.

2.3.2 Graduation Requirements in Manitoba

In the province of Manitoba, high school (often referred to as "Senior Years") course credits accumulate from Grades 9 to 12 (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d., 2024). A minimum of 30 credits are needed to graduate and students only receive credit with a passing grade of at least 50% in a course. Typically, 1 credit is equivalent to about 110 hours of instruction or classroom-based learning experiences. Coursework must be completed sequentially at the 10-, 20-, 30-, and 40-level. Manitoba offers four official school programs: English, French Immersion, Senior Years Technology Education, and Français (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.). For the purposes of this study, the English

program will be the primary focus (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2024). To meet the graduation requirements of Manitoba's Senior Years English Program, students must acquire 17 credits from compulsory courses and 13 credits from optional courses. The 17 compulsory credits include English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Physical Education/Health Education up to the 40-level, Social Studies up to the 30-level, and Science up to the 20-level. The 13 optional credits can come from a mix of coursework at the discretion of the student. This can include other language courses, School-Initiated Courses (SICs), Student-Initiated Projects (SIPs), career development courses, and arts education courses such as dance, music, drama, and visual arts.

2.4 Research Setting: The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program

IYMP is a community-based after-school healthy living program that engages Indigenous youth in mentorship opportunities and promotes healthy lifestyle behaviours (Lopresti et al., 2021, 2022; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). IYMP was co-developed by Indigenous youth, educators, and researchers with a central goal to promote wholistic wellness and the way of the "good life" (Mino-Bimaadiziwin or Mino-pimadiziwin as described by the Anishinaabe peoples) for Indigenous youth in Canada (Landry et al., 2019; Sobierajski et al., 2022). Peer-led, relationship-based health promotion programs are considered particularly useful for promoting wellbeing with Indigenous youth as these programs are effective at improving self-esteem, self-confidence, and personal growth for participating youth (Vujcich et al., 2018). Sloane & Zimmer (1993) describes peer-led health education as the sharing of health information amongst those with similar attitudes and beliefs. This definition encompasses youth and students as they are more likely to listen to, trust, and make positive lifestyle changes based on messages

from their community of peers. To support wholistic wellbeing for Canadian Indigenous youth, IYMP has been offered across Canada.

IYMP began as a community-based research project in north Winnipeg in 2005 and has since rippled to engage thousands of youth across Canada in over 50 communities from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). IYMP is delivered by Indigenous high school youth mentors for their Indigenous elementary-aged peers (Lopresti et al., 2021; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). The high school youth mentors are guided by community-appointed Community Champions and traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders (Lopresti et al., 2021). This enhances the program beyond a peer-led model to a communal, wholistic model that engages many community members. The program is typically conducted once per week for 90 minutes over 20 weeks during the school year (Lopresti et al., 2021; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). This program structure is flexible to best align with the unique needs of each specific school community. Mentorship is a foundational aspect of IYMP as high school mentors have the opportunity to develop essential skills such as leadership and communication, build lasting relationships within their community, and gain employability skills. The program also positively impacts youth and children by fostering experiences that build community relationships, provides a space to be physically active through culturally-relevant games and activities, and creates opportunities to learn about other aspects of wholistic health such as healthy eating (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019).

A key element of the IYMP communal mentorship model is the development of peer connections between younger (elementary-aged) and older (high school-aged) students. As will be discussed throughout this section, IYMP is an effective means for peer mentorship amongst

Indigenous students. Peer-led Indigenous health promoting programs have successfully demonstrated an improvement in positive lifestyle behaviours such as healthy eating and physical activity for participants (Santos et al., 2014). Younger students who act as peer mentees experience improved knowledge on healthy living while older students who serve as peer mentors experience improvements to their social skills and social responsibility (Lopresti et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2014). Self-esteem is improved for all students as they learn to navigate and gain confidence through peer interactions. Throughout this section, additional key elements of IYMP programming will be discussed including the IYMP theoretical framework, the essential conditions and key characteristics needed for successful implementation and sustainability of IYMP, and a further deep dive into the positive impact of IYMP on students.

2.4.1 The IYMP Theoretical Framework

The IYMP theoretical framework, developed by Métis scholar and IYMP team member Dr. Heather McRae, is guided by the concept of Mino-Bimaadiziwin/mino-pimadiziwin as well as work conducted by Indigenous scholars, Dr. Martin Brokenleg (the Circle of Courage) and Dr. Verna Kirkness (the Four R's of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility) (Brendtro et al., 2005; Halas, McRae, et al., 2017; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). A visual depiction of the IYMP theoretical framework is included in Appendix A. The concept of Mino-Bimaadiziwin/Mino-pimadiziwin describes the harmony of "comprehensive health based on relationships, cultural identity, and connection to the land" (Landry et al., 2019). This term reflects Indigenous worldviews of wholistic wellbeing in a more culturally affirming manner than simply the "absence of illness," commonly used to describe health in biomedical spaces. The Circle of Courage described by Dr. Martin Brokenleg details the four universal needs of all youth to achieve resiliency, strength and self-worth: belonging, mastery, independence, and

generosity (Brendtro et al., 2005; Halas, McRae, et al., 2017) (Appendix B). The Four R's described by Dr. Verna Kirkness explains how IYMP is guided by respect for Indigenous cultural integrity, maintains relevance to Indigenous perspectives and experiences, builds reciprocal and empowering relationships for youth participants, and ensures responsibility is instilled through participation (Halas, McRae, et al., 2017; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) (Appendix C). This essential work by Halas, McRae, et al. (2017), Brendtro et al. (2005), and Kirkness & Barnhardt (1991) is necessary to understand the foundational beliefs, perspectives, and worldviews that have shaped IYMP since its inception. As this research moves towards exploring pathways to embed IYMP within high school curriculum, understanding the basis of how IYMP can be explained and mapped to existing curricular outcomes will be key.

The theoretical framework for IYMP aims to provide a clear understanding of the values and central qualities of the program. The framework is aligned with the TRC Calls to Action for Education (#6 to #12), Education for Reconciliation (#62 to #65), and Youth Programs (#66). The framework is also aligned with the Indigenous Medicine Wheel, and ties together wellbeing and health-related outcomes adapted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that emerge from the Circle of Courage and the Four R's such as Safety and Stability, Social Bonds, Self-Esteem, and Sense of Purpose (Halas, McRae, et al., 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). The three key components of IYMP–relationship building and mentorship, healthy eating, and physical activity–are represented in the framework as elements of the program that intersect and overlap with all areas of the IYMP theoretical model.

2.4.2 Essential Conditions and Key Characteristics for IYMP

The essential conditions needed to implement IYMP are vital to understanding how IYMP runs across Canada (Sobierajski et al., 2022). Work conducted by Sobierajski et al. (2022)

provides detailed insights into the key features that give the program its unique identity. The findings in this paper can be extrapolated to any communal, relationship-based after school mentoring program, making the transferability of this work a key strength. A set of essential conditions identified through a comprehensive school health (CSH) approach was used as the starting point of this work to understand key factors needed to implement a school-based healthy living program (Neely et al., 2020; Sobierajski et al., 2022; Storey et al., 2016). CSH is a framework used to holistically address healthy school culture, enhance healthy student behaviours, and promote positive educational outcomes (Storey et al., 2016). Sobierajski et al. (2022) recognized that more nuanced information was needed to understand how these CSH conditions could be applied to Indigenous school communities in order to promote the long-term sustainability of IYMP. Therefore, this work delved into specific details and modifications to these essential conditions developed for a CSH approach that were relevant to IYMP.

Through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants, eight core conditions and four contextual conditions were identified as necessary to successfully implement IYMP. These participants were young adult health leaders or program coordinators with experience implementing IYMP in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, or Quebec. The purpose of these interviews was to understand what conditions were needed to implement IYMP. The eight core conditions included *students as change makers, school/community-specific autonomy, demonstrated administrative leadership, higher-level support, dedicated champion(s) to engage school community, community support, quality and use of evidence,* and *professional development*. The four contextual conditions included *time, funding and project support, readiness and understanding,* and *prior community connectivity*. Core conditions were identified as factors necessary for program implementation while contextual conditions were identified as

factors that determined "whether or not the core conditions can be achieved" (Sobierajski et al., 2022, p. 2). Sobierajski et al. (2022) suggested modifications to two core conditions to ensure the experiences of IYMP implementation were actively represented. These modifications were *youth-led* instead of *students as change makers* and *learning opportunities* instead of *professional development*. Additionally, one new core condition emerged: *rooted in relationships*. This additional essential condition was added as this work emphasized grounding the program in strong community relationships to embed it effectively within the school and its surrounding community. Overall, this work effectively identifies and describes the conditions necessary to implement a school mentoring program such as IYMP.

Work completed by Lopresti et al. (2021) aimed to describe key implementation characteristics for IYMP. They specifically collaborated with peer youth mentors and young adult health leaders as key informants for this research as these individuals are essential for program delivery and therefore have important insights on what is necessary for successful program implementation. Lopresti et al. (2021) used field notes generated from six participant observations, two focus group interviews with sixteen individuals from seven school communities, four follow-up semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and meeting notes collected from IYMP regional and national team meetings to generate data and identify five key implementation characteristics for IYMP: *building relationships, communication, community engagement, instilling a sense of ownership,* and *program supports*. This work concluded that implementation and delivery of IYMP to communities across Canada may be more successful and stable if these characteristics are met. These five characteristics will be discussed below.

Building Relationships. When preparing and planning for IYMP delivery, it was important to build strong, respectful relationships with key partners (Lopresti et al., 2021). These

partners included IYMP program leaders, high school youth mentors, elementary students, school administrators such as principals, academic research partners, and local community members (Lopresti et al., 2021; Sobierajski et al., 2022; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). Prioritizing these relationships promoted success and sustainability of the program (Lopresti et al., 2021). Work from Potvin et al. (2003) also found that building respectful relationships that integrate all stakeholders as equal partners was key to community health promotion programming. Research by MacDonald et al. (2013) found that positive mental health outcomes for Indigenous youth were protected when youth built and maintained strong relationships with their community of peers and engaged in mentoring relationships. Wexler et al. (2014) adds to the positive impact of relationship building as a mechanism to support healthy outcomes such as strong personal growth and resiliency.

Communication. Communication between all partners was essential for effective program delivery for students (Lopresti et al., 2021). Appropriate language should always be considered for documents such as consent and program information forms, for recruitment presentations for prospective students, on the IYMP official website and social media platforms, and through all verbal communications such as virtual calls or in-person meetings with IYMP partners and community members. Open communication and easy to understand language was key in promoting engagement with the program.

Community Engagement. Community engagement was essential to effectively deliver IYMP programming and ensure all necessary partners were included (Lopresti et al., 2021). This can manifest as the involvement of Elders and traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers in programming to share traditional teachings with students. Their involvement also amplified intergenerational connections and provided an opportunity to pass on generational knowledge

such as cultural protocols for offerings, learning to fish and set fishing nets, and learning how to make a drum. This close mentorship from older generations, the traditional teachings they share with youth, and an overarching commitment to community and culture were all protective factors against negative mental health outcomes for Indigenous youth (MacDonald et al., 2013).

Instilling a Sense of Ownership. Ownership and community autonomy were crucial elements of empowering school communities to run their IYMP programming in a way that best suits their specific community needs and addresses local priorities (Lopresti et al., 2021). This sense of ownership should be felt by the individuals involved in directly delivering IYMP to students as well as the broader school community. As the program is primarily operated by individual communities, an emphasis on ownership supports the sustainability of IYMP. For students, this sense of ownership improved their self-esteem by making them feel more confident, responsible, and important as a key piece of their program.

Program Supports. Tangible program supports such as program manuals, training events and gatherings, national team meetings, and funding for individual communities were essential for successful IYMP implementation (Lopresti et al., 2021). Each of these supports play a key role in strengthening the program. For example, national team meetings create a space where individuals who are involved in IYMP from across the country can come together to connect and foster team relationships. Adequate funding ensures programs are able to acquire the materials they need to run programming. This may include healthy snacks, items for games and activities, and travel costs for team gatherings and training opportunities. Long-term funding also ensures sustainability of the program.

2.4.3 The Positive Impact of IYMP on Students

Since its early beginnings as a research project in Manitoba, IYMP has positively impacted thousands of Indigenous youth across Canada. The program drives positive health outcomes through a wholistic approach to health that recognizes the value of cultural identity in connection with school, community, land, and local traditions (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). The program utilizes a communal mentorship model to create a sense of belonging and purpose for students. The opportunities provided by IYMP also create a space for students to develop their leadership skills and affirm their cultural identity.

The impact of the IYMP program has been explored in numerous studies and collectively, these works have demonstrated the lasting impact of IYMP on student health. In terms of social and emotional health, involvement in IYMP as a high school youth mentor serves as an empowering experience for Indigenous students (Halas, McRae, et al., 2017; Johnson & Halas, 2011). This improves confidence, self-efficacy, and mental health outcomes for participating students (Ferguson et al., 2021; Halas, McRae, et al., 2017; Johnson & Halas, 2011). Many of the skills students develop are transferable to the work environment, enhancing the future employability of students participating in IYMP (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). Involvement in this culturally affirming mentorship opportunity also creates a safe space that expands and strengthens student social networks, promoting the development of long lasting friendships and supportive relationships (Carpenter et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2021; Halas, Carpenter, et al., 2017; Johnson & Halas, 2011; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). Additionally, the program improves student knowledge on healthy behaviours such as healthy eating (Eskicioglu et al., 2014; Halas, Carpenter, et al., 2017). This demonstrated a reduction to the risk factors for chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes (Eskicioglu et al.,

2014). The program content within IYMP exposes students to culturally relevant games, activities, and experiences that serve as vital opportunities to foster a positive cultural identity (Carpenter et al., 2008; Johnson & Halas, 2011; Lopresti et al., 2020). The flexibility of IYMP programming allows for program leaders to celebrate the unique strengths of each high school mentor and create an environment that fosters their individual identity (Carpenter et al., 2008; Johnson & Halas, 2011). The program also fosters more student interest in pursuing post-secondary education and employment, improving high school attendance and graduation rates. Overall, IYMP contributes to the wholistic wellbeing of students, improving their connection to their cultural and enhancing quality of life (Ferguson et al., 2021).

The IYMP communal mentorship model and its positive impact on participating students was explored in depth by Ferguson et al. (2021). This work explored the experiences of students participating in IYMP, concluding that the key impacts of IYMP were (1) its ability to foster wellness, (2) its ability to strengthen meaningful connections, and (3) its ability to support participants in their exploration of leadership experiences.

Within this context, wellness included physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing as IYMP engagement resulted in relationships and experiences that had a multifaceted and positive impact on youth participants. Physical activity was found to relieve school-related stress and by engaging in fun activities, student's moods and overall wellbeing was improved. Socio-emotional connections were also strengthened because positive qualities such as teamwork and cooperation were emphasized when students participated in physical activities. Emotional wellbeing was strengthened through relationship building in the safe and supportive environment fostered in IYMP. This programming also created a sense of belonging for students. By feeling as though they were able to have a strong, positive impact on others, youth mentors experienced

immense pride during their involvement in the program. Emotional wellbeing was also enhanced as IYMP created a happy and positive environment for students. Mental wellness was apparent as IYMP provides students with a welcoming environment for personal growth and development. Students were motivated to explore their own identity through the new experiences they encountered in the program while also learning how to engage with others in a safe space. To this effect, Ferguson et al. (2021) also found that IYMP had a stress-reducing effect on youth mentors.

Meaningful connections were established through respectful interactions between Elders, community members, and students to create a close-knit community (Ferguson et al., 2021). These connections uplifted the community and encouraged reciprocal respect amongst all members. Elementary and high school students came to closely understand each other's personalities, allowing for students to plan program activities that were highly personalized to the interests of their peers. This relationship building created an integral sense of belonging for all students that motivated them to put more time and energy into all important relationships in their lives, both within and beyond IYMP. Mentorship skills were found to be a core element of the program as high school mentors learned how to facilitate an inclusive, safe, and comfortable environment for their elementary-aged peers. Cultural teachings such as traditional Indigenous games sparked awareness and increased student interest in continuing to learn more about their culture. Students experienced a strong sense of pride when sharing their culture with other students which encouraged them to engage as leaders in planning culturally-enriching activities. By building these community connections between elementary students, high school mentors, and other IYMP program participants, students felt empowered to uplift their community and foster a safe, inclusive space for all.

Leadership plays an important role in the experiences of IYMP high school youth mentors (Ferguson et al., 2021). This leadership is embodied by students serving as supportive, encouraging role models for their younger peers and by students leading group activities. Students also develop a diverse skill set related to leadership including patience, communication, and time management. For students who struggle with leadership, IYMP is an opportunity for them to step out of their comfort zone and overcome a new challenge in a safe space. By continuing to grow and develop their leadership skills, high school mentors have the ability to create a positive and memorable environment for their elementary-aged peers.

IYMP serves to provide Indigenous students across Canada with a safe space for learning and growth as they interact with their peers (Ferguson et al., 2021; Lopresti et al., 2021; Sobierajski et al., 2022). Students feel motivated to engage with the program because it brings them a sense of joy, belonging, and fulfillment. This promotes wholistic wellness and supports students as they develop essential skills such as leadership and mentorship.

2.4.4 The Desire for Credit

Youth have expressed a strong desire for credit earning opportunities within IYMP (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). High school youth mentors believe that earning credits for their involvement in IYMP will support their education and the learning experiences they engage in throughout the program will build employment skills such as confidence, public speaking, and problem solving. This interest in supporting youth through high school credits was echoed by IYMP team members from across Canada during IYMP Morning Star Visioning Wheel strategies planning sessions in 2022 and 2023 (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2022, 2023). These meetings aimed to share IYMP team member's goals and hopes for the future of IYMP, many of which emphasized suggestions such as students earning credit for

being a mentor, building IYMP into a high school leadership course, or a national IYMP high school course. As previously discussed, earning credits supports educational attainment which is a critical determinant of health that influences many other health status factors such as income potential, health literacy, and access to social supports (Braveman et al., 2011; Dela Cruz et al., 2024).

Through sharing circles at the 2019 IYMP National Gathering, youth indicated their desire for more training and support within their role (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). They specifically requested training that would improve their public speaking skills and their capabilities to serve as strong mentors for their elementary-aged peers. Students were also eager to build connections with community partners such as Elders and community organizations who could connect youth to different local learning opportunities. A credit earning pathway that addresses these areas of student interest has the potential to improve the educational content IYMP provides to students, making the program more robust. Therefore, awarding high school credit for IYMP participation serves as an opportunity to support the educational interests of youth while simultaneously improving the depth and breadth of programming that IYMP offers to students.

The primary researcher for this work has attended virtual bimonthly IYMP National Meetings and virtual monthly IYMP Program Coordinator Meetings in 2023 and 2024 where they have connected with members of the IYMP team from across Canada. Through these meetings and other personal communications with various members of the IYMP leadership team, it quickly became apparent that students have a strong interest in earning compensation through high school credits for their participation in the program. Credit earning opportunities will also boost the long-term sustainability of IYMP by embedding the program within school

communities. Therefore, this thesis will work to better understand how IYMP can serve as a pathway to educational attainment that supports wholistic health for Indigenous high school students.

2.5 Summary and Study Purpose

The social determinants of health have a profound impact on wellbeing and quality of life (Braveman et al., 2011; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020). Education is a vital social determinant of health and has a substantial impact on health (Shankar et al., 2013). Educational attainment refers to how much schooling someone has completed with higher levels of educational attainment positively associated with improved health literacy, increased employment opportunities, the development of more employable skills, and improved mental, physical, and social health (Braveman et al., 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Dela Cruz et al., 2024). Indigenous youth benefit from education as a positive social determinant of health when their educational system creates a supportive and nurturing learning environment (Kim, 2019; Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999). IYMP can enhance this enriching learning environment for students (Ferguson et al., 2021; Lopresti et al., 2021; Sobierajski et al., 2022). If students can also earn credit towards their high school diploma for their participation in the program, this would improve the program's ability to support healthy outcomes for students by increasing educational attainment opportunities. To ensure education serves as a positive social determinant of health for Indigenous youth, it is important to understand high school graduation requirements in Canada, specifically exploring how IYMP situates itself within this topic of credit awarding and educational attainment for Indigenous students. The present study explores pathways to awarding credit to Indigenous youth in Alberta and Manitoba for IYMP participation. More specifically, the policies and procedures that guide existing potential

pathways and the practices currently in place to award high school credits for IYMP. Findings will be shared with IYMP communities to support their efforts to provide credits to students.

CHAPTER 3: MAPPING PATHWAYS TO HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT AWARDING FOR THE INDIGENOUS YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM IN ALBERTA AND MANITOBA: A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Educational Attainment and Indigenous Youth

Education is an important social determinant of health that is interlinked with other vital health outcomes (Braveman et al., 2011; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020; Shankar et al., 2013). Aspects of health such as health literacy, employment and income, housing, food security, mental health, positive self-esteem, and overall quality of life are all influenced by an individual's level of completed education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Dela Cruz et al., 2024; Heflin et al., 2022; Korpal & Wong, 2015; Marsh & Martin, 2011). Educational attainment is defined as the highest level of education an individual has completed (Statistics Canada, 2021). The acquisition of a high school (or secondary school) diploma serves as a defining achievement in this process. Indigenous high school students in Canada face lower levels of educational attainment compared to their non-Indigenous peers with only 63% of Indigenous students completing high school compared to 91% of non-Indigenous students based on a Statistics Canada study of the 2015/2016 school year (Statistics Canada, 2023). This lack of educational attainment is largely influenced by a history of colonization in Canada and may disproportionately impact health outcomes for Indigenous youth (Kim, 2019; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017).

The more education an individual has access to, the greater opportunity they have to experience the positive effects of health factors such as high levels of health literacy and access to high quality employment (Braveman et al., 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Dela

Cruz et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2008). Strong health literacy allows individuals to make informed healthcare decisions regarding nutrition, exercise, illness management, and more (Braveman et al., 2011; Korpal & Wong, 2015). Educational attainment also supports employment opportunities that positively influence health such as access to higher earning potential (Shankar et al., 2013). This increased income may then further influence health outcomes by improving access to secure housing and food security (Braveman et al., 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Heflin et al., 2022; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020; Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999). If an individual is unable to achieve educational attainment, then these additional health factors may also face a reduction, negatively impacting overall quality of life.

It is well understood that Indigenous youth are underrepresented in post-secondary education which begins at the high school (secondary school) level where many Indigenous students struggle to earn a sufficient amount of credits to receive their high school diploma (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Shankar et al., 2013). While many structural and societal factors will influence an individual's likelihood to participate in the education system, prominent personal factors include significant responsibilities at home that limit attendance at school, a desire to quickly enter the workforce due to money concerns, or a general sense of apathy towards high school (Arriagada, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). Numerous actions can be taken to increase Indigenous student engagement in their school communities. This may involve encouraging students to take part in clubs and extracurricular activities that get them more involved in their community or providing students with more culturally affirming learning opportunities embedded within their curriculum to ensure a fulfilling educational experience

(Arriagada, 2015; Kim, 2019; Thackrah et al., 2022). Above all else, if education is to be a positive social determinant of health, then it must be an empowering experience that ensures students have the opportunity to earn the credits they need to graduate (Korpal & Wong, 2015).

3.1.2 Research Setting: The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program

One such way to nurture empowering educational experiences is through health promotion programming that focuses on building community connections and provides an opportunity for students to continue developing their interpersonal skills such as leadership and mentorship (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP) is one such program that can improve student's experiences with the education system and may provide a flexible avenue for earning credits towards one's high school diploma.

IYMP is a community-based after-school healthy living program that engages Indigenous youth in mentorship opportunities and promotes healthy lifestyle behaviours (Lopresti et al., 2021, 2022; Sobierajski et al., 2022; The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). The program began as a community-based research project in Manitoba in 2005 and has since rippled across Canada to support youth from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). The program is delivered by Indigenous high school youth mentors for their Indigenous elementary school-aged peers. All students are guided by local community leaders called Community Champions, as well as traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders (Lopresti et al., 2021). Students spend their time in the program staying physically active through culturally-relevant activities, developing interpersonal skills such as teamwork and leadership, and learning about different aspects of wholistic health such as nutrition and healthy eating habits (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship

Program, 2019). The program is typically run once per week after school, but this structure can be flexible to meet the needs of each school community. Due to the program's flexibility and the broad learning opportunities it provides to students, IYMP has the potential to serve as a credit earning opportunity for high school students.

Additionally, students participating in IYMP have expressed a strong desire for credit earning opportunities within IYMP to support their education and build employable skills such as confidence, team work, public speaking, and problem solving (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). Students have specifically requested training opportunities to improve their mentorship capabilities and support them in building connections with diverse community partners. A credit earning pathway that addresses these areas of student interest has the potential to improve the educational content IYMP provides to students, making the program more robust and sustainable by embedding the program within school communities. This would support students as they make progress towards earning their high school diploma, increasing educational attainment while also engaging in a valuable program that promotes wholistic wellbeing. However, it is not well understood how the credit earning process can be utilized to support students participating in programs such as IYMP, nor how this process may vary across different provinces. To address our lack of knowledge on this process, the research team chose to focus on pathways to credit awarding in Alberta and Manitoba. These provinces were selected because IYMP has sustainable and robust connections to both provinces as the pilot study where IYMP originated was based in Manitoba and the majority of this research team and team that coordinates IYMP programming, particularly the IYMP National Director Dr. Teena Starlight, are located in Alberta.

3.1.3 High School Credit Awarding

In order to graduate and earn a high school diploma, Canadian students must accumulate course credits. High school is primarily a responsibility of provincial governments, meaning specifics on the credit awarding structure will vary from province to province.

In the province of Alberta, high school course credits are accumulated from Grades 10 to 12 and are only awarded when students receive a passing grade of at least 50% in a course (Alberta Education, 2024b, 2024a; Edmonton Public Schools, 2024). A minimum of 100 total credits are needed to successfully graduate in Alberta but students have flexibility on how they achieve this. Courses can be worth a varying number of credits with most awarding 3-5 credits. Typically, 1 credit is equivalent to 25 hours of work. Coursework must be completed sequentially at the 10-, 20-, and 30-level. Fifty-six credits come from core courses that all students are required to take. This must include English Language Arts and Social Studies up to the 30-level, Mathematics and Science up to the 20-level, Physical Education at the 10-level, and Career and Life Management (CALM). An additional ten credits must come from a select pool of electives such as Second Languages, Fine Arts, Career and Technology Studies (CTS), or locally developed courses. Another ten credits must come from other 30-level courses. The remaining twenty-four credits are flexible and can come from a mix of other courses and elective opportunities. Due to this flexibility, there are numerous potential pathways for IYMP to fit into this system and serve as a credit earning opportunity for high school students in Alberta.

In the province of Manitoba, high school (often referred to as “Senior Years”) course credits accumulate from Grades 9 to 12 (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d., 2024). A minimum of 30 credits are needed to graduate and students only receive credit with a passing grade of at least 50% in a course. Typically, 1 credit is equivalent to about 110

hours of instruction or classroom-based learning experiences. Coursework must be completed sequentially at the 10-, 20-, 30-, and 40-level. Manitoba offers four official school programs: English, French Immersion, Senior Years Technology Education, and Français. For the purposes of this study, the English program will be the primary focus. To meet the graduation requirements of Manitoba's Senior Years English Program, students must acquire seventeen credits from compulsory courses and thirteen credits from optional courses. The seventeen compulsory credits include English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Physical Education/Health Education up to the 40-level, Social Studies up to the 30-level, and Science up to the 20-level. The thirteen optional credits can come from a mix of coursework at the discretion of the student. This can include other language courses, School-Initiated Courses (SICs), Student-Initiated Projects (SIPs), career development courses, and arts education courses such as dance, music, drama, and visual arts.

3.1.4 Study Purpose, Objectives and Research Question

Education is an important social determinant of health that has rippling effects to other elements of health such as employment and income (Braveman et al., 2011; National Center for School Mental Health, 2020). Increasing educational attainment for Indigenous high school youth will also increase overall quality of life (Shankar et al., 2013). IYMP has been identified as a health promotion program that will enrich learning experiences for students (Sobierajski et al., 2022). If students can also earn credit towards their high school diploma for their participation in the program, this would improve the ability of IYMP to support healthy outcomes for students by increasing educational attainment opportunities. As previously discussed, how school communities can go about awarding credit outside of the traditional courses and electives described earlier is not well understood and may vary across school communities.

To ensure education serves as a positive social determinant of health for Indigenous youth, it is important to understand high school graduation requirements in Canada, specifically exploring how IYMP situates itself within this topic of credit awarding and educational attainment for Indigenous students. Therefore, this study aims to identify and describe pathways to high school credit awarding in Alberta and Manitoba that can be mapped to the Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program. More specifically, the objective of this study is to map potential pathways to credit awarding for Indigenous high school students participating in IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba. This objective is accompanied by the guiding research question: How can IYMP award high school students with course credit for their involvement in the program? The research findings will be shared with school communities interested in supporting students with credit for their participation in programming that promotes healthy living such as IYMP.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Data Generation

3.2.1.1 Researcher Positionality and Theoretical Perspective

This work is aligned with a constructivist inquiry paradigm which has influenced this research from inception to completion. Constructivists believe "knowledge is created in interaction among investigator and respondents" and the ultimate goal is to achieve understanding on a particular topic or phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mayan, 2023). A relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology were also applied to this work. Through relativism, reality is constructed through the experiences of the researcher to achieve a goal. In this case, the experience was the act of collecting and analyzing documents, as will be discussed further in this section, and the goal was to gather knowledge on credit awarding as it applies to IYMP. With subjectivism, the researcher and their topic of interest or phenomenon are

interactively linked "so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Following this line of thinking, the researcher was actively engaged in the research and co-constructed the knowledge that was generated.

3.2.1.2 Guiding Research Method

Qualitative document analysis was employed as the guiding research approach. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for evaluating and reviewing documents (Bowen, 2009). For this study, documents included web pages (specifically government sites), handbooks, guides, policy documents, reports, tip sheets, and other curricular documents. This research approach was utilized to understand the policies and procedures currently in place to guide the high school credit awarding process in Alberta and Manitoba, specifically looking at their potential application to IYMP.

3.2.1.3 Document Search Strategy

The search began in consultation with two University of Alberta reference librarians. The objective of the study was explained to the librarians and important search parameters were shared (i.e., English documents only, documents relevant to Alberta and Manitoba high school education only, and some key words such as leader, mentor, high school, credit, and curriculum). With librarian guidance, it was determined that grey literature would be the primary driver of this research as policy and education documents would be most useful in meeting the study's objective. Peer-reviewed and published research articles were not used as research database searches yielded no relevant search results in this initial consultation with the librarians.

A detailed document analysis search strategy was developed with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide all searching (Appendix D). Documents had to meet all inclusion criteria to be added to the collection of data. The inclusion criteria defined the acceptable content

of documents (i.e., documents must be relevant to high school course credit awarding, address locally developed, CTS, or dual credit courses, and/or address curricular requirements that align with IYMP such as the roles and responsibilities of youth mentors) and the activity-status of the documents ("in-use" documents that are up to date or foundational historical documents within 20 years of age). The document also needed to answer "yes" to three key questions:

1. Does the document identify high school credit awarding opportunities?
2. Does the document provide insight into the high school credit awarding process?
3. Does the document address high school credit awarding opportunities in a way that can be connected to IYMP?

The Government of Alberta and Government of Manitoba education websites were searched from November 2023 to March 2024. The Advanced Google Search feature was used to confine the search to these specific sites and to filter for English results only. The search process was recorded in a Google Docs file. This included the exact search terms, the website domain, the total number of search results, and the number of relevant search results. Relevant search results were compiled in an extensive spreadsheet in Google Sheets, with data for Alberta and Manitoba separated in individual sheets. After repeated testing of this search strategy, the researcher found that anything past the top 50 search results did not return useful or relevant results. Therefore, if the total search results were greater than 50, only the first 50 documents were searched. Over time, the process became repetitive and duplicates would appear in multiple searches. These duplicates were another sign that the researcher had exhausted all useful results from the search. Saturation was achieved through this redundancy in the document search (Sandelowski, 1995). If any documents were a PDF file or another form of downloadable file, these were saved for easy off-line access. Beyond the Advanced Google search, documents were

also compiled through word-of-mouth connections. A connection was built early in the research process with a curriculum manager for an Alberta school division that provided helpful insights into documents that should be included in this study. This individual has stayed in contact with the primary researcher over the course of this searching period, continually sharing resources that have been compiled in the spreadsheet.

Once the search results were compiled in a spreadsheet, these resources were used as starting points to identify other documents that also met the inclusion criteria. As many of these search results were web pages, links within these pages to further information were almost always available. This allowed the researcher to expand the spreadsheet with additional useful documents and web pages. This added step of identifying resources that were referenced within the documents collected through Google searches was an essential strategy to increase the number of results.

3.2.2 Data Analysis

All documents deemed relevant and included in the spreadsheet were analyzed for key details per a document analysis template adapted from the second edition of *Essential Conditions of Qualitative Inquiry* (Mayan, 2023) and further refined through guidance by the researcher team (Appendix E). This template included categories such as: document title, document type, document source, date and edition of the document, target audience, a general document overview, and a description/summary of the document. Every relevant document in the spreadsheet was read in great detail at least three times to achieve immersion in the data and identify key topics.

3.2.2.1 Content Analysis

Conventional content analysis as described by Hsieh & Shannon (2005) was conducted by the primary researcher for all documents deemed relevant by the inclusion criteria. Initial codes were developed based on the description/summary column of the spreadsheet, which contained a quick snapshot of key information collected from each document. This was an inductive process as the researcher allowed the codes to emerge from the data. Once these codes were developed, they were grouped into meaningful clusters based on overlapping concepts. The spreadsheet was expanded to include a sheet that organized these codes and clusters into the documents that best aligned with that grouping. Categories were established to finalize these groupings. The primary researcher worked carefully to ensure the research objectives of this study were central in informing category development. Abstraction of each category created rich descriptions of the data.

These codes, clusters, and categories were shared with research team members to review and discuss each stage of group organization for this data. Journal-style reflections were kept by the primary researcher to explain how the categories were established, how they related to each other, and what meaning they brought to the overall body of work. These reflections kept the researcher grounded in the work and prevented coder fatigue (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). While the initial establishment of the spreadsheet allowed for the identification of key information within the documents, the conventional content analysis approach allowed for a deeper dive into understanding how this information could be organized to map pathways to high school credit awarding opportunities for IYMP.

3.2.3 Rigour

Rigour as described by Lincoln & Guba (1985) was employed throughout this study to cultivate reliability and validity of the project (Mayan, 2023; Morse et al., 2002). The four categories of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were maintained throughout.

Credibility (i.e., Internal validity). Member checks with the IYMP research team were conducted to ensure the data was an accurate representation of the credit awarding experience. Discussions of these findings also provided a valuable opportunity for new ideas on how to best organize and present this information for the intended audience of IYMP communities. Although document collection and analysis was primarily conducted by a single researcher, these discussions with other research team members enhanced overall data credibility.

Transferability (i.e., External validity). While this research is intentionally situated within the specific context of IYMP, there is potential for the learnings of this study to address the needs of similar mentorship and leadership programs that are also looking to provide course credit to students. To ensure transferability, the research focused on providing thick, detailed descriptions of the findings with the intention of maintaining the scope necessary for readers to apply these findings to other health promotion programming for high school students in Alberta and Manitoba.

Dependability (i.e., Reliability). A great deal of time was spent ensuring a clear sampling strategy was used. This involved the creation of a detailed document search strategy with clearly defined inclusion/exclusion criteria that was carefully developed with the guidance of multiple University of Alberta librarians. This ensured a deliberate and organized approach to

document collection was used. The researcher also kept an audit trail to track document collection.

Confirmability (i.e., Objectivity). Detailed documentation and an audit trail was used to record the researcher's workflow. This process ensured the document collection and analysis process was logical. Documentation included the document search strategy and a document search tracking form. A document analysis template was used to standardize the key takeaways from each piece of data. These documents were foundational resources that grounded both the collection and analysis of all relevant documents. Confirmability was also encouraged as the researcher ensured that multiple thorough read-throughs of each document were completed. This included reflections recorded continuously throughout the analysis process to ensure the data was examined thoroughly.

To further foster rigour, the researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the research process by concurrently collecting and analyzing documents. Concurrent document collection and analysis of the data ensured there was a clear and mutual interaction between "what is known and what one needs to know" (Morse et al., 2002). This strategy of simultaneous collection and analysis also ensured data saturation because the data was adequately replicated (i.e., Multiple documents that addressed a specific topic on credit awarding were identified and analyzed) (Morse et al., 2002; Sandelowski, 1995). This also ensured the research topic had comprehensive coverage in order to paint a detailed picture of the appropriate pathways to credit awarding.

The final element of a rigorous study is the researcher (Mayan, 2023; Morse et al., 2002). This primary research was open, creative, and flexible when interacting the data at all stages of preparation, collection, and analysis. The researcher was adaptable as document collection and

analysis unfolded, keeping the study intention of centering IYMP at the forefront of all decision making throughout this process. The personal journal kept by the primary researcher was a vital resource to record their research process as well as their perspectives, thoughts, and feelings as the research unfolded (Mayan, 2023). The personal journal also guarded against coder fatigue, allowing the researcher to stay focused and engaged with the data at all times (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). This journal was an effective tool for practicing reflexivity that ensured the production of a high quality research product.

3.2.4 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Human Research Ethics Board under the project name "Still I Rise: Indigenous youth-led strategies as a pathway to wholistic health and health equity" No. Pro00124180. There were no participant interactions in this study that required ethics approval. The majority of the collected documents were available through public domain and open access resources with a handful of documents acquired through community partnerships. During the analysis process, careful consideration was taken to remove all personal identifiers from included documents.

3.3 Results

The initial advanced Google search yielded a combined total of 1804 search results (656 results on Alberta education sites and 1148 results on Manitoba education sites). Duplicates were occasionally present in these search results. Relevant results totaled 122 (38 for Alberta and 84 for Manitoba). Nine items were shared by the Alberta school division curriculum manager. After expanding the spreadsheet with more items linked within the collected documents and after assessing each item to ensure it met the inclusion criteria, 111 relevant items remained in the spreadsheet (48 for Alberta and 63 for Manitoba).

The types of documents included web pages (49), policy documents (8), fact sheets (5), guides (19), handbooks (3), course templates (21), and other curricular documents (20). The target audience for these documents was largely educators (108) such as teachers, principals, school authorities, and post-secondary or technically-certified teaching partners. Many documents were also developed for parents, guardians, and caregivers (27), as well as government officials (38), students (11), and technical school staff (3).

Three key categories with five essential subcategories were identified. Each category and subcategory play a key role in describing the high school credit awarding pathways that IYMP may choose to explore. The categories and subcategories are: Pathways to Credit (subcategories include: Locally Developed Credit, Dual Credit, Mentorship and Leadership Credit, Health and Wellness (including Physical Education/Health Education) Credit, and Arts Education Credit), Student-Centered Decision Making, and Essential Partnerships for Credit Awarding.

3.3.1 Pathways to Credit

There are numerous pathways to credit awarding within the Alberta and Manitoba high school education systems. For the purposes of this work, five credit awarding pathways that have the potential to align with IYMP have been identified, with four relevant to both AB and MB and one specific to MB. This alignment may pertain to different aspects of a credit awarding opportunity such as its setting in a non-traditional classroom format. These pathways are flexible in their possible course content and availability to students across each province. It is likely that existing high school course content overlaps with the programming embedded in IYMP. As IYMP is primarily a mentorship program that emphasizes wholistic wellbeing, courses that have the potential to cover mentorship, leadership, and Indigenous perspectives on healthy living are included in the list of pathways (below).

All pathways contain similarities in regards to who is involved in credit awarding, why credits are necessary, and generally, what is included in the coursework itself. First, all credit awarding pathways require the involvement of a certificated teacher to assess students, provide grades that will appear on student transcripts, and overall ensure students receive credit for their efforts if they meet all passing requirements. Second, the common goal of all credit awarding pathways is to support students as they work towards the credit totals required for graduation and the acquisition of their high school diploma. This "why" informs all pursuits for IYMP credit awarding. Third, all pathways have a set of learning outcomes that must be achieved as students learn and grow from their experiences within each pathway. The flexibility in how these learning outcomes are achieved will vary between each pathway. Summary tables are included at the end of the following pathway subcategories (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2).

List of Pathways (in no particular order):

1. Locally Developed Credit
2. Dual Credit
3. Mentorship & Leadership Credit
4. Health and Wellness (including Physical Education/Health Education) Credit
5. Arts Education Credit

3.3.1.1 Locally Developed Credit

A locally developed course (LDC) is a course developed, approved, or acquired by an individual school authority to address a particular student or community need. A LDC is an opportunity to expand the existing provincial program of study, accommodate unique student interests, and support local community priorities. School authorities are responsible for developing, implementing, and renewing LDCs when necessary. A school authority that

proposes a new LDC must internally approve the new course at the school authority level (e.g., school board, school division, school district) before the LDC moves on to review and authorization from the provincial government. For context, Alberta primarily uses the term 'school authority' to encompass school boards, school divisions, and/or school districts while Manitoba primarily uses the term 'school board' when describing school authorities, divisions and/or districts. For consistency throughout this chapter, the term 'school authority' will be used. This school authority authorization step is essential to ensure appropriate funding is available for students to receive credit through this locally developed opportunity. Once an LDC is approved, it can be acquired by any school authority within the province as a unique course offering for their students.

When proposing a new LDC in Alberta, it is important to consider locally developed course requirements. A new LDC proposal must include a clear rationale for the course such as its relevance in a local community context and a clear explanation of how the course will meet student needs. Including the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as educators, community partners, and parents, also strengthens the proposal's rationale. Careful consideration must be given to explain why existing LDCs and other provincially authorized courses that also address or overlap with the needs identified in the LDC proposal are not sufficient. If student learning opportunities can be satisfied through another avenue, the LDC proposal may not receive government approval. To avoid this, the proposal should acknowledge all similarities and overlaps with existing courses and emphasize how this new LDC will expand beyond the scope of what is currently offered to students, adding value to their education. The proposal must also contain a course description, clear learning outcomes, and guiding questions. A descriptive implementation plan is also required. This includes planned assessments to evaluate student

progress, identification of equipment/facility needs and student safety procedures. In addition, all LDCs must be instructed by a certificated teacher and all course content must be allowed to be shared with the public without interfering with intellectual property laws. Finally, the proposal should specify the number of credits being offered by the course and how many hours of work that equates to for students. For example, a 3 credit LDC proposal in Alberta must describe how students will engage in approximately 75 hours of work.

A new LDC proposal in Alberta must be submitted, reviewed, and authorized by the appropriate provincial government. If approved, an authorization letter containing the official course code, credit value, and start/end date for a maximum of four school years is generated. Next, this authorization letter must receive a motion to approve by the appropriate school authority governing body. Once the motion to approve the new LDC is passed, the course can be offered to students. To share an approved LDC with other school authorities, a request to share the course is submitted, followed by authorization through the provincial government, and finally through local approval by the appropriate school authority prior to offering the LDC to students. When an LDC reaches its expiry date, revisions to the course content and a resubmission to the provincial government will be required to reauthorize the course.

While LDCs in Alberta have no further layer of complexity, LDCs in Manitoba can be classified as School-Initiated Courses (SICs), Student-Initiated Projects (SIPs), Community Service Student-Initiated Projects (CSSIPs), and Cultural Exploration Student-Initiated Projects (CESIPs). Manitoba refers to these credit awarding options as "locally developed curricula." SICs are courses developed by a school authority to meet the local learning needs of their student body. These courses cannot replace existing Manitoba education courses. SICs must be approved by the local school authority and authorized by the provincial government every school year.

Once a SIC is approved, it can be shared across the province. Students can use SIC credits towards their optional credit requirements for graduation, up to a maximum of 11 SIC credits. SIPs are projects developed by individual students to meet an area of interest not covered in the existing Manitoba education curriculum. Project proposals are written and developed by the student with support from school staff. A certificated teacher must evaluate student learning and growth over the course of the project. A 1 credit proposal should account for approximately 110 hours of work (or 55 hours for a half credit course option). SIPs are not ideal for IYMP as they are individual to each student, are not intended to replace existing community activities, and cannot be shared across the province. CSSIPs and CESIPs are specific types of Student-Initiated Projects for students who make large volunteer contributions to their community or participate in cultural exploration activities. These opportunities must take place outside of school and students earn credit retrospectively by providing written documentation of the activity they participated in. If student volunteer hours can be carefully tracked by IYMP program leaders, the CSSIP credit may be a simple and low barrier pathway. A maximum of 1 credit per project type is available to students.

It should be noted that all types of LDCs in both provinces are not intended to replace community programs offered by individuals or organizations. This caveat may cause an IYMP-specific LDC course to fail to receive authorization at the school authority or government approval stage. IYMP may work around this barrier by taking advantage of existing LDCs that contain content that IYMP participants will benefit from. As of the 2023-2024 school year, LDCs in Alberta that address teachings such as Beading, Smudging, Tipi Making, Traditional Land-Based Learning, and the Medicine Wheel are available to students (full list available below). A list of current LDCs in Manitoba is not publicly available. By drawing from an

existing pool of LDCs, IYMP may have the opportunity to partner with school authorities to develop unofficial "bundles" of these credits that can be offered to students with certificated teachers coordinating with IYMP to provide instruction on LDC course content to students.

List of current (2023-2024) Alberta LDCs that may have some relevance to IYMP:

LDC 1014 Beading (Elder Chronicles)

LDC 1803/2803/3803 Braided Journeys 12, 25, 35

LDC 1172 Medicine Wheel

LDC 1175 Smudging (Elder Chronicles)

LDC 1175 Seven Teachings

LDC 1021 Tipi Making (Elder Chronicles)

LDC 2248 and 3248 Traditional Land-Based Learning

3.3.1.2 Dual Credit

Dual credit is a flexible programming option where students can pursue niche areas of interest and gain experiences that prepare them for further education and/or career pursuits after high school. At a provincial level, dual credit is overseen by Alberta Education or Manitoba Education and at a local level, dual credit is managed by individual school authorities along with their working relationships with post-secondary institutions or business/industry partners. The credit students receive for completing a dual credit course will go towards their high school diploma under the 24 flexible credits in Alberta and under the 13 optional credits in Manitoba. It is also possible that students will earn credit towards a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, or an apprenticeship or journeyperson certificate through this pathway.

There are two dual credit pathways in Alberta: provincial and local. Provincial pathways utilize Career & Technology Studies (CTS) courses and course codes while local pathways

require school authorities to apply for new course codes through the provincial government. These new course codes are titled PSI (Post-Secondary Institution). To implement dual credit through a provincial pathway in Alberta, the course content must align with an existing CTS course code. No application is necessary, and the school can begin using the appropriate CTS course code immediately. A local pathway is necessary in Alberta if a new course code is needed for school authorities to design their own programming. To implement dual credit through a local pathway, an application is submitted to the provincial government. This application must explain why a provincial pathway is not ideal, why course content does not overlap with existing CTS courses, how this pathway will align with student interests, and how this pathway connects to local/provincial labour market needs. Approval at the school authority level, usually via a motion of approval from the local school authority, is also required prior to submission to the provincial government. Once the provincial government approves the application, new course codes are authorized. IYMP would likely pursue the local pathway in order to develop a course that encompasses the teachings of IYMP as thoroughly as possible.

There are also two types of courses under dual credit programming in Alberta: single enrolled and dual enrolled. In single enrolled dual credit programing, students only receive high school credit. This is often the path taken by students pursuing journeyperson experiences. Instruction is conducted solely by a certificated teacher with appropriate credentials beyond their high school educator role to teach the curriculum, or by a journeyperson who is supervised by a certificated teacher. A partnership with a post-secondary institution is not necessary for single enrolled dual credit programming. In dual enrolled programming, students receive both high school and post-secondary credit. A certificated teacher collaborates with a post-secondary instructor to supervise and instruct students. Assessment responsibilities are shared between

teacher and post-secondary instructor, including the responsibility of submitting all final student grades to the appropriate school authority and post-secondary authority. IYMP would likely pursue the dual enrolled programming pathway in order to take advantage of post-secondary partnerships and provide students with the opportunity for both high school and post-secondary credit. When implementing dual credit, it is imperative that community partners understand their roles and responsibilities. This may include planning coursework, coordinating with the school authority, developing curriculum and appropriate learning outcomes, providing necessary resources to students, supervising and instructing students, communicating with parents, and supporting teachers with assessment and evaluations of students.

In Manitoba, there are fewer layers of complexity with dual credit courses. Certificated teachers and post-secondary instructors work together to instruct and assess students but there are no local or provincial pathways, nor single or dual enrolled course options. Dual credit simply requires a partnership with a post-secondary institution and instructor to offer students a learning opportunity beyond what is available within their school authority. Manitoba dual credit provides students with credit towards the 13 optional credit requirements of their high school diploma as well as credit towards a post-secondary degree, diploma or certificate. There is no limit on the number of dual credits a student can use towards their optional diploma credit requirement. An application and authorization by the provincial government is still required before dual credit can be implemented.

Through this dual credit pathway, IYMP would have the opportunity to take advantage of its close connections to post-secondary institutions such as the University of Alberta in Edmonton and the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. An IYMP course could be established to award students credit not only at the high school level, but also at the post-secondary level.

However, funding poses a significant potential barrier to the sustainability of this pathway. In Alberta, start-up funding is available to initiate the program, but enhancement follow up funding is limited. No funding information for Manitoba is available. For a program such as IYMP that reaches a large number of students, funding may not be sufficient to sustain dual credit as a pathway to IYMP credit awarding over many years. The heavy dependence on partnerships outside of the primary school authority may also pose a challenge as communication between multiple IYMP sites and the post-secondary institutions that are supporting credit awarding may be a serious challenge to coordinate. Logistically, if a post-secondary partner was required to deliver course content to students, it may not be feasible for all students participating in IYMP across the province to connect with post-secondary partners, nor would it be feasible for post-secondary partners to travel across the province to provide instruction to students. While these barriers could be addressed by the IYMP team, there are other pathways that require less resources and pose fewer complexities to credit awarding for students participating in IYMP. Dual credit for IYMP is likely not the path of least resistance.

3.3.1.3 Mentorship and Leadership Credit

Both Alberta and Manitoba provide opportunities for students to earn credit for engaging in mentorship- and leadership-oriented learning activities. This often involves students learning how to be great mentors, a topic that is central to IYMP. In Alberta, mentorship- and leadership-related courses are available under Career & Technology Studies (CTS), specifically under the Human & Social Services (HSS) program of study, and through Career Development course credits in Manitoba. The topic of mentorship and leadership aligns well with IYMP programming and students have the opportunity to engage in coursework that will greatly develop their leadership skills via these credentials.

In Alberta, CTS courses provide unique and personalized learning opportunities to students ranging from skills they will use daily, to experiences that will prepare them to enter the workforce. All CTS courses are approved by Alberta Education and are immediately available to all students across the province. CTS course credits can contribute to the 10 elective credits or the 24 flexible credits students must acquire to reach 100 total credits towards an Alberta High School Diploma. Each CTS course is worth 1 credit and represents approximately 25 hours of instruction. Multiple CTS credits can be "bundled" together to build a 3-5 credit course.

In order to make credit bundling more uniform across Alberta, a CTS Credentialed Pathway or a Specialized Skills Pathway can be created. These pathways allow CTS credits to be packaged into a larger course. A Credentialed Pathway is a series of specific courses through which a student will achieve a credential such as a certificate. A Specialized Skills Pathway is a collection of courses that address a specific student interest. Foundations of Mentoring is an existing Credentialed Pathway that schools can follow. Students will earn a mentorship certificate for completing this credentialed pathway, but this involves additional steps beyond just completing coursework such as an online mentor training course that is not affiliated with IYMP. No leadership-focused pathways currently exist. When implementing CTS pathways, school administration should consider the infrastructure and resources needed to provide this learning opportunity to students, how scheduling of multiple 1 credit courses will function in a student's timetable, how course activities will be delivered to students, and how health and safety will be maintained. If a Credentialed Pathway is implemented, it is also necessary to establish a partnership with an external body that will award students with certification for their efforts. It is unclear if government-level approval is required to implement a new pathway or if approval at the school authority level is sufficient. A certificated Alberta teacher is a key requirement for

CTS coursework, as they will need to develop lesson plans that ensure the learning outcomes of each CTS course is met, provide teaching instruction, evaluate students, and ensure final grades are submitted to Alberta Education for students to earn credits. Learning outcomes are predetermined for each course, but there is vast flexibility in the educational activities teachers can implement to help students meet these learning outcomes.

In terms of mentorship- and leadership-specific CTS credit awarding opportunities, there are 8 existing courses (n=5 for mentorship, n=3 for leadership) under the Human and Social Services (HSS) program of study within CTS programming. For mentorship, these courses include HSS 1050 Introduction to Mentorship, HSS 2050 Becoming a Mentor, HSS 3050 Becoming a Mentee, HSS 3060 Extending the Mentoring Relationship, and HSS 3070 Peer Mentoring. There is a sequence to some of these courses. For example, HSS 1050 must be completed before HSS 2050 which must be completed before HSS 3060. For leadership, these courses include HSS 1080 Leadership Fundamentals 1, HSS 2080 Leadership Fundamentals 2, and HSS 3080 Leadership Fundamentals 3. If bundled together, this would create a 3-credit leadership CTS course. Implementation simply involves developing a plan of how classroom activities will address the learning outcomes of the CTS course and how a certificated teacher will instruct and assess students. In the case of IYMP, this would involve tailoring lesson plans to align IYMP teachings on mentoring with the learning outcomes of appropriate CTS courses.

In Manitoba, mentorship- and leadership-related opportunities can be provided to students as Career Development credits. Career Development is an opportunity for students to gain knowledge that will support their interests, learn about future career possibilities, develop personal and employable skills, and help students transition into the “real world” after high school. Career Development credits can be earned through Career Development Life/Work

courses, a Career Development Internship (CDI), or through Credit for Employment (CFE). CDI and CFE are not ideal pathways for IYMP. CDI is intended for students interested in gaining on-site workplace experiences and job shadowing in business, industry, and government sectors while CFE requires students to participate in paid employment to receive credit.

Career Development Life/Work courses are designed as flexible opportunities for students to take courses that meet their needs and aspirations. Thanks to this flexibility, IYMP mentorship-related learning experiences can be addressed through this pathway. The Career Development Life/Work courses build upon each other from Grade 9 (Life/Work Career Exploration), to Grade 10 (Life/Work Career Planning), to Grade 11 (Life/Work Career Building), to Grade 12 (Life/Work Career Transitioning). Descriptive curriculum documents that outline the general and specific learning outcomes of each course are available for interested school authorities and teachers. Similar to CTS in Alberta, teachers pursuing this pathway are responsible for developing lesson plans that align IYMP teachings on mentoring with the appropriate learning outcomes of Career Development Life/Work courses. Ideally, IYMP teachings on both mentoring and leadership would be covered in a Career Development course, allowing students to earn credit for skills acquired in both essential areas. Both full and half credit courses are available. Students can earn up to 4 elective credits if they take part in the Grade 9 to 12 Career Development full credit courses. A certificated Manitoba teacher is required to evaluate students and assess performance. Overall, mentorship and leadership are key aspects of IYMP programming and both Alberta and Manitoba have flexible crediting options that can be used to provide this learning experience to high school students.

<u>List of Alberta mentorship and leadership CTS HSS courses:</u>

<u>Mentorship:</u>

HSS 1050 Introduction to Mentorship

HSS 2050 Becoming a Mentor

HSS 3050 Becoming a Mentee

HSS 3060 Extending the Mentoring Relationship

HSS 3070 Peer Mentoring

Leadership:

HSS 1080 Leadership Fundamentals 1

HSS 2080 Leadership Fundamentals 2

HSS 3080 Leadership Fundamentals 3

List of Manitoba Career Development Life/Work courses:

Life/Work Exploration 10S or 15S

Life/Work Planning 20S or 25S

Life/Work Building 30S or 35S

Life/Work Transitioning 40S or 45S

3.3.1.4 Health and Wellness (including Physical Education/Health Education) Credit

In addition to the credit awarding pathways previously discussed, Alberta has a small collection of other health-related credit opportunities that may align with IYMP. This includes other CTS courses not connected directly to mentorship or leadership. Within the HSS program of study, three additional CTS course were identified as having the potential to align its learning outcomes with IYMP programming. This includes HSS 1020 Nutrition & Wellness, HSS 1100 Nature & Wellness, and HSS 3020 Mental Health & Wellness. If these topics are covered through IYMP's emphasis on wholistic wellbeing, this may be an additional 1 credit course that

students can earn. For example, HSS 1100 Nature & Wellness involves teachings surrounding personal wellbeing and the relationship between humans and the environment. As a reminder, implementation of a CTS course involves a certificated Alberta teacher developing lesson plans that align with the learning outcomes of the CTS course (in this case, also aligning with the context of IYMP), providing instruction on these topics to students, and conducting assessments in order to grade students on their participation in the course content. Since this is a 1 credit course it would be equivalent to approximately 25 hours of learning. Due to the flexibility of CTS courses, this 1 credit course may be bundled with other CTS courses to create a larger 3-5 credit course. Resources and scheduling must be considered before implementation. Authorization at the provincial government level is not required as this course code is already approved. IYMP program leaders are encouraged to explore the entire list of CTS course offerings, specifically under HSS, to determine other niche CTS credits that may align with the teachings covered in IYMP.

Manitoba's Physical Education/Health Education (PE/HE) courses educate students on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to live physically active and healthy lifestyles. The curriculum focuses on five general learning outcomes: movement, fitness management, safety, personal and social management, and health lifestyles practices. PE/HE credit is essential to the 17 compulsory credits that Manitoba high school students must acquire from Grades 9 to 12 to meet graduation requirements. At each grade level, students build upon their learnings surrounding active healthy lifestyles. The Physical Education (PE) aspect of this programming includes individual sports/games, team sports/games, rhythmic/gymnastic activities, and other fitness activities. The Health Education (HE) element of this programming emphasizes healthy decision-making through topics such as personal, social, and mental-emotional development,

active living, nutrition, and substance use/abuse prevention. In Grades 9 and 10, course content is allocated 50/50 to PE and HE. In Grades 11 and 12, 50% of course content must come from a Physical Activity Practicum completed by students with the other 50% coming from both PE and HE at the discretion of the school authority.

The PE/HE program allows schools the flexibility to choose their own delivery model for PE/HE courses informed by local community priorities and preferences. Therefore, course content and assessments are at the discretion of the teacher responsible for the course. This is another pathway where the flexibility in how students are instructed and assessed on learning outcomes creates an opportunity for IYMP programming to align with existing courses. In this case, IYMP's emphasis on wholistic healthy living and nutrition may align well with PE/HE learning outcomes, allowing students to earn their compulsory PE/HE credits through IYMP participation. The PE curriculum in Alberta does not allow for the same level of flexibility in course content, nor does it emphasize wholistic healthy lifestyle education for students. Therefore, this pathway through PE/HE credits is Manitoba-specific.

To implement PE/HE programming, planning documents are available to support teachers as they develop course content that aligns with PE/HE learning outcomes. Certificated teachers are also responsible for all course instruction and student assessments. As PE/HE courses are already approved by the provincial-government, there are no submission or authorization steps necessary before content can be implemented for students. Similar to other pathways, school authorities and teachers preparing this course content for their students should consider the availability of resources and infrastructure, how PE/HE courses will fit into school scheduling and student timetables, and what other community partnerships may be necessary to support students.

List of Alberta health and wellness CTS HSS courses:

HSS 1020 Nutrition & Wellness

HSS 1100 Nature & Wellness

HSS 3020 Mental Health & Wellness

List of Manitoba Physical Education/Health Education courses:

Physical Education/Health Education 10F

Physical Education/Health Education 20F

Physical Education/Health Education 30F

Physical Education/Health Education 40F

3.3.1.5 Arts Education Credit

Manitoba's Arts Education curriculum is a flexible collection of courses covering dance, drama, music, and visual arts. These courses fall under the umbrella of optional credits required for high school graduation. Reflecting the vast topics within the arts, Manitoba's Arts Education curriculum is set up to offer adaptable learning opportunities to students. Courses can be offered for full credit or half credit. Half credit courses in different subject areas can be combined to create a full credit, interdisciplinary learning opportunity for students. Schools are highly encouraged to design their own courses, keeping in mind that students must be evaluated by certificated teachers for all official assessments and grading. There are 16 different course codes for each subject area (dance, drama, music, and visual arts), with no specific courses preassigned to each code. This allows schools to develop coursework within these diverse areas of arts education as it aligns with their specific community context and/or student interests. To this effect, specific arts courses on Indigenous theatre, music, dance, and visual arts could be offered to students. This flexibility creates a potential alignment with IYMP. Although this pathway is

specific to arts education and does not encompass the mentorship or leadership aspects of IYMP, artistic programming could be encouraged through the activities that youth mentors and mentees engage in. There is no similar arts education programming in Alberta.

The implementation of arts education programming is the responsibility of the school authority hoping to offer these courses to their students. Implementation requires appropriate human resources (Are teachers properly trained to teach these topics? Can they connect with community partners to support students?), appropriate infrastructure (Does the school have the correct type of physical space and resources? For example, do dance classes have access to a large space, proper dance flooring, barres, mirrors, and a sound system or a live musician?), school budget considerations, and effective timetabling (Should arts education sessions be longer than the typical block of time for a regular course? Shorter? More frequent?). Detailed planning resources are available to support schools with the development of their courses. For example, course design and learning design tools are available to support educators as they develop the specific details of the course they will offer to students. This includes developing a course description that follows the 3C Model–Community of Learners, Contexts, and Curriculum. This model encompasses a statement on the characteristics of classroom learners (What are students interested in? Do they have prior knowledge or experience with this subject area? What are their perceived strengths and challenges entering this course?), the learning contexts such as the main subject area of the course, the physical contexts such as the available infrastructure and resources to facilitate learning, and the curriculum of the course itself. The design tools also encourage school authorities to describe how course content will fulfill the learning outcomes that are required for successful course implementation. For example, if the learning outcome is: "*The learner experiments with, develops, and uses ideas for creating dance*," then the educator must

describe how this will be achieved in their course. The course design document also requires an explanation of how the course will be structured (modules, units, themes, etc.) and what resources will be used (costumes, props, musical instruments, etc.). The final element of the design tools asks educators to describe how students will be assessed such as through projects, performances, portfolios, quizzes, reflective journals, and more. These planning resources and design tools do not need to be submitted for approval, but instead serve to guide school authorities and ensure all essential elements of the arts education curriculum are considered prior to offering the course to students. Although IYMP is not an arts-focused learning environment at its core, this pathway could still be an effective way for participating high school students to earn credit.

List of Manitoba Arts Education courses:

Dance (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S

Drama (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S

Music (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S

Visual Arts (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S

Table 3.1 Summary of Credit Awarding Pathways in Alberta

Pathway	Course Codes (# of Credits Earned)	Approximate Hours of Student Work	Key Requirements of the Pathway	Recommended Exploring as a Pathway to IYMP?
Locally Developed Credit	LDC 1014 Beading (Elder Chronicles) (1) LDC 1803/2803/3803 Braided Journeys 12, 25, 35 (1 each)	25 hours per 1 credit	Certificated Alberta teacher A course proposal School authority-level approval	Yes

	LDC 1172 Medicine Wheel (1) LDC 1175 Smudging (Elder Chronicles) (1) LDC 1175 Seven Teachings (1) LDC 1021 Tipi Making (Elder Chronicles) (1) LDC 2248 and 3248 Traditional Land-Based Learning (1)		Alberta government approval	
Dual Credit	PSI (post-secondary institution) credits (5) or CTS credits (1)	25 hours per 1 credit 5 credits = 125 hours total	Certificated Alberta teacher Post-secondary instructor, partner or collaborator Provincial pathway: Use CTS course codes Local pathway: Apply for new course codes (PSI), receive school authority and provincial government approval	Yes, with reservations

Mentorship & Leadership Credit	<u>Mentorship:</u> HSS 1050 Introduction to Mentorship (1) HSS 2050 Becoming a Mentor (1) HSS 3050 Becoming a Mentee (1) HSS 3060 Extending the Mentoring Relationship (1) HSS 3070 Peer Mentoring (1) <u>Leadership:</u> HSS 1080 Leadership Fundamentals 1 (1) HSS 2080 Leadership Fundamentals 2 (1) HSS 3080 Leadership Fundamentals 3 (1)	25 hours per 1 credit All 8 credits = 200 hours total	Certificated Alberta teacher Align learning outcomes with program (i.e., IYMP) content	Yes
Health and Wellness Credit	HSS 1020 Nutrition & Wellness (1) HSS 1100 Nature & Wellness (1) HSS 3020 Mental Health & Wellness (1)	25 hours per 1 credit	Certificated Alberta teacher Align learning outcomes with program (i.e., IYMP) content	Yes

Arts Education Credit	Arts Education not available in Alberta	Arts Education not available in Alberta	Arts Education not available in Alberta	Arts Education not available in Alberta

Table 3.2 Summary of Credit Awarding Pathways in Manitoba

Pathway	Course Codes (# of Credits Earned)	Approximate Hours of Student Work	Key Requirements of the Pathway	Recommended Exploring as a Pathway to IYMP?
Locally Developed Credit	4-digit numeric course codes are available once the SIC (School-Initiated Course), SIP (Student-Initiated Project), CSSIP (Community Service Student-Initiated Project), or CESIP (Cultural Exploration Student-Initiated Project) has been registered and approved	55 hours per 0.5 credit 110 hours per 1 credit	Certificated Manitoba teacher A course proposal (if it is a SIC it is developed by a school authority; if it is a SIP it is developed by a student) School authority-level approval Manitoba government approval Written documentation of student participation (for CSSIPs and CESIPs)	Yes

Dual Credit	Course codes not available	55 hours per 0.5 credit 110 hours per 1 credit	Certificated Manitoba teacher Post-secondary instructor, partner or collaborator School authority-level approval Manitoba government approval	Yes, with reservations
Mentorship & Leadership Credit	Life/Work Exploration 10S or 15S (1 or 0.5) Life/Work Planning 20S or 25S (1 or 0.5) Life/Work Building 30S or 35S (1 or 0.5) Life/Work Transitioning 40S or 45S (1 or 0.5)	55 hours per 0.5 credit 110 hours per 1 credit	Certificated Manitoba teacher Align learning outcomes with program (i.e., IYMP) content	Yes
Health and Wellness (including Physical Education/Health Education) Credit	Physical Education/Health Education 10F (1) Physical Education/Health Education 20F (1)	55 hours per 0.5 credit 110 hours per 1 credit	Certificated Manitoba teacher Align learning outcomes with program (i.e., IYMP) content Students complete a practicum at the	Yes

	Physical Education/Health Education 30F (1) Physical Education/Health Education 40F (1)		discretion of the school authority	
Arts Education Credit	Dance (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S (0.5) Drama (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S (0.5) Music (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S (0.5) Visual Arts (1A, 1B… 8A, 8B) 15S, 25S, 35S, or 45S (0.5)	55 hours per 0.5 credit 110 hours per 1 credit	Certificated Manitoba teacher Align learning outcomes with program (i.e., IYMP) content Decide how/if courses will be combined to create a 1 credit course	Yes

3.3.2 Student-Centered Decision Making

A central theme that appears in all high school credit awarding documentation is an emphasis on placing students at the center of all decisions regarding coursework. Coursework must always reflect student needs, interests, and priorities. Every pathway described above uses terms such as flexible and adaptable to describe how programming is offered to students. This flexibility is integral to building an education system where students feel empowered to tailor their high school experience to meet their own personal needs. In each pathway above, learning outcomes can be interpreted and incorporated into course content in many different ways. This

flexibility is paramount for IYMP to potentially align with many different credit awarding opportunities. By building programs that aim to empower students, youth in Alberta and Manitoba develop independence and a sense of ownership over their education. This is embodied in LDCs, dual credit, Alberta's CTS courses, and Manitoba's PE/HE and arts education programs. Career exploration is also enhanced through student-centered decision making as many pathways focus on how students can acquire skills that will benefit them now and in the future. This includes developing personal and employable skills.

When assessing the graduation requirements students must meet to earn their high school diploma in both Alberta and Manitoba, it becomes apparent that each student's journey is unique and it is unlikely for students to graduate with an identical list of courses on their transcript. Every student's journey is unique and tells their individual story. In Alberta, students are in complete control over a minimum of 24 credits that are required for graduation. If this is broken down into multiple 3 credit courses, this is equivalent to 8 courses that a student is empowered to select based on their unique goals and interests. In Manitoba, students have independence over 13 optional credits required to meet graduation requirements. This equates to 13 courses that students can choose to enhance their high school experience. If IYMP is an important aspect of a student's life, then ensuring this is reflected in their high school transcript can further emphasize the empowerment of students in making their own decisions and supporting them in their pursuit of coursework that engages and interests them.

3.3.3 Essential Partnerships for Credit Awarding

Partnerships consistently stand out as an essential aspect of flexible credit awarding pathways for high school students. The task of providing engaging and enriching learning opportunities to students is a shared responsibility between numerous groups. This includes

school authority personnel such as principals, teachers, supporting school staff, and school board members, along with post-secondary institutions, community/local partners, volunteers, mentors, family members, and the provincial government. Every group is actively working to provide high quality education to students, ensuring these flexible credit awarding opportunities enhance student learning. IYMP program leaders are another group of individuals dedicated to providing the best possible learning experiences for high school students.

Partnerships thrive when all members of a credit awarding pathway understand their roles and play to their strengths. For example, teachers assume responsibility for day-to-day instruction and therefore are the primary individuals involved in developing lesson plans that align with appropriate learning outcomes. School authorities and the provincial government approve applications for new courses to ensure there is oversight and a clear process to regulate the education system, keeping learning opportunities consistent for all students across the province. Community and post-secondary partners provide expertise when topics that students are interested in go beyond the scope of high school teachers, expanding the scope and possibilities of what students can pursue. Overall, this document analysis demonstrates that education is the responsibility of the collective and students with diverse interests will thrive under this system.

3.4 Discussion

This document analysis identified numerous potential pathways to credit awarding for IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba. Many of the resources and documents collected were intended for educators and each cover a specific topic on credit awarding. When compiled together, the documents paint a bigger picture of the different opportunities for credit awarding within the context of IYMP. The variation in these pathways provides an opportunity for school

communities to implement credit awarding in the way that best suits their specific community context and the needs of their specific students.

The five pathways to credit awarding with potential to support healthy living programs such as IYMP include: Locally Developed Credit, Dual Credit, Mentorship and Leadership Credit, Health and Wellness (including Physical Education/Health Education) Credit, and Arts Education Credit. The first four pathways are applicable to both Alberta and Manitoba while the fifth pathway, Arts Education Credit, is specific to Manitoba. A list of course codes within each pathway, the approximate number of hours students will spend working towards these credits, key requirements of each pathway such as the need for a certificated teacher, and the research team's perspective on the feasibility of each pathway are included in Table 3.1 (summary of Alberta pathways) and Table 3.2 (summary of Manitoba pathways). Each pathway has its own strengths and limitations and thus, different pathways will likely suit different school communities. For example, school communities with the capacity to prepare a detailed course proposal for a new locally developed course may prefer this pathway over school communities who are looking for a simple strategy to utilize credits where existing learning outcomes can be aligned with IYMP programming. The five pathways identified in this document analysis will be shared with school communities as a tool to inform their decisions on how to go about pursuing credit awarding opportunities for students involved in programs such as IYMP.

While this document analysis was focused on identifying and describing different credit awarding pathways for IYMP, two additional findings that apply universally to all pathways were identified: student-centered decision making and essential partnerships. These topics exist as central themes that weave throughout each pathway and although they do not describe unique credit awarding pathways, it would be remiss to exclude them from this study. High school

education in Canada, specifically elective opportunities for students, are built around providing students with flexible opportunities to pursue topics that interest them. As students pursue different topics, it is valuable to earn credit and align these learning experiences with high school diploma requirements. Flexibility ensures students have a high school education experience that is tailored to their specific goals and aspirations. The importance of partnerships was also highlighted as a key theme of this study because the task of credit awarding is a shared responsibility of numerous stakeholders. This includes students, IYMP program leaders, teachers, and principals. The engagement of all partners is essential for the implementation of each pathway and is therefore also essential for the success of educational attainment for students participating in IYMP.

3.4.1 Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this research is that the resources and documents identified have been thoroughly compiled and can be used to inform the future development of credit awarding resources for educators and IYMP communities. Translating these findings to the individuals working directly with students participating in IYMP is a key piece of this work. Each document was downloaded and is securely stored in the SIRCLE Research Lab server with the original link to the document source also recorded. Every webpage link has been tracked and this information is organized within the primary document analysis spreadsheet. Another strength of this research is its immediate relevance to IYMP youth mentors. Many of these credit awarding pathways can be implemented quickly, meaning as early as the 2024-2025 school year students can begin to earn credits for their IYMP participation. This will immediately support high school students in acquiring more credits towards their diploma in return for their engagement and dedication to IYMP. From a methodology perspective, conventional content analysis was a strong choice as

this method is particularly useful when the goal of a study is to describe a phenomenon where existing published literature is limited. In this case, there was little to no existing research on the topic of potential pathways to high school credit awarding in Alberta and Manitoba. Conventional content analysis is also useful for new concept development and model building, which supported efforts to effectively map course credit pathways for this study.

A limitation of this research is that the information contained in this analysis may not be reflective of the entire realm of possibilities, specifically when considering that individual school districts may have their own set of policies and procedures that dictate how these pathways can be implemented. These pathways were developed using data largely from provincial government-level resources, meaning there may be more or less complexity within each pathway at the individual school district-level. Another limitation of this research is the gap between policy and practice. While these research findings will be shared with IYMP communities, there is no control over or standard procedure for what these educators choose to do with this information. This disconnect between the research space and the practical application of these pathways does not account for limiting factors such as a teacher or principal's capacity to pursue these pathways. Ultimately, our role as researchers is to follow best practices to provide information to IYMP communities, but we are not in control of how that knowledge is used. Additionally, this study cannot comment on the experiences of individuals who have already successfully or unsuccessfully attempted to carry out these pathways in actuality. This study simply exists to understand and highlight the possible credit awarding pathways that align with IYMP. Therefore, there remains a gap in knowledge regarding the real world practicality and feasibility of these credit awarding pathways including what has already been attempted by educators. Regardless, the documents and resources collected in this study provide a strong

starting point for identifying detailed credit awarding pathways with the potential to serve IYMP communities.

3.4.2 Conclusions, Future Directions, and Implications

This study highlights the potential pathways that can be utilized to provide high school credit to Indigenous students for their involvement in IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba. These pathways explore the benefits and challenges of each credit awarding pathway and take a deep dive into key information such as requirements for implementation, logistics such as course titles, grading requirements to pass a course, and scheduling considerations, strengths and drawbacks of the pathway, essential personnel, and how this pathway may fit within existing IYMP programming. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time these resources have been compiled and carefully analyzed within the context of Indigenous youth engaged in IYMP. Ideally, these numerous pathways will empower IYMP communities and their students to pursue credit awarding opportunities in ways that best suit their specific program site. This will also contribute to Indigenous students building towards acquiring their high school diploma, marking a crucial step in educational attainment.

While this knowledge allows us to understand the potential pathways to credit awarding on paper, it does not take into account real life experience with these pathways. Questions pertaining to potential roadblocks to implementation, unexpected difficulties, and what pathway is the easiest to use in practice cannot be answered by documents alone. Gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of individuals who are involved in the credit awarding process is a key future direction of this work. Chapter 4 of this thesis will involve interviews with individuals who have attempted to award credit. Whether they were successful or unsuccessful, their insight will add crucial detail and depth to understanding the pathways that have been

identified here. These findings will be incorporated into resources shared with IYMP communities to better inform recommendations and guidance on ideal pathways to credit awarding.

Knowledge translation is essential to ensure these research findings are shared with knowledge users (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Government of Canada, 2012). In this case, knowledge users are those who work in education in Alberta and Manitoba, specifically working with Indigenous high school youth through IYMP. This audience was kept at the forefront of all data collection and analysis, specifically in the organization of the credit awarding pathways. Two knowledge translation products will be developed from this study: a text product and a visual product. This will be accomplished by building upon Table 3.1 and Table 3.2. The text product will be narrative summaries for both Alberta and Manitoba. These summaries will report the necessary details extracted from the document analysis, clearly laying out all important policy and procedural information that educators will need to implement an IYMP credit awarding opportunity for their students. The visual product will likely be a mind map or a similar graphic-focused product to illustrate the different pathways and steps required to award credit. Both products will work in tandem to detail the pathways to credit awarding for students participating in IYMP.

This research may have both short- and long-term implications on the educational experiences of Indigenous youth in Alberta and Manitoba. In the short term, by effectively explaining the different opportunities to award credit to school communities, we hope to encourage communities to pursue the pathway that best suits their specific community needs and supports their specific students as early as the incoming 2024-2025 school year. In the long term, we hope this work will allow more students to receive credit for their involvement in healthy

living programs such as IYMP. By increasing opportunities to earn credit for programs they are already actively engaged in, we hope this will lead to an increased likelihood that Indigenous students obtain their high school diploma. Ultimately, we hope this work brings students opportunities to earn credit for their engagement and dedication to health promotion programs such as IYMP and beyond.

CHAPTER 4: "WE'RE SO FAMILIAR WITH THE CHALLENGES, BUT THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE STILL THERE." EXPLORING EDUCATOR EXPERIENCES WITH HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT AWARDING FOR HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAMS IN ALBERTA, CANADA

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Educational Attainment and Indigenous Youth

Educational attainment, defined as the highest level of education an individual has completed, is linked to many elements of wholistic health such as positive life satisfaction, healthy eating habits, and overall quality of life (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Shankar et al., 2013; Statistics Canada, 2021). However, as a result of the Eurocentric structure of the education system in Canada, influenced by a history of colonization, educational attainment is largely inequitable (Kim, 2019; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). Due in part to the lasting impacts of colonization, Indigenous students in Canada are less likely to graduate high school compared to their non-Indigenous peers (Shankar et al., 2013; Statistics Canada, 2023). Therefore, it is valuable to support Indigenous students through educational attainment by promoting programs that aim to support their journey to high school graduation. This can be achieved through opportunities to earn a sufficient number of credits towards one's high school diploma, whilst also prioritizing the development of other skills that enhance wholistic health such as confidence and leadership. One such program that may support students in this manner is the Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP).

4.1.2 Research Context: The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program

The IYMP serves as a potential pathway to award students with high school credit through a health promotion program that provides students with a plethora of opportunities to

develop employable skills and build strong connections with their community. This study was conducted within the context of the IYMP as the program actively engages Indigenous youth across Canada and has strong potential to support educational attainment through credit awarding opportunities integrated within regular programming.

IYMP is a community-based after-school healthy living program that is currently running in over 50 communities across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2020). The program is delivered by Indigenous high school youth mentors for their younger elementary-aged peers. Students are guided by local community leaders called Community Champions, as well as traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders (Lopresti et al., 2020). The program focuses on three core components: 1) healthy eating, 2) physical activity, and 3) relationship building and mentorship. During the program students learn about nutrition and healthy eating habits with healthy snacks provided at each gathering, students stay physically active by engaging in culturally-relevant activities, and students develop important skills such as teamwork, leadership, and confidence (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). The program is typically run once per week after school for about 90 minutes, but this structure is flexible and can be adapted to meet the scheduling needs of each individual school community. As the program structure is flexible and provides diverse learning experiences to youth, IYMP has the potential to serve as a credit awarding opportunity for high school students across Canada. At the 2019 IYMP National Gathering, high school youth mentors explained that they saw IYMP as an opportunity to support their education with credits, advance their future employment opportunities by developing skills such as leadership and confidence, and build relationships with other Indigenous youth, community members, and Elders (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). A key motivating factor for this

work was to honour the voices of Indigenous youth as many students participating in IYMP have asked for credit for their time investment in the program. While the research team was anecdotally aware of IYMP school communities that were successfully awarding credit to their students, this information was not widely available or clearly explained. Therefore, how school communities could go about addressing this student request for IYMP credits was not well understood, sparking the need to further study this phenomenon.

4.1.3 Pathways to Credit Awarding

Objective 1 (chapter 3) of this thesis utilized qualitative document analysis to identify pathways to credit awarding that have potential to support health promotion programs such as IYMP. Five pathways to credit awarding for health promotion programs such as IYMP included: locally developed credit, dual credit, mentorship and leadership credit, health and wellness (including physical education/health education) credit, and arts education credit. Details such as requirements for implementation, logistics on grading and course content, and insights on how these pathways may align with existing IYMP programming were explored through objective 1. Ideally, this knowledge will empower IYMP communities to pursue the credit awarding pathway that best reflects the needs of their specific school community while also supporting Indigenous students as they work towards earning sufficient credits for high school graduation and reaching this key step in educational attainment.

However, it remains unclear how these pathways function within the education system in reality as a document analysis approach does not take into account potential roadblocks to implementation or what pathway will truly serve as the "easiest" option in practice. To address this, it is crucial to understand the experiences of educators currently involved in providing credit earning opportunities to students. Educators such as teachers and principals play a vital role in

the education system as they work to create an enriching educational experience for students (Thackrah et al., 2022). By gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of individuals involved in the credit awarding process, pathways to credit identified in objective 1 will be better informed. This will improve the quality of credit awarding pathway recommendations shared with IYMP communities and beyond.

While the credit awarding pathways from objective 1 address both Alberta and Manitoba, the sole focus of this study (objective 2) was Alberta due to availability of interview participants. In addition to gaining a strong understanding of this research topic through objective 1, the primary researcher also had a strong familiarity with the education system in Alberta due to their personal experience as a longtime resident of Alberta. In the province of Alberta, high school students must accumulate a minimum of 100 course credits from Grades 10 to 12 in order to earn their high school diploma (Alberta Education, 2024b, 2024a). There is a great deal of flexibility in how these credits can be earned, creating space for numerous potential pathways for health promotion programming such as IYMP to fit into the Alberta Education system and serve as a unique credit earning opportunity for high school students in Alberta. As previously mentioned, the experiences of educators currently implementing credit awarding pathways that align with specific student programming is not well understood nor described in existing literature.

4.1.4 Study Purpose

This research intended to qualitatively examine the experiences of educators in Alberta involved in the IYMP credit awarding process through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. While not all interview participants worked directly with IYMP, participants were familiar with the program and shared their experiences with other nontraditional credit awarding programs in Alberta. The intent was for these findings to provide important context for potential credit

awarding pathways for youth participating in IYMP. To improve credit awarding opportunities for Indigenous youth and increase educational attainment, it was important to first understand the existing experiences of numerous educators currently working in the credit awarding space. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore existing strategies used in practice for awarding high school course credit to youth mentors involved with IYMP in Alberta. This objective is accompanied by the guiding research question: What successes, failures, challenges, and opportunities have individuals in Alberta encountered in the IYMP credit award process? The research findings will complement objective 1 to inform our understanding of the potential pathways to credit awarding for health promotion programs such as IYMP.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Method

This research was qualitative in nature and used qualitative description as the guiding method (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). Qualitative description is a research method that seeks to understand experiences, events, or processes. When applying this method, the research findings are compiled in a rich description and depicted in easily understandable language that is ideal for future knowledge sharing. This approach was appropriate to understand and explore the experiences of individuals currently involved in crediting awarding in Alberta, specifically as it relates to programs such as IYMP. This work was aligned with a constructivist inquiry paradigm where knowledge is created through interactions between investigators and respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mayan, 2023). A relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology were also applied to this work. Through relativism, reality is constructed through the experiences of the researcher to achieve a goal. In this study, that experience was interviewing and interacting with individuals who are knowledgeable on the topic of credit awarding, as will be discussed further

in this section. With subjectivism, the researcher and their topic of interest or phenomenon are interactively linked "so that the 'findings' are *literally created* as the investigation proceeds" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Subjectivism explains how the primary researcher was actively engaged in the research from inception to completion and co-constructed the knowledge that was generated.

The primary researcher was a non-Indigenous MSc student. They established relationships with IYMP members at all stages in this research from planning to implementation, building rapport and connections through attending regular virtual meetings with the IYMP team. They attended two monthly IYMP national meetings and one monthly IYMP program coordinator meeting. This active participation allowed the primary researcher to gain an authentic understanding of the IYMP leadership group and to gain an awareness of how the program was running across Canada in 2023 and 2024.

4.2.2 Data Generation

Data was primarily generated via one-on-one semi-structured interviews with key informants. The flexible interview structure was supplemented with follow up questions, probes, and thoughtful comments to enrich data generation (Mayan, 2023). This data generation strategy informed our understanding of the Alberta credit awarding process from the perspective of those who have hands-on experience. A semi-structured approach was best suited for this study as the primary researcher had a preexisting understanding of the topic at hand due to their previous work (as presented in Chapter 3), which informed the current study (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). This approach was also ideal as it allowed the interview process to be adaptable and fluid based on insightful conversation between the researcher and the interviewee, ensuring rich and detailed data generation. Interviews lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour in total duration and mainly took

place virtually over Zoom. To complement this data collection, the primary researcher recorded detailed field notes before and after each interview. This was an effective strategy to ensure personal observations and insights were captured throughout this process (Mayan, 2023). The researcher also kept a detailed journal to record their reflections throughout both data generation and analysis. This ensured the primary researcher was grounded in their work and thoroughly interacted with the data.

Resources for this study including the study information letter and consent form (Appendix F), and interview guide (Appendix G) were drafted and refined in consultation with the supervisory committee. Expert input from a curriculum manager within an Alberta school division also supported the interview guide development, specifically ensuring the use of appropriate terminology. All finalized documents were approved by the IYMP National Director prior to interview recruitment. The interview questions sought to understand the successes, failures, challenges, and opportunities that educators in Alberta have encountered in their credit awarding attempts. An emphasis was placed on understanding what educators deem an ideal scenario for credit awarding opportunities specific to IYMP school communities in Alberta.

4.2.2 Participant Recruitment

Purposeful and snowball sampling was utilized to ensure informants with an appropriate base of knowledge on the research topic were intentionally selected (Morse, 1991; Sandelowski, 1995). Purposeful sampling was ideal for this study as this strategy ensured individuals were intentionally recruited based on their experiences as an educator in Alberta and their knowledge on the credit awarding process. Snowball sampling also occurred as interview participants were asked to recommend other potential participants based on their knowledge of credit awarding. A small sample size was expected as this research objective was investigating a very specific

phenomenon (Sandelowski, 1995). The research team was unsure how many total IYMP communities and knowledgeable educators would have the capacity to participate in this study and thus, an ideal sample size was approximately 10 participants. Ideally, this would be broken down into 1-3 individuals per IYMP community. In actuality, a total of five interviews were completed. Informational redundancy was achieved as little to no new information was acquired in the final few participant interviews. This enhanced the primary researcher's confidence that enough data had been collected to promote a rich analysis on the high school credit awarding process for IYMP.

Key informants for this research were defined as educators who have played an active role in the process of awarding credit to high school students participating in IYMP or more generally, individuals who have experience with the credit awarding process. A variety of individuals were interviewed including an IYMP program leader, an Alberta school division curriculum manager, an Ever Active Schools (EAS) staff member, a student wellness consultant, and an Indigenous student program coordinator. Of the five participants, four were also certificated Alberta teachers. Youth were not interviewed as this study aimed to capture the experiences of the individuals awarding credit and was not focused on interviewing the individuals receiving the benefits of this work. The research team intends to capture student perspectives in separate but complementary research endeavours.

Participants were initially contacted through the primary researcher's existing circle of contacts. The IYMP National Director supported this work by initiating contact between the primary researcher and an IYMP program leader at an Alberta school. No further successful connections were made through these avenues. Next, the primary researcher reached out to a contact at EAS who was known to the research team as an individual with vast knowledge on

IYMP and credit awarding. This individual was able to recommend two further connections within EAS who served as valuable interview participants. No further connections were established along this path. All participants were contacted via email and were provided with a study information and consent form at least 1 week prior to their interview. While objective 1 (chapter 3) explored credit awarding in both Manitoba and Alberta, objective 2 (chapter 4) only explored educator experiences with credit awarding in Alberta. Due to time and contextual factors beyond our control, Manitoba participants were unavailable to participate in this study.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A transcription software was used (OtterAI) to initiate the transcription process with the primary researcher verifying the transcripts to edit errors such as spelling, grammar, and the software failing to identify the correct speaker. The transcripts were then imported into NVivo 14 software as a means to organize the data.

Inductive thematic analysis as described by Braun & Clarke (2006) was employed to create a rich, detailed, and complex understanding of the data. This was an effective method to identify, analyze, and report patterns and themes within the data. Thematic analysis was compatible with the primary researcher's constructivist paradigm which allowed for thorough "searching across a dataset" while constructing knowledge. In this case, the dataset was five one-on-one semi-structured interviews. An inductive approach to thematic analysis was necessary to allow the data itself to drive the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This was an appropriate strategy as there was little to no preexisting knowledge on the IYMP credit awarding phenomenon in Alberta. Overall, this approach ensured participant voices centered the data analysis process and guided the development of codes, themes, and patterns.

The inductive thematic analysis process followed six key steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To begin, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading through each transcript at least twice. Reading in an "active" way allowed themes and patterns to begin emerging as the researcher took notes and recorded their ideas on possible codes, identified key information, and collected their overall first impressions. The next step involved the generation of codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mayan, 2023). A code is defined as an interesting feature of the data that has a shorthand label attached to it, allowing the content to be assessed in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this stage, the primary researcher coded each interview transcript, giving equal attention to all parts of the data to identify as many possible interesting features as possible. All codes were informed by the central research goal of exploring credit awarding experiences that may connect to IYMP. As this was an iterative process, the researcher was adaptable to incorporating new and unexpected insights identified during the data generation and analysis process. The third step was to generate themes and identify patterns within the coded data. At this stage, similar codes were combined into single themes while codes that were too vague or did not appear often were disregarded. Once themes were identified, they were reviewed with another thorough read through of all transcripts to ensure every meaningful aspect of the data was extracted and the identified codes and themes "fit" together. The researcher was open to rearranging the data, creating sub-themes, and relabeling the themes if deemed appropriate. The themes were then defined and named in order to generate rich descriptions of the analyzed data. The focus of this stage of analysis was to make names succinct and easy to understand with definitions that supported a deeper understanding of

the data. The final step of inductive thematic analysis was to complete a write up that summarized and told the story of the data, both within and across the different themes.

4.2.4 Rigour

Lincoln & Guba (1985)'s four categories of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used to foster rigour throughout this study. Rigour was essential to cultivate reliability and validity of this study (Mayan, 2023; Morse et al., 2002).

Credibility (i.e., Internal validity). Member checks with research team members were conducted to verify the data and ensure the research findings served as an accurate representation of the credit awarding experiences of educators.

Transferability (i.e., External validity). Although this research is intentionally situated in a specific environment (IYMP), the analysis was conducted in a manner that allowed for learnings to be transferable to other similar health promotion programs looking to provide credit to students. During analysis, the intention was to understand the practicality of IYMP-specific credit awarding endeavours, while also staying general enough in the analysis process that the research findings could be adapted by other programs.

Dependability (i.e., Reflexivity). The primary researcher developed their reflexive thinking skills with a detailed personal journal to record all personal assumptions, perspectives, revelations, and thoughts that emerged throughout the research process (Mayan, 2023). This was an effective strategy for the primary researcher to reflect on their interactions with interview participants and think through their positionality at all stages of data generation and analysis. This journaling process also helped to guard against coder fatigue as it served as a tool to keep the researcher focused and engaged with the data (Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

Confirmability (i.e., Objectivity). The research process was tracked through detailed documentation and an audit trail. This trail encompassed the key informant sampling procedure, the interview guide development, the interview process, the transcription procedure, and the data analysis process.

An appropriate sampling technique was vital to further promote rigour (Morse et al., 2002). It was important that key informant participants had adequate knowledge of the research topic and could speak to the phenomenon of IYMP credit awarding in Alberta. Purposeful sampling in this manner promoted efficient and effective saturation of the data where all aspects of the phenomenon were accounted for (Morse, 1991).

4.2.5 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Human Research Ethics Board under the project name "Still I Rise: Indigenous youth-led strategies as a pathway to wholistic health and health equity" file number Pro00124180. When recruiting key informants, all individuals were provided with an information letter detailing their participation in the research study. This included information on the reason for this study and how participant confidentiality would be maintained. A signature was required as consent for in-person interviews while verbal consent was required for all virtual interviews. Participants were informed that they could ask the researcher questions at any point during the interview process and if they became uncomfortable with the discussion at any point, the interview would end without consequences. There were no anticipated concerns surrounding discussions of sensitive or difficult topics. All interview recordings, transcripts, signed consent forms, and other identifying data was stored in a secure server. During the analysis process, careful consideration was taken to remove all personal identifiers from included documents and data.

4.3 Results

Through the analysis process, four major themes emerged that were related to educator experiences with the high school credit awarding process in Alberta. All interviews centered on the main goal of credit awarding strategies and key considerations for health promotion programming such as IYMP. These themes were: *essential partnerships, educating educators, student engagement and autonomy,* and *policy challenges and opportunities*. The themes are described below with quotes embedded throughout to support the findings. Quotes are included to illustrate the specific thoughts of each of the interview participants while also reflecting the larger themes that were revealed throughout the analysis process.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Essential Partnerships

Interview participants highlighted the need for a multitude of partnerships to successfully award high school course credit to students. Numerous factors and shared responsibilities impacted the credit awarding process from who develops the credit earning opportunity, to who implements programming, to who evaluates students, to who submits credits into a student's online information system, to who must approve the overall process. In addition, these partners must be motivated to support students in their pursuit of educational attainment and be welcoming to collaboration with multiple groups. Partners may include school authorities, principals and vice principals, school administration staff, Alberta certificated teachers, and IYMP program leaders. In addition, our interview participants also highlighted the role of community partners, specifically discussing how community partners could be called upon to teach program content that was outside of the primary teacher's scope of training. For example, participants discussed bringing in external partners to provide training for food handling certification to students and collaborating with community members such as Elders to provide

students with traditional cultural learning opportunities. Additionally, partnerships must be built on the genuine motivation to support students. In the context of IYMP, the program leaders must be "keen to work with schools and get those opportunities" to students (Educator C). Regardless of the specific credit awarding pathway that an IYMP community chooses to pursue, partnerships will be necessary in some capacity.

One essential partner that all participants mentioned were certificated Alberta teachers. Four of the participants were certificated teachers themselves, although three were not actively working in a school setting in a teaching role. These participants spoke about the value in being able to deliver programming, conduct student evaluations or assessments, and award credits by themselves as this created autonomy over the credit awarding process. One of the participants who was not a teacher emphasized the essential need to partner with certificated teachers to successfully provide programming to students. Participants also explained that while a certificated teacher must conduct all student assessments and evaluations, they can collaborate with other individuals who are better equipped to provide specific learning experiences to students. Educator D referred to these collaborative efforts as "mini partnerships" that were often used to create a rich learning environment for students. In this sense, mini partnerships referred to collaborators who played a small but important role in providing programming to students. For example, a teacher may work with a certified First Aid instructor to provide First Aid training to students. Additionally, Educator A shared that "sometimes we have education assistants, who are actually doing some work in the classroom with people. And technically, they aren't teachers, but they're doing [the work]."

Interview participants also highlighted the essential need to partner with teachers because of their role in assessing and evaluating student acquisition of learning outcomes. As an example

of this, Educator A walked the interviewer through the learning outcomes for the Career and Technology Studies (CTS) Human & Social Service (HSS) 1050 Introduction to Mentorship course. This example allowed Educator A to explain the learning outcomes described by Alberta Education for a student to earn credit for HSS 1050 and connect this to how a teacher could go about awarding HSS 1050 credit. Educator A shared that "we don't necessarily have to assess every piece of minutia on here… what we're trying to assess is the things that are… in bold and… this is the route through it. You know, they say we have to teach all of these things, but we don't have to assess all of these things. That's for a teacher to determine what they'll assess." This example demonstrates why it is important to partner with individuals who are knowledgeable and able to make decisions on how the credit awarding process will function in practice.

Interview participants also cited the importance of working closely with school administrators such as principals and vice principals, as well as school staff such as administrative assistants. Participants specifically spoke about the necessity to connect with principals and vice principals in order to secure support in their efforts to get more credit for students. Educator B shared that their school administrators "advised me to get creative to get these students credit so that they can graduate." This support was essential in encouraging Educator B to pursue how IYMP could serve as a credit earning opportunity for their students. Educator C added that "principals are key, because they usually oversee credit earning in their school" and "when principals are not on board, we can't, we just can't do it."

Participants noted that establishing this partnership was often simpler in smaller school jurisdictions where principals have more autonomy over their individual school. This unveiled a potential layer of bureaucracy at the school division and school district level that created barriers

to establishing strong school partnerships. Educator C shared an example of a time their organization attempted to bring a leadership-based program opportunity to students that would earn them credits. This credit awarding strategy had previously been successful, but years later they became unsuccessful in providing the program to students.

> We tried to do the same thing four years later with different district level leadership and they said, no… However, what we learned from that is had we just gone to the principal and work[ed] directly with the principal, the principal was amendable to it and confident in the process… I think the principals are key, whether it's the vice principal or principal who oversees credit earning, they're so key in that relationship. (Educator C)

Participants also noted that school communities, including administrators and staff such as administrative assistants, must be willing to support credit awarding pathways that are implemented to support students for their participation in health promotion programs such as IYMP. For example, multiple participants explained that administrative assistants are essential for enrolling students in the appropriate courses within the school's student information system and ensuring the appropriate credits appear on a student's transcript. If programming took place during the school day, administrative assistants also provided support by ensuring students could make programming work with their timetable for other core and elective courses. For any programming occurring after school, specifically IYMP programming, school administrators and administrative assistants were essential in coordinating details such as getting permission forms to parents and guardians, organizing which students were participating, and how those students would be getting home after programming finished for the day. Additionally, these partners were essential for logistical considerations for programming such as how students would be transported to and from the learning environment, specifically if programming was taking place

off of school grounds. This consideration creates another "mini partnership" where partners such as bus drivers may also be essential to the success of a credit awarding program.

Generally, all participants agreed that building partnerships with individuals who are invested in this endeavour to bring more credit earning opportunities to youth are essential. Partners who truly see the value that graduating high school will have on students enhances their motivation to support credit awarding pathways. Educator D reflected on how they were "very fortunate" in their role "to have somebody in a higher up position, who was also a former teacher who was super keen on getting [a credit earning opportunity] up and rolling" because in their experience it's difficult to make this credit awarding process successful "if you try to throw that to someone who has no understanding of credits or education." Individuals who are motivated to support youth and provide them with opportunities to learn new skills and "make connections to like real world learning and real world like activities" (Educator C) are key in finding success with the high school credit awarding process.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Educating Educators

The need to ensure educators are knowledgeable on the credit awarding process was highlighted by all participants. This level of knowledge must encompass the entire credit awarding process including: what specific credits are available to students outside of traditional courses and electives, what other educators in other schools are already doing, and how this knowledge can be adapted to suit an educator's specific school. Many interview participants expressed that as they became more involved in the credit awarding process, they were surprised by the diversity of credits that they could provide to students. Educator E was unsure if there was currently an ongoing credit attached to leadership in their school community and did not know how they could go about finding more information on this. Educator B explained that after they

took the initiative to become better aware of what CTS credits they could pull together for students, ideas on how they could connect credits to IYMP programming began to take shape. Educator C specifically acknowledged that they knew far more about this topic than the average teacher because of how closely they have worked in the credit awarding space to "build a patchwork course out of a number of like single credit CTS courses." Participants also expressed their concerns that they would not feel comfortable handing off the responsibility of evaluating their unique credit pathways to other teachers who were less knowledgeable on the course content and how credit was being awarded to students. Educator B shared that their system of awarding credits to IYMP high school youth mentors was not structured in a way "that somebody else can also do the evaluating who is not as familiar with the curriculum as what I am." These participant perspectives illustrate the fact that the credit awarding process is complex and takes time for teachers and educators to develop sufficient knowledge on how to take advantage of the numerous credits that are available to students.

Despite this need for more information on credit awarding, there is a fine line between educating teachers and overwhelming them with too much information. Educator C spoke about a failed approach their organization took to provide more credit awarding knowledge to teachers where they prepared a how-to document with examples of different credits you could award students for IYMP participation along with sample assignments and rubrics that teachers could use. There was little to no uptake for this resource, and the participant felt this indicated teachers were overloaded by the amount of information on credit awarding that was suddenly presented to them. Other participants reinforced this idea of information as a barrier by expressing concerns surrounding teacher workloads. Participants explained they do not have much extra time to explore pathways to credit awarding for programs such as IYMP and they are overwhelmed by

the thought of the potential paperwork that may be involved. Another factor that influences teacher workload is the lack of communication between school sites. This may result in duplication of work as teachers may be aware of other non-traditional credit awarding programs, but are not clear on their operational details and may be replicating pathways and resources that already exist in other school communities. The potentially inadvertent duplication of work may limit the credit awarding pathways that educators choose to pursue, reducing opportunities for students to earn credit for programming they participate in outside of their core courses and electives. Participants expressed a desire to improve supports for teachers through this potentially steep learning curve to improve their capacity to provide credit earning opportunities to students involved in health promotion programs such as IYMP.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Student Engagement and Autonomy

All participants highlighted the importance of prioritizing student engagement and fostering autonomy if credit awarding endeavours are to be successful. Students may be motivated to actively engage with their schooling in an effort to earn enough credits for graduation, to explore their personal interests through the skills and learning opportunities offered to them, or both. Participants believed that credit earning can be used as an effective way to increase student participation in programming such as IYMP, specifically when students are close to reaching the total number of credits required for graduation.

When determining how best to engage students, participants believed the community should play a vital role. By building connections both amongst peers and with members of the broader community, students demonstrated an incentive to participate in programming. Educator D noted that prioritizing "relationship building" as a strategy to engage students led to "a lot of growth within the students" as they developed their social skills. Participants also cited the role

of the local community as an effective method to engage students in programming. This is effective when the community is able to provide opportunities that the students are interested in. For example, Educator C shared a story about a traditional foods camp held in one community. This camp came to fruition in part due to a request by the local community to receive more support during community events and in part due to students expressing interest in developing skills, such as safe food handling, that could potentially lead to future employment opportunities.

> ...they did a traditional foods focused camp. So the camp, like they did a whole bunch of different sessions, like plucking ducks and preparing wild game for cooking, picking berries, and then doing like canned preserves and cooking Bannock and...then they also got like a food handling certificate. And that all came from like the community it was like, we need more folks to help, like serve and prepare food for, you know, feasts and powwow and those types of things. And the youth were like looking for opportunities for employment. So that kind of came from the community and then…I think it was like a three day camp and they got one or two credits from from participating in all of those activities. (Educator C)

To this effect, participants believed that the needs of the community and the interests of students could be aligned to provide learning opportunities that positively benefit both students and their communities. They emphasized the need to provide students with programs and coursework that address what they are interested in, develop skills that will support them in the future, and keep them engaged to increase the likelihood that they will be active participants in their learning. Participants agreed that "it's cool when youth can choose" (Educator C) because it is valuable to foster autonomy "as a really great opportunity to help [students] graduate so they can pursue their further goals down the line" (Educator D).

When asked what a credit awarding pathway for IYMP would look like in their ideal world, multiple participants emphasized the desire to build a flexible program that allows students to earn credits aligned with their own areas of interest. This highlights a desire for student autonomy in the credit awarding process. For example, participants explained that leadership and mentorship skills can be assessed in a variety of ways. Some examples of this presented by participants included arts-based programming such as dancing, crafting, or beading, or sports-based programming such as coaching. Each of these learning opportunities could "fall under the umbrella of IYMP" (Educator C) but would offer students more autonomy in their learning by providing them with different pathways to earn credit. Participants also detailed their hopes of engaging students through more land-based learning as these activities often had strong student interest and were not just another instance of students "just sitting in the classroom doing their regular work" (Educator E). To this effect, participants were interested in providing opportunities for student autonomy based on their perspectives of what students might enjoy. The following quotes by Educator's D and E further illustrate this sentiment.

> I'd love to get those kids out to the mountains more and do a bit more credit earning out there because I think there's a lot of learning, leadership development, character development that happens just by being outside without having to really facilitate tons of activities necessarily, it just naturally happens. (Educator D)
>
> Well, anything outdoorsy for sure. Kids do like being outside… anything connecting the kids to their culture or like land-based or being outside that would be what I would be most excited with and I think more successful than just doing another class inside. If it's like combined with like a field trip where the kids are having fun, then yeah I think those would be really good [credit earning opportunities]. (Educator E)

Participants noted that programs such as IYMP were not effective if students had low attendance. All interview participants that were currently working with Indigenous high school students emphasized low attendance as a primary concern that inhibits students from earning credit. Participants stated that poor attendance may be caused by students managing responsibilities at home or by students experiencing disinterest in specific learning topics or activities. To address this attendance barrier, participants discussed the importance of what Educator D termed "sneaky learning" as a strategy to engage students. Sneaky learning was achieved when learning outcomes were embedded seamlessly into learning activities so that students were focused on the enjoyment aspect of their time in programming and did not feel like they were doing work. The enjoyment aspect of health promotion programming such as IYMP cannot be understated as students have expressed that they attend school more because of IYMP and "how they can't believe that they get to just come and have fun and earn credits. Like they don't even see it as an extra class…" (Educator B). Thus, participants believed that increasing student engagement through enjoyable programming could be a useful strategy to improve attendance. However, participants noted that if teachers care more about the credits and students are essentially "voluntold" (Educator C) to participate in additional credit earning opportunities, then it is difficult to maintain engagement, nor is student autonomy demonstrated, as students are typically less keen to take part in activities that they do not see as a valuable use of their time.

Ultimately, all interview participants highlighted the importance of centering credit awarding work around the interests of students as "students need to be supported doing whatever they're doing" (Educator A). It's important "to help them to graduate so they can pursue their further goals down the line" (Educator D). Participants agreed that no matter how much energy goes into preparing and planning a pathway to credit awarding, without fostering student

engagement and autonomy, credits will not be awarded and the ultimate goal of educational attainment will not be achieved. Ideally, educators want to avoid situations where you "put a lot of work into something and the kids just…don't see the importance" (Educator E). Therefore, ensuring that programming serves student interests and appropriately meets their learning needs is crucial to successfully award credit.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Policy Challenges and Opportunities

Policy at the provincial and school authority level creates both challenges and opportunities for health promotion programming such as IYMP to find an ideal pathway to credit awarding for high school students. Participants echoed the sentiments of Educator C that "the challenge and success that we've had with credit earning in my tenure… just comes down to like how districts function."

Policy can impose challenges, specifically when an educator is creating a credit awarding pathway for a group of students who attend different schools within different school authorities. Participants explained that depending on the school authority they are working with, there are different requirements for awarding credits. Some schools will follow a hours-based credit model, which is typically 25 hours of student work per credit. This 25 hours per credit model is defined at the provincial policy level, but depending on specific policy at the school authority level there is more flexibility to assess students based on the acquisition of learning outcomes. Following an outcomes-based learning model, once a student has demonstrated that they can meet the curricular outcomes of a course, they can earn the credit, regardless of the number of hours spent learning. If school authorities follow a strict 25 hours per credit policy, this can pose a significant barrier to credit awarding pathways for students and may limit their opportunity to

earn numerous credits for their participation in IYMP. Educator C describes this challenge below.

> I would say yeah, policies is a blockade. Especially like thinking about the 25 hours per credit piece like a lot of jurisdictions abide by that even though I don't think it's mandated…it's nearly impossible to offer a credit camp for students that gets them learning for 25 hours, right? Because you can't really do that over a weekend. So it becomes impossible when school jurisdictions are, have that policy of 25 hours. It becomes impossible to provide something for them. Unless you're doing it over spring break, and that's like five hours a day for five days or whatever. Like, I do think yeah, that policy piece is significant (Educator C).

Interview participants had a clear preference for the learning outcomes-based model of credit awarding as this approach was better aligned with the skills students acquire in programming like IYMP which were described as "characteristics-based" and "behavioural" (Educator B). Participants emphasized the need to seek out strong partnerships with schools that did not follow the 25 hours per credit model. This allowed the focus to shift towards meeting learning outcomes for students and providing appropriate opportunities to connect their learning to the real world, regardless of the number of hours these activities took. Despite this potential challenge, participants were optimistic that most school authorities would be understanding of their goal to focus programming around learning outcomes as a priority over meeting the 25 hours per credit requirement.

Another school authority-level policy that must be considered for educators looking to award credit for programming such as IYMP is who is allowed to evaluate and ensure students earn credits. Participants described situations where even though they were certificated teachers

who were permitted to deliver programming to students, they were not allowed to assess students or access student information systems to ensure credit was awarded. In this situation, a partnership with another teacher who was part of the staff of that specific school was necessary to oversee student evaluations regardless of who was responsible for program delivery. One participant specifically described a workaround where they requested permission from a certain school authority to become a substitute teacher within their school system to appease this policy. Participants noted that not every school authority will have policies like this in place, but educators should be prepared to encounter a few unexpected barriers as they develop the best approach to IYMP credit awarding for their specific group of students.

Educators must also be aware of policy that may inhibit students from earning specific credits while participating in a program. For example, if a school already runs a dedicated leadership course, a student would not be able to earn those leadership credits again through IYMP. A clear understanding of the credits a student has already earned will ensure the credit awarding process stays organized. In addition, students will have specific timetable requirements depending on their school and educators may struggle to find time to fit credits for IYMP participation into a schedule that works for a group of students. This requires creative thinking by the educator to fit IYMP-related credits into a student's timetable and ensure there is no interference with their core classes.

Policy set in Alberta's Education Act requires coursework to be aligned with existing curriculum and learning outcomes. Participants discussed how they work to align credit and find curriculum fits within their existing programming to provide more credit earning opportunities to students. Some participants directly referenced a "big book" (Educator E) or "booklet" (Educator B) that has guided their credit awarding pursuits. This confirms that the curriculum requirements

for all credits within Alberta Education are well described and easily accessible to educators. This booklet describes key details such as the official titles of all credits, how many credits students can earn, prerequisites (if applicable), a summary of what the course should entail, and detailed learning outcomes that students should meet in order to be awarded credit. Educator E described their process as "once we figured out sort of our [program] itinerary, then we'll go back to the course summaries, and then try to attach credit to that." This resource booklet should be utilized to support educators who are exploring different pathways to credit awarding that can be aligned with IYMP programming.

Participants also saw policy as a potential opportunity to embed IYMP within school communities across the province and make the credit awarding process simpler for teachers. For example, if IYMP can demonstrate that its programming aligns with a set of credits agreed on by IYMP and local school authorities, then a potential agreement could be made to automatically enroll students in these credits if they participate in IYMP. This would involve a partnership between school administration and the program leaders running IYMP to ensure students are attending and truly meeting the learning outcomes of the appropriate credits. By utilizing policy in this manner, the process of IYMP credit awarding could be automated and the workload on teachers could be dramatically reduced. Participants suggested exploring policy as a mechanism for positive change in the process of credit awarding.

Overall, participants echoed the sentiment of Educator C that pathways to credit awarding "still feel very muddy in Alberta" and policy change may be an effective way to create more opportunities for students to earn credit. In the meantime, understanding the layer of complexity that policy may add to the credit awarding process is important for educators hoping to provide credit to students participating in IYMP.

4.4 Discussion

The current study explored existing strategies that may be used in practice for awarding high school course credit to youth mentors involved in health promotion programming such as IYMP in Alberta. Understanding the experiences of educators when awarding credit for programs like IYMP is essential if we are to determine the best pathways to credit awarding. As youth have expressed interest in earning credit for their involvement in IYMP, this work is an important step in supporting youth in their journey to high school educational attainment (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). Our findings revealed four common themes (i.e., essential partnerships, educating educators, student engagement and autonomy, and policy challenges and opportunities) that must be considered when educators decide to pursue credit awarding pathways for programs such as IYMP. Expanding upon these themes, considerations for credit awarding pathways include 1) the essential nature of strong partnerships, 2) the need to ensure educators are properly informed and educated on the credit awarding process, 3) the focus on centering work around student's interests in order to engage them in programming, and 4) the need to consider how policy can be both a support and a hindrance in this process. If educators acknowledge and honour the role that these major themes play in the credit awarding process, then they are more likely to find the most effective and ideal pathway towards a successful credit awarding model for their school community and their specific students. This study provides an opportunity for educators to learn from the experiences of others and move through the credit awarding process better informed and prepared to support students in their educational attainment journey.

In this study, we found that the credit awarding process requires many different school community members working together. These partnerships are essential not only to the success

of credit awarding endeavours, but also in creating a strong learning environment for students (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). In Alberta, this may involve school authorities such as principals, school staff such as administrative assistants, certificated Alberta teachers, and other individuals who deliver programming to students such as IYMP program leaders. “Mini partnerships” described individuals who played a small but important role in program implementation such as bus drivers and individuals qualified to provide specific training opportunities to students. This highlighted the importance of accounting for all logistical details needed for successful IYMP program delivery. Many of the core essential conditions for the implementation of a school-based healthy living program first identified through a comprehensive school health approach by Storey et al. (2016) and Neely et al. (2020), and later refined by Sobierajski et al. (2022) to fit the nuanced context of IYMP, align with these findings on the importance of partnerships for successful credit awarding. The essential conditions that align with our theme of essential partnerships included *demonstrated administrative leadership, higher-level support, dedicated champions to engage school community,* and *community support* (Sobierajski et al., 2022). This tells us that both at the program implementation stage, as described by Sobierajski et al. (2022), and at the credit awarding stage, as described in this body of work, it is necessary to take a community-focused approach to providing programming to students.

As identified in our findings, a lack of knowledge and awareness of the credit awarding process limits educators in what credit earning opportunities they provide to students. Walsh et al. (2022) found similar findings regarding the unmet professional learning needs of teachers. In their study, teachers expressed concern that when trying to implement curriculum changes, there was no centralized opportunity to discuss and share their experiences with other educators.

Walsh et al. (2022)'s teacher participants expressed their desire to access more opportunities to have intentional conversations with their colleagues and to work together to make sense of the school curriculum available to them. In this sense, teachers were interested in establishing a stronger professional learning community to meet this need for enhanced collaboration. Within a school setting, collaboration and knowledge sharing is fundamental to successfully support students (Paulsen, 2008). It is important that all collaborators acknowledge that all educators bring different expertise to the conversation and everyone will benefit from the sharing of knowledge. Collaboration can be fostered through small steps such as encouraging more communication between IYMP program sites in order to share knowledge on how credit awarding is best structured in each individual school community. For example, regular gatherings amongst small groupings of educators from numerous IYMP program sites may help to facilitate more knowledge sharing and collaboration.

All participants shared that it was important to keep this work centered on the interests of students. They shared that the majority of their energy should focus on implementing new credit awarding opportunities in ways that will increase student engagement and foster student autonomy. Two major motivators for students were a need to earn enough credits for graduation and a desire for more learning opportunities that reflected their individual goals. However, participants expressed that it did not matter how much work was put into developing credit awarding pathways if students did not attend in the first place. Poor attendance may act as a barrier to academic achievement and the development of strong peer relationships (Thackrah et al., 2022). To address this, it is important to prioritize efforts to ensure students are maintaining good attendance. A recommended strategy to improve student attendance was through more participation in after-school activities such as IYMP, as after-school programming can create a

school atmosphere where students attend class because they see value in the activities or programs they engage with (Hall et al., 2021; Thackrah et al., 2022). Interview participants also explained that the positive culture fostered by IYMP made their students enjoy attending programming and instilled a sense of belonging in students. This recommendation to increase attendance through a positive school culture was echoed by Hall et al. (2021) and Thackrah et al. (2022). Hall et al. (2021) expressed the notion that if a community is to build a positive school culture, it is important to build strong relationships with students. This can be accomplished by fostering effective rapport and open lines of communication with students. Thus, supporting educators in better understanding what students value and what types of credit earning opportunities they are interested in participating in. This strategy may support educators in making decisions, in this case decisions regarding what credit earning opportunities will be offered to students, that will effectively address student interests. If we take a step back to reflect more generally on the need for Indigenous students to express autonomy and ownership over their values and interests, the education system has the potential to serve as an empowering space that fosters overall health and wellbeing (Korpal & Wong, 2015). Therefore, consideration of the importance of student engagement and autonomy when pursuing credit awarding must be acknowledged.

These findings also highlight the importance of addressing policy both as a limiting factor and as an opportunity in the credit awarding process. As a challenge, policy can create additional layers of complexity in the credit awarding process. This complexity may limit the flexibility and effectiveness of pathways to credit awarding. As an opportunity, policy provides an avenue to implement health promotion programs such as IYMP within school communities in a manner that is sustainable and robust. Neely et al. (2020) describes the value of policy as a

supportive strategy for health promotion efforts in schools, as change at the systematic level is valuable in coordinating multiple partners such as the provincial government, school authorities, and individual school communities. Generally, policy must be taken into consideration when exploring credit awarding pathways as it has the capacity to act as both a hindrance and a valuable asset.

Of note, the need for strong partnerships intersects with the other three themes identified in this study, making essential partnerships the most dominant and central theme in this study. Partnerships are necessary to provide educators with the knowledge they need to provide effective programming. This may be achieved through community collaborations or by learning from the experiences of fellow teacher peers (Paulsen, 2008; Walsh et al., 2022). Partnerships also serve as an avenue to provide students with the learning opportunities that will excite and engage them in programming. Community-led and collaborative relationships where educators are dedicated to investing time into their students will create a warm, welcoming, and culturally responsive environment (Thackrah et al., 2022). If students feel supported by community partnerships, this will serve as a key precondition for students to thrive academically and wholistically. In addition, strong partnerships are required to align credit awarding pathways with existing policy as certain individuals (ie., community or school partners) will be required to carry out specific tasks. For example, school authorities or principals must approve the hours- or outcomes-based learning structure of all credits and policy will determine what certificated teachers are eligible to assess students in their learning. Gaining an understanding of how valuable these partnerships were to our interview participants highlights the importance of building strong relationships within a school community. It is also important that all partners are aligned in the goal of prioritizing Indigenous student success through credit awarding

opportunities. The central goal when working with students is always to support them on their journey to graduate high school. Identifying and connecting with individuals who see the value in this process and are willing to lend their support is imperative to successfully awarding credits to students participating in programs such as IYMP.

4.4.1 Strengths and Limitations

A key strength of this work is its immediate relevance to IYMP communities. This work will add real-world context and experience to the credit awarding pathways information being collected by this research team. Ideally, this information will be shared with school communities to support credit awarding pathways as soon as next school year (2024/2025). This study builds upon previous research to add context, depth, and experiential details shared by interview participants that add unique and essential pieces of insight to our understanding of credit awarding pathways that may be useful to IYMP and beyond. By adding another layer of detail to previous work, our research team will be able to share more niche and refined information on credit awarding with IYMP communities across Alberta. Ideally, this will enhance credit earning opportunities for Indigenous high school students.

The qualitative nature of this study and its use of interviews for data generation allowed for a detailed understanding of the experiences of individuals involved in credit awarding to emerge. This study is also strengthened by the participation of the knowledgeable educators and program leaders who informed data generation. These individuals are dedicated to improving educational opportunities for Indigenous youth and their combined 40+ years of experience allowed for rich conversations surrounding the credit awarding phenomenon.

Although this study is specific to IYMP credit awarding opportunities in Alberta, IYMP is present across Canada. As education differs between each province, it is difficult to extrapolate

these findings directly to communities outside of Alberta. While taking an Alberta-focused approach may limit transferability to IYMP credit awarding pathways in other provinces, this approach also allows for a deep dive into one specific education system and an exploration of the experiences of the individuals most intimately familiar with it. Participants in Manitoba were not included in this study due to time and contextual factors, but it is acknowledged that participants from Manitoba would have added additional insights and detail to this study.

As interview participation was entirely voluntary, we acknowledge that educators who prioritize credit awarding opportunities for their students were more likely to respond when contacted for participation in this study and were more likely to agree to be interviewed. This voluntary recruitment strategy may cause us to miss out on generating data with educators with relevant credit awarding expertise. However, this approach also ensures participants were knowledgeable on the credit awarding phenomenon and had a vested interest in supporting work that aims to improve the educational experience of Indigenous students.

It must be acknowledged that education is a multifaceted social determinant of health and educational attainment is shaped by far more than student participation in health promotion programming. While a program like IYMP has strong potential to support educational attainment, there are many other factors that will influence a student's ability to obtain the requisite total number of credits needed for high school graduation that were not explored in this study (i.e., socio-economic status, responsibilities at home, level of interest in education, experiences of racism and discrimination, inequitable funding for rural and remote school communities, or an emphasis on hierarchical Euro-Christian teaching styles). Many factors link back to attendance concerns which were discussed in this study, although a larger, dedicated deep dive into the attendance of Indigenous students may better serve to address this

consideration. Overall, our efforts to better understand credit awarding for students participating in IYMP does not aim to entirely solve educational attainment concerns for Indigenous youth in Canada. Rather this work serves to explore avenues that may improve the educational experiences of Indigenous students.

4.4.2 Conclusions and Future Implications

This study demonstrates the importance of understanding the experiences of educators in Alberta and the strategies they implement to award credit to students participating in health promotion programs such as IYMP. The themes identified in this study provide valuable insights from the perspectives of educators with practical knowledge on credit awarding. This highlights important considerations that individuals looking to bring more credit earning opportunities to students in their school community must be aware of. The findings of this study, along with the findings from objective 1 (chapter 3), will be shared with IYMP communities. By sharing knowledge with educators involved in IYMP we aim to support the process of educators utilizing the IYMP credit awarding pathways available to them more regularly. While this work was completed within the context of Alberta's education system, the themes summarized throughout should be considered across all provinces looking to implement credit earning opportunities for health promotion programming such as IYMP. Future work should aim to connect with educators involved in IYMP in other provinces such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec to understand their experiences with attempting to award credit to students participating in IYMP. Becoming knowledgeable on this topic within the context of Alberta is a strong starting point for our efforts to develop a clear understanding of the pathways to high school credit awarding for health promotion programming.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

The overarching goal of this thesis was to understand the potential pathways to credit awarding that health promotion programs such as the Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP) can utilize to support the educational attainment of high school students. This also involved an exploration of the experiences of educators who are closely involved in credit awarding work. To achieve this goal, the two objectives and guiding questions of this thesis were:

Objective #1: To map potential pathways to credit awarding for Indigenous high school students participating in IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba.

1. How can IYMP award high school students with course credit for their involvement in the program?

Objective #2: To explore existing strategies used in practice for awarding high school course credit to youth mentors involved with IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba.

1. What successes, failures, challenges, and opportunities have individuals in Alberta and Manitoba encountered in the IYMP credit awarding process?

These findings serve to address a gap in knowledge regarding pathways to high school credit awarding that can be utilized by programs such as IYMP in Canada, specifically in Alberta and Manitoba. More generally, this work can be used to inform and support individuals involved in awarding credits for any health promotion program that places a large emphasis on the development of skills such as leadership and mentorship. These findings also address the knowledge gap of what an educator experiences when pursuing opportunities to award students with credit for participation in programming that goes beyond traditional courses and electives.

The present thesis found that numerous pathways to credit awarding for programming such as IYMP exist in Alberta and Manitoba. While there are strengths and limitations to each pathway, this body of knowledge will support educators in making the most informed decision on what pathway will best suit their specific community and align with the needs of their specific group of students. In conversations with knowledgeable individuals such as curriculum managers, teachers, program directors, coordinators, and consultants, a collection of key strategies and important considerations for successful credit awarding emerged. This knowledge further enhanced our work on credit awarding pathways by adding experiential details that will better inform the true feasibility of each credit awarding pathway. Collectively, this research has the potential to strengthen our understanding of how IYMP can go about awarding credits to students participating in the program as well as students participating in other similar health promotion programs. This chapter will summarize the findings of objective 1 (chapter 3) and objective 2 (chapter 4), interpret these findings, explore overarching strengths and weaknesses of this research, and explain recommended future directions for research, policy, and practice.

5.1.1 Objective 1 Summary

The purpose of objective 1 was to identify and describe potential pathways to credit awarding for Indigenous youth participating in IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba. While the intent was to use these findings to address credit awarding opportunities for IYMP, the results are generalizable to other health promotion programs looking to awarding students with credit for their participation in these enriching programs. A document analysis was conducted with 111 resources collected from government sources and through the primary researcher's connections with an individual who works within Alberta Education. The document types included web pages, policy documents, fact sheets, guides, handbooks, course templates, and other curricular

documents. The target audience of these documents was primarily educators such as teachers, principals, and school authorities. Inductive conventional content analysis was used to delve into the data, allowing key information to emerge from the data. Three categories including *pathways to credit, student-centered decision making,* and *essential partnerships for credit awarding* were generated from the document analysis process. Five subcategories of *pathways to credit* emerged, detailing multiple avenues to credit awarding that may apply to health promotion programs such as IYMP. These pathways included: locally developed credit, dual credit, mentorship and leadership credit, health and wellness (including physical education/health education) credit, and arts education credit.

The categories and subcategories described key takeaways from the document analysis. This included details on the pathways themselves as many documents explained the logistical processes required to pursue *pathways to credit*. A common feature of each pathway was the need for a certificated teacher, as this individual was often vital in program delivery and in completing student evaluations to ensure appropriate learning outcomes were met. A common goal of the documents was to support students as they work towards earning a sufficient number of credits required for graduation. Additionally, many of the documents displayed flexibility in how different learning outcomes could be achieved and how different learning experiences could be used to support students in developing important skills while earning credit. These pathways create distinct and valuable opportunities for programming such as IYMP to support students.

The locally developed credit pathway allows school authorities to develop and implement their own unique credit opportunity. The dual credit pathway highlights an opportunity for school authorities to collaborate with post-secondary or industry partners to provide students with credit, often at both the high school and post-secondary level. The mentorship and

leadership credit pathway describes specific credits that are immediately available to students if teachers can align the learning outcomes of these courses with the mentorship- or leadership-specific program content of IYMP. Similarly, the health and wellness (including physical education/health education) credit pathway highlights credits that are immediately available to students. Credits within this pathway reflect the physical activity, healthy living, and wholistic wellbeing aspects of IYMP programming. The arts education credit pathway is the only pathway specific to Manitoba as this pathway describes a unique arts-based learning curriculum where students can access learning opportunities related to dance, drama, music, and visual arts. There is a great deal of flexibility within the learning outcomes of these credits, creating potential to align these credits with IYMP. Through the document analysis process, the detailed logistics of each of the five pathways were described. Ideally, this information will support school communities in their decision making on which pathway best aligns with their needs in order to successfully award credit to students participating in programs such as IYMP.

The document analysis process also described *student-centered decision making* and highlighted the need for *essential partnerships for credit awarding*. These categories highlighted a central thread in all credit awarding documentation to keep work centered on the needs, interests, and priorities of students to empower them and ensure they feel a sense of ownership over their education. Every student's journey to achieve their high school graduation requirements will be different and this should be honoured throughout the credit awarding process. The document analysis process also emphasized the need to share the responsibilities of credit awarding with numerous partners such as teachers, principals, and community partners. When each partner provides their individual expertise to the credit awarding process, students will be better supported, and flexible credit awarding opportunities will enhance student learning.

Overall, our goal is that these pathways will help educators understand the options that are available to them and support them in accessing appropriate resources to provide more credit awarding opportunities to students participating in programs such as IYMP. Further work in objective 2 (chapter 4) aimed to add the perspective of educators attempting to implement credit awarding for programs such as IYMP.

5.1.2 Objective 2 Summary

The purpose of objective 2 was to explore existing strategies used in practice for awarding high school course credit to youth mentors involved with IYMP in Alberta. To build upon objective 1 (chapter 3) and add additional details to the potential credit awarding pathways for health promotion programs such as IYMP, it was important to understand the experiences of educators. Data was generated through semi-structured one-on-one interviews with educators involved in the credit awarding process in Alberta (n=5). Diverse educator perspectives were collected, including that of an Alberta school division curriculum manager, an IYMP program leader, a staff member of Ever Active Schools (EAS), a student health and wellness consultant, and an Indigenous student program coordinator. Four of the interview participants were also certificated Alberta teachers. Qualitative description with a constructivist inquiry paradigm guided this work with data analyzed via inductive thematic analysis. This approach allowed for a rich and detailed exploration of the data that ensured participant voices guided the analysis process. Four themes that encompassed key factors of the credit awarding experiences of the participants included *essential partnerships, educating educators, student engagement and autonomy,* and *policy challenges and opportunities*.

Participants shared the need for *essential partnerships* (theme 1) in order to successfully award credit to students participating in programs such as IYMP. These partnerships included

school authorities, principals and vice principals, school administration staff, certificated Alberta teachers, IYMP program leaders, and other community partners. Participants spoke about the shared responsibilities involved in credit awarding as different individuals may oversee each step of the process. This can range from who develops credit earning opportunities, implements programs where credits will be earned, evaluates participating students, submits credits into a student's online information system, or approves the overall process. In this sense, participants deemed credit awarding a collaborative effort where all parties are motivated to support students as they work towards their high school diploma.

Participants highlighted the need to ensure *educators are educated* (theme 2) on the entire credit awarding process in order to provide appropriate credit earning opportunities to students. Participants expressed many uncertainties surrounding how credit could be awarded to students and what other school communities were doing to support students. While a need for more knowledge was emphasized by participants, they also cautioned against overwhelming educators with too much information as this may lead to a lack of action as teachers fear placing additional strain on their often already heavy workloads. Efforts to improve communication and collaboration of teachers and educators from numerous school communities is important to improve the sharing of knowledge, specifically in regard to sharing knowledge on potential credit awarding pathways that may support programs such as IYMP.

Participants believed that the success of credit awarding pathways was predicated on *student engagement and autonomy* (theme 3). The opportunity to earn credits was an effective way to increase student participation in programs such as IYMP. However, maintaining student engagement to sustain strong attendance levels was essential for students to develop new skills and meet the learning outcomes required to earn credit. Participants recommended a focus on

seamlessly blending learning activities with enjoyable experiences to address student interests while also meeting the learning outcomes required to award credit.

Participants acknowledged the role of *policy as both a challenge and an opportunity* (theme 4) when pursuing different pathways to credit awarding for programs such as IYMP. As a challenge, policy may restrict how credits can be awarded depending on the internal policies of school authorities. For example, school authorities may follow a 25 hours per credit or a learning outcomes-based model. This may limit the number of credits a student is able to earn despite the skills they acquire when participating in programs such as IYMP. As an opportunity, policy creates a pre-existing framework for educators to work within. This involves organized information on what credits are available and the learning outcomes students should meet to be awarded credit, providing programs such as IYMP with a foundation of knowledge to align programming with. Generally, participants shared that as this knowledge is shared with educators, a clear understanding of the rules surrounding the credit awarding process will ensure the most ideal pathway for each specific community is pursued.

5.2 Intersection and Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this thesis demonstrate that there are numerous potential pathways to credit awarding for health promotion programming such as IYMP and the existing experiences of educators should be utilized to better inform future credit awarding pursuits. Objectives 1 and 2, chapters three and four respectively, intersect and complement each other to describe these findings. Objective 1 explores the credit awarding process from the perspective of published documents and resources while objective 2 adds an important point of view to this body of work by taking the true experiences of those involved in credit awarding for programs such as IYMP into consideration.

The topic of essential partnerships was raised in both studies, with a key category in chapter three titled *essential partnerships for credit awarding* and theme 1 in chapter four titled *essential partnerships*. As this topic was prevalent in both studies, we are confident that strong, supportive partnerships are a central component of the credit awarding process. In both studies, the primary goal of all partners is to contribute to the credit awarding process in a way that best suits their particular skill set. For example, teachers deliver programming supported by community partners when a learning topic falls outside of their area of expertise. Higher level partnerships with groups such as school authorities, individual school boards, principals, or the provincial government may be necessary to oversee new credit awarding pathways. This need for essential partnerships is much broader than just within the context of the credit awarding process and also encompasses the successful implementation of a school-based healthy living program. Numerous essential conditions such as *demonstrated administrative leadership, higher-level support, dedicated champions to engage school community,* and *community support* were identified through a comprehensive school health approach that aligned with IYMP (Sobierajski et al., 2022; Storey et al., 2016). These essential conditions encompass the need for essential partnerships to successfully run programming. Our studies further develop this finding as the essential conditions connected to partnerships are not only necessary to implement programming, but also to ensure this programming serves as a credit earning opportunity for students. Overall, these findings demonstrate that credit awarding is a collective and collaborative responsibility shared by numerous groups who are invested in supporting high school students in their journey to educational attainment.

The topic of centering this work around student interests was presented as a key category in chapter three titled *student-centered decision making* and as theme 3 in chapter four titled

student engagement and autonomy. As this topic was a key finding in both studies, the student perspective should always be considered when educators are making decisions on what pathway will best suit their specific school community and their specific group of students. The decision on what constitutes as the "best" choice must be influenced by what resonates most with the goals, values, and interests of students. As an educator, one of the central goals of any program is to keep students engaged in order to ensure they are attending class and acquire the knowledge necessary to meet the learning outcomes that will result in credit earned. Honouring the interests of students is also helpful in creating an atmosphere they are motivated to engage with (Hall et al., 2021; Thackrah et al., 2022). In the case of IYMP, students have expressed interest in earning credits and developing employable skills through their participation in IYMP (The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program, 2019). Therefore, meeting these needs should be a priority. While students were not direct participants in this thesis, their interest in earning credit for their participation in IYMP sparked this entire study and future work that looks into credit awarding in other provinces or future steps taken to share this knowledge with educators must continue to reflect on what best suits the interests of students.

Acknowledging the role of policy in the credit awarding process is another key takeaway of this thesis that creates an intersection between the findings of chapter three and chapter four. While there was no category dedicated to policy explicitly in chapter three, much of what informed and shaped the pathways to credit awarding were in itself policy documents and resources. To complement this, theme 4 of chapter four titled *policy challenges and opportunities* reminds us to consider how existing policy creates the framework we follow when looking into credit awarding opportunities. Chapter four also advises us to look deeper for policy that may be present at the school authority level as this layer documentation was not captured in

our document analysis, likely due to these resources not being easily or publicly available. For example, individual schools may have policies surrounding who is required to deliver programming and evaluate students on their learning before credits can be awarded. Policy presents an opportunity to lean on partnerships with school communities to better understand what specific requirements must be met in order to successfully implement a credit awarding opportunity for students involved in programs such as IYMP. Overall, this finding on the consideration of policy, as well as the entire body of work within this thesis, will contribute to knowledge that will be shared with educators to encourage and support them in providing more credit awarding opportunities to students.

When we look towards the future of this work, particularly how this knowledge will be shared with individuals such as teachers, IYMP program leaders, and other individuals looking to award credit for programs such as IYMP, the majority of this information will come from the multiple pathways to credit awarding in Alberta and Manitoba as identified and described through findings from objective 1 (chapter 3). Existing literature indicates that teachers do not always have their professional learning needs met and this can be a hindrance in delivery of education to students (Walsh et al., 2022). To address this, teachers have requested more opportunities to share knowledge and collaborate with their peers to better meet the needs of their students. Within the context of IYMP, improving knowledge sharing amongst teachers is essential to support credit awarding for students working towards their high school diploma. However, theme 2 that emerged from objective 2 (chapter 4), *educating educators*, helps us understand why this knowledge sharing may not always be successful and cautions us against overwhelming teachers with too much information. One particular participant from objective 2 (chapter 4) (Educator C) specifically shared an experience where teachers were provided with a

large resource of credit awarding information but there was no uptake by teachers because the amount of information and the anticipated workload of pursuing credit awarding was overwhelming. This finding tells us that while we have collected a great deal of useful information, it is important to take careful consideration of how this information will be delivered to individuals involved in IYMP if we want to maximize uptake of our suggested pathways and ensure more students have credit earning opportunities connected to their IYMP participation. Therefore, approaching this knowledge sharing process from a well-informed perspective that considers our findings from objective 2 when sharing pathways developed through objective 1 is crucial to our success in ensuring more students earn credits for their participation in IYMP.

5.3 Strengths and Limitations

This chapter provides a summary of the two individual studies included in this thesis. Strengths and limitations were presented for both objective 1 (chapter 3) and objective 2 (chapter 4). Additional strengths and limitations in relation to this thesis in its entirety are provided below. A potential limitation of this thesis is its inability to maintain both the Alberta and Manitoba perspective to credit awarding throughout both objectives 1 and 2. For example, there was no Manitoba perspective in the second half of this work as it was difficult engaging with individuals from Manitoba involved in the credit awarding process as it relates to IYMP. While the Alberta-specific data from objective 2 (chapter 4) still provides a rich, in-depth analysis of the credit awarding experiences of educators, when the researchers consider future steps, such as sharing this knowledge with educators involved in IYMP, there will not be accounts of the experiences of current Manitoba educators involved in credit awarding to draw from. Therefore, credit awarding knowledge specific to Manitoba will not be available to better inform the

pathways that IYMP communities may choose to explore. However, it must be noted that a similar critique could be made of this thesis not addressing credit awarding in other provinces where IYMP is present such as Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec. The findings from the Alberta-specific interviews from objective 2 (chapter 4) are generalizable and will serve as valuable insights for other provinces to consider although we acknowledge that the detailed nuances of other provinces may be absent. As no previous work that we are aware of existed on this topic, this thesis provides a thorough and crucial starting point. Expanding these findings into these additional provinces should be a future priority of this work.

Completing the research for this thesis sequentially (i.e., completing data generation and analysis for objective 1 before beginning data generation for objective 2) was an important strength of this work. Ordering the research procedure in this manner allowed the findings of objective 1 to inform objective 2, specifically in regard to the interview process. Having a strong basis of knowledge on the potential pathways to credit awarding developed through objective 1 allowed the primary researcher to ask strong questions and engage in interviews for objective 2 on a deeper level. This included asking effective probing questions at the data generation stage. At the analysis stage, this allowed for an exploration of the data beyond the credit awarding pathways themselves to focus on what educator experiences initially inform those pathways. Upon reflection, the primary interviewer does not believe they could have collected the same in-depth results from the credit awarding interviews without a preexisting knowledge base on the pathways to credit awarding, making the sequential nature of these chapters incredibly important to the final body of work. Additionally, this thesis demonstrated strength through its qualitative approach to research. By following a descriptive qualitative method, this work allowed for a rich description of existing credit awarding documents in Alberta and Manitoba and an in-depth

understanding of the credit awarding experiences of educators in Alberta. Altogether, this research has gathered key information and essential considerations for educators looking to pursue credit awarding for programs such as IYMP. Thus, this research has significant implications for research, policy, and practice within high school credit awarding to health promotion programs such as IYMP. These implications are described below.

5.4 Implications

This thesis provided insight into high school credit awarding pathways that may be utilized by health promotion programs in Canada such as the IYMP. As a whole, the findings of this thesis can be used to inform future research and may contribute to policy and practice recommendations for future credit awarding opportunities that will support students as they work towards high school graduation. For IYMP program leaders, the numerous pathways to credit awarding identified in this study will provide flexible opportunities to establish their preferred method of awarding credit to students. Understanding the perspective of educators who have experiences with the credit awarding process further strengthens the knowledge that will be shared with educators. This knowledge includes considerations of the need for key partnerships and collaboration, the need to ensure educators have appropriate knowledge to carry out the credit awarding process, the need to maintain student engagement and autonomy as the central motivator in this work, and the need to acknowledge and engage with policy when necessary. Collaboration and the sharing of knowledge is a valuable element of the education system, particularly when the implementation of new curriculum or programming for students is the primary goal (Walsh et al., 2022). Overall, understanding the potential pathways to credit awarding for health promotion programming will increase students' ability to develop essential skills and achieve educational attainment through earning their high school diploma.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Future Research

This thesis addresses gaps in our understanding of the potential pathways to credit awarding for health promotion programs such as IYMP. Future research should continue to expand this understanding and add additional perspectives to this body of work to address educational attainment of Indigenous students in Canada. To build on our findings, future research should continue to develop rich, detailed pathways to credit awarding that are specifically tailored to other provinces where IYMP programming takes place such as Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec. This may involve a document analysis of government-level education resources to better understand the context of how each province can provide credit earning opportunities to students participating in programs such as IYMP.

It is also important to continue gathering insight on educator experiences and the strategies currently in place for credit awarding for IYMP participation. Ideally, we hope to prevent the duplication of work to understand different pathways. Therefore, if a certain pathway has already been thoroughly explored by a school authority, principal, teacher, or other individual involved in the credit awarding process, then we want to learn from their insights and share potential opportunities and barriers to those particular pathways with other educators across the country. Future research should also prioritize building more connections with IYMP-specific participants such as program leaders. The work in this thesis was able to connect with one IYMP program leader and a handful of individuals who have supported IYMP in delivering programming. Placing a greater emphasis on the experiences of educators directly involved in IYMP particularly in other provinces such as Manitoba, where the research team is anecdotally aware of students earning credit for their participation in IYMP, will add additional depth and rich detail to this body of work on credit awarding. Connecting with IYMP communities in

Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, along with additional IYMP communities in Alberta will enhance our understanding of credit awarding efforts across all IYMP communities and the strategies employed to achieve this.

Additionally, future research should answer questions that dive deeper into the nuances of particular credit awarding pathways. For example: What would an IYMP-specific course, such as an IYMP locally developed course, look like? What would the learning outcomes look like? What skills would students acquire? This may involve working closely with a school authority or principal who is familiar with both IYMP and the credit awarding process as they will have the expertise to answer questions regarding the logistics of developing an IYMP course. As it is important to keep this research centered around student voices, it would also be essential to work collaboratively with students to understand what they would want to see in an IYMP course, what skills they would want to prioritize and develop, and how this course would best support their future goals and aspirations. This potential future research reminds us that the central aim of this work is always to bring more credit earning opportunities to students in hopes of engaging them and supporting them as they work towards a sufficient number of credits for high school graduation.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Policy and Practice

A key finding of this thesis was the need to leverage policy as an opportunity to support the credit awarding process. In this sense, we advocate for policy that will streamline credit awarding for IYMP and similar health promotion programs. For example, if a student participated in IYMP, and a certificated teacher or IYMP program leader could provide confirmation of this, then that student's school would enroll them in credits that correspond to the learning outcomes achieved through IYMP. This may involve mentorship, leadership, or

volunteer credits. If the process to get students credit for their participation in IYMP was simpler and did not create a great deal of additional work for an educator, this may help to increase uptake of pathways providing credits to students for their engagement in IYMP. This policy suggestion was made by one of our objective 2 participants, highlighting the need to collaborate with and lean on individuals with existing expertise in the area of credit awarding as they have the most knowledgeable insights on what would make this process more effective and seamless.

Another key finding of this thesis was the need to share more knowledge on the credit awarding process with educators. A practical application of this finding may be to encourage and provide an avenue for more frequent communication between different school communities and teachers involved in credit awarding. This may involve communication strategies such as interschool meetings, online group forums, or peer mentorship amongst new teachers and more experienced educators. While this knowledge sharing should focus on the individuals directly involved in delivering coursework or health promotion programming to students and ensuring they are earning the credits they need to graduate, knowledge sharing should also include individuals who work with IYMP on a broader scale such as the IYMP National Director.

Before future policy and practice recommendations can be applied, the knowledge contained in this thesis must be used to inform key partners. To achieve this, knowledge translation must be prioritized. Knowledge translation is an essential component of this work to ensure the research findings are shared with the appropriate knowledge users (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Government of Canada, 2012). In this case, knowledge users may include school authorities, principals and vice principals, teachers, IYMP program leaders, and other individuals involved in IYMP programming. The goal of our knowledge translation will be to refine the knowledge we have produced in this thesis on credit awarding pathways into

resources that are tailored to our knowledge users. These resources will likely include both text and visual products. In terms of text products, resources such as narrative summaries, handbooks, or guides on the pathways to credit awarding will be developed. The details contained in these resources will report the necessary details for each pathway, including important policy and procedural information that is needed for implementation of a credit earning opportunity for students participating in IYMP. In terms of visual products, resources such as mind maps, charts, or other graphics will be developed to illustrate the pathways and the steps required to award credit. Ideally, both types of knowledge translation products will work in tandem to detail the pathways to credit awarding for students participating in IYMP. If we want to prioritize uptake of these resources by IYMP school communities, then it will be imperative that the research team applies our findings from objective 2. We must maintain extreme mindfulness of the volume of information shared in these knowledge translation products, including the potential workload or additional burden these resources may place on the shoulders of teachers and school communities. As an additional strategy to support future work and continue sharing the knowledge contained in this thesis, the research team intends to publish these findings as peer-reviewed journal articles and present the findings at academic research conferences in late 2024 and 2025.

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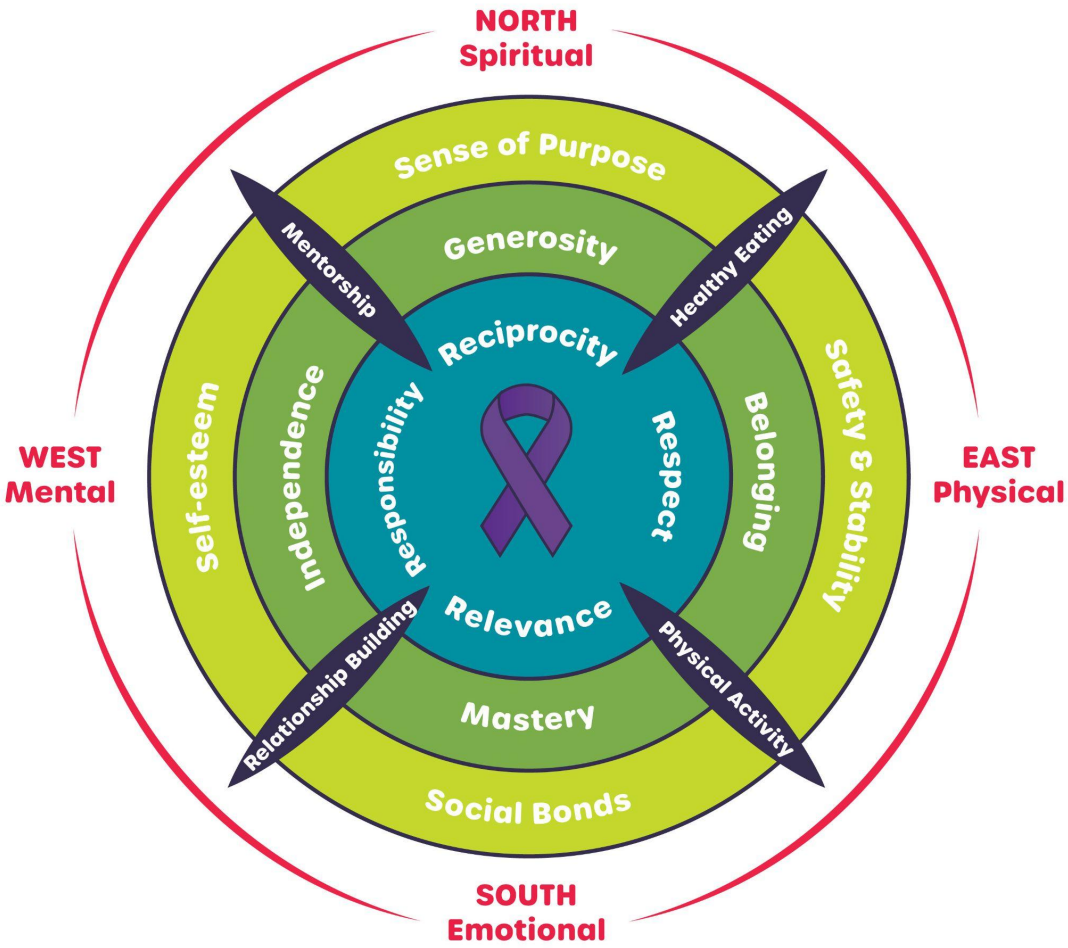
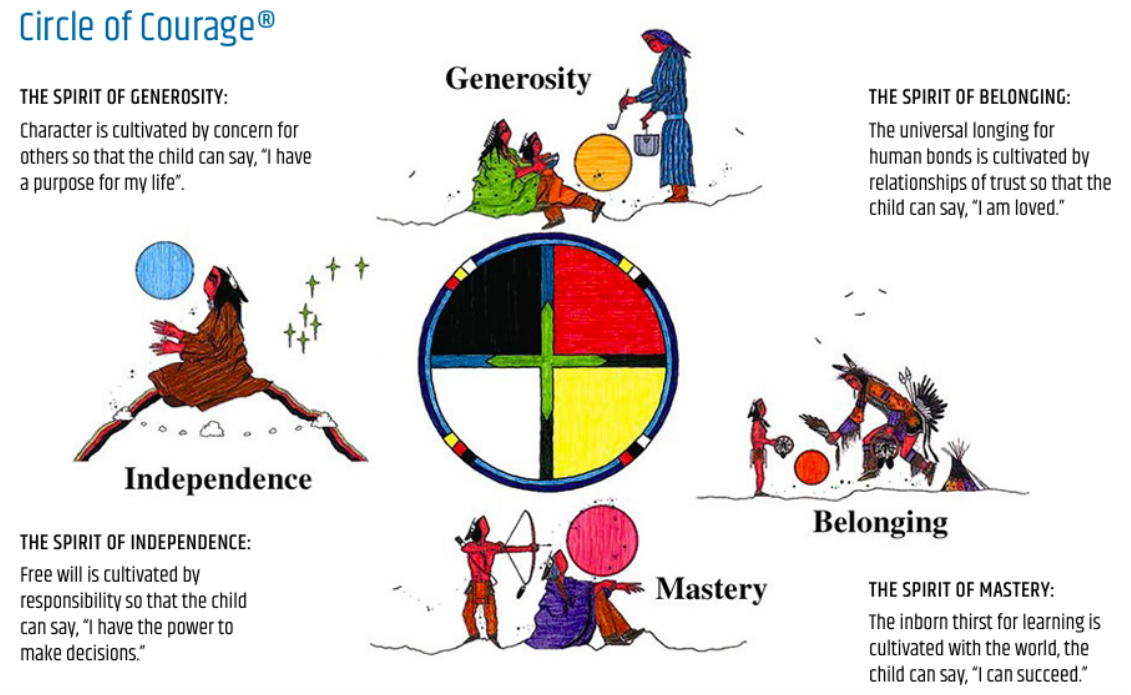
APPENDIX A: The IYMP Theoretical Framework



Appendix A. Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP) Theoretical Framework. The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program's theoretical framework was developed by Métis scholar and IYMP team member Dr. Heather McRae. The purple ribbon represents Truth and Reconciliation. The blue inner circle represents Indigenous scholar Dr. Verna Kirkness' Four R's of reciprocity, respect, relevance, and responsibility. The green middle ring represents Indigenous scholar Dr. Martin Brokenleg's Circle of Courage. The lighter green outer ring represents the wellbeing and health-related outcomes that emerge from the Four R's and the

Circle of Courage. The words Mentorship, Health Eating, Physical Activity, and Relationship Building are included in text that overlaps each ring of the framework, depicting how the key components of IYMP overlap with the theoretical model of the program. The red outer ring depicts the Indigenous Medicine Wheel.

APPENDIX B: The Circle of Courage



Appendix B. Dr. Martin Brokenleg's Circle of Courage. The Circle of Courage describes the four universal needs of all youth to achieve resiliency, strength and self-worth: generosity, belonging, mastery, and independence.

APPENDIX C: The Four R's

Appendix C. Dr. Verna Kirkness' Four R's. IYMP is guided by the Four R's of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility.

APPENDIX D: Objective 1 Document Analysis Search Strategy

PLEASE NOTE: This search strategy was developed in consultation with Lisa Tjosvold, the University of Alberta Public Health Librarian.

RESEARCH TITLE
Mapping experiences: Understanding pathways to course credit awarding for high school-aged Indigenous youth mentors across Canada

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS
McKayla Kirkpatrick, Keatton Tiernan, Genevieve Montemurro, Brian Torrance, Lauren Sulz, Kate Storey

BACKGROUND
The Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP) is a healthy living program that engages Indigenous youth to promote healthy behaviours and wholistic wellness. IYMP is delivered by Indigenous high school youth mentors for elementary students. IYMP mentors have the opportunity to develop skills such as leadership. Mentors also benefit from opportunities to earn course credits toward their high school diploma. Awarding high school credits for IYMP can directly benefit youth and supports IYMP's sustainability. However, how school communities can award high school credits for programs outside of traditional courses is not well understood and may vary across school communities. Therefore, the purpose of this research aims to map feasible pathways for awarding high school course credits to IYMP mentors and explore cases where the awarding of course credits for IYMP has been attempted.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this document scan is to identify high school credit awarding pathways that can be utilized by IYMP in Alberta and Manitoba.

OBJECTIVE
To map pathways to high school credit awarding in Alberta and Manitoba. This knowledge will be gathered through policy documents and other education documents.

SCOPE
Documents that align with IYMP's programing such as career and technical skills (CTS) courses, mentorship courses, and leadership focused courses.

REFERENCE MANAGEMENT
Zotero will be used to manage references because the primary research (MK) has the most experience with this software. However, if a different reference management system is recommended the researcher is amenable to this change.

INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type	Policy Operating procedures Administrative procedures Curricular documents Programs and initiatives	Web-pages (specifically from non-government sites) Promotional material Unpublished materials

	School-board level documents Peer-reviewed and published research articles Web-pages (specifically from government sites)	
Audience	IYMP program coordinators, superintendents, trustees, board members, principals, teachers, school staff, students	None
Source	Publicly available	Not publicly available
Language	English	Not English
Country	Canada (specifically AB or MB)	Not Canada (ie; the USA)
Active	Active "in-use" documents, most recent/most up-to-date; foundational historical documents (within 20 years)	Repealed
Content	Documents relevant to high school course credit awarding Documents that address locally developed courses Documents that address CTS courses Documents that address dual credit Documents that address curricular requirements that align with IYMP learning outcomes Documents that address the roles/responsibilities of IYMP mentors	Other topics

KEY QUESTIONS FOR DOCUMENT INCLUSION CRITERIA
Does the document identify high school credit awarding opportunities?
Does the document provide insight into the high school credit awarding process?
Does the document address high school credit awarding opportunities in a way that can be connected to IYMP?

SEARCH METHODS/PROCEDURE
This document scan will involve a manual electronic website search of Alberta and Manitoba government, ministry, and provincial organizations to identify publicly available documents relevant to high school course credit awarding, specifically documents that can be related to IYMP. While grey

literature will be the focus of this document analysis, the ERIC education database and Google Scholar will also be searched to ensure published research on this topic can be included in our analysis.

Documents will be organized based on document type and content areas addressed, as well as their potential to support IYMP's goal of credit awarding. Any discrepancies in inclusion/exclusion criteria will be resolved through peer discussion among the research team to reach consensus. Document selection will be guided by the inclusion and exclusion criteria described below.

DATA EXTRACTION

An excel database will be created to store data from the document review. The data will be extracted from each document using the fields described in Appendix E, the Document Analysis Template. Any further analysis or data for extraction will be identified by the research team and may include consultation with the advisory group.

KEYWORDS

The following list are potential keywords that will be utilized in the search.

- Policy or policies
- Curriculum or curricula
- Credit or credit awarding
- Guide or handbook or legislature
- Procedure
- High school or highschool or secondary education
- Ninth or tenth or eleventh or twelfth grade (or grader)
- Youth or peer or student or teen or young people
- Alberta
- Manitoba
- Canada or Canadian
- Mentor or leader

APPENDIX E: Objective 1 Document Analysis Template

Note: This template will be modified and utilized in an Excel spreadsheet to organize data collection for Objective 1.

1	Name/Title of document
2	Type of document (ie; article, policy, procedure, curriculum, syllabus)
3	Document source and date of document
4	If an edition of a document, explain
5	Author/creator(s) of document
6	Position/organization(s) of author/creator(s)
7	Background of author/creator(s) (ie; credentials, faculty, experience)
8	General overview of the document/Content areas covered (brief, broad perspective) (ie; general credit awarding process, CTS courses, mentorship courses, dual credit, etc)
9	Unique characteristics of the document (does anything stand out?)
10	Tone/mood of the document (what feelings does the document stimulate?)
11	Audience for which the document was written (ie; the public, specific to organization, colleagues)
12	Language of document (ie; research, medical, layman)
13	Patterns within the document (ie; style, paragraphing, numbering)
14	Symbols, diagrams, pictures, visuals in document (if any) (ie; logos, photos)
15	Viewpoint from which the document was written (may not only be the author's)
16	Purpose/objective of document (ie; to convince, provide information)

17	Topic/issue of document
18	Description of the topic/issue in the document
19	Consistency of definitions & objectives with relation to other documents
20	Conflict or agreement with other documents about the topic/issue
21	Credibility assessment (ie; is the document evidence-informed, developed by or in partnership with an educational or governmental institution or body?)
22	Question(s) left unanswered by the document
23	Additional Notes

APPENDIX F: Objective 2 Information Letter and Consent Form

INFORMATION LETTER & CONSENT FORM

Title of the study:	Still I Rise: Indigenous youth-led strategies as a pathway to wholistic health and health equity
Study Focus:	Understanding pathways to course credit awarding for high school-aged Indigenous youth mentors across Canada
Principal Investigator:	Dr. Kate Storey Associate Professor School of Public Health (780) 492-9609 kate.storey@ualberta.ca
Research Coordinator:	Genevieve Montemurro School of Public Health (780) 248-1863 grs@ualberta.ca
Research Assistant:	McKayla Kirkpatrick School of Public Health mkirkpat@ualberta.ca

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study? You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a teacher who works closely with the Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program (IYMP) in your community. The goal of this study is to create an IYMP-specific accredited high school course.

What is the reason for this study: We aim to learn how to improve the IYMP and how the program impacts youths' educational opportunities, job skills and health education and future employment. We also want to understand if and how teachers awarded high school credits to youth mentors who participated in the IYMP program. By doing this research, we can better understand how to improve the IYMP and help young people OR Indigenous youth get more involved in education, career skills and building relationships.

What will happen in this study? If you agree to participate, you will take part in one one-on-one interview about your experience awarding high school credits. The interview will last around an hour, will be held online via Zoom (or in person if possible), and will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transcribed, with the use of transcription software, and stored on a secure server at the University of Alberta.

What are the benefits of participating in the study? The interviews may lead to some knowledge sharing of credit awarding processes that may help with your current practices. While there may be no direct benefit

to you, results from this study may lead to the creation of an IYMP-specific high school course that will benefit IYMP youth mentors.

What are the risks of participating in this study? We do not think any risks are involved in participating in the interview. It is impossible to know all the risks that may happen in a study, but we have done everything possible to decrease any known risks.

Do I have to take part in the study? Taking part in this study is your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind and stop being in the study within 30 days of your interview. After that point, we cannot remove you from the study because we have begun combining and analyzing the data. To withdraw from the study, please contact the principal investigator, Dr. Kate Storey, at (780) 492-9609 or the research coordinator, Genevieve Montemurro, at (780) 248-1863.

You can choose not to answer or skip any questions that you are not comfortable with and still be a part of the study. In the event that Zoom is used, you have the right to participate with your camera off if you wish.

Even if you remain in the research study, you may choose to withdraw some or all of your responses by contacting Dr. Kate Storey or Genevieve Montemurro within 30 days of your interview. After that, we cannot remove you from the study because, after that time, your answer will become part of the data set.

Will my information be kept private? The information you share will remain confidential, and we will only use it for this study. Your name will be replaced with a code, and identifying information will be removed. Your name or identifying information will never be used in presentations or publication of study results. The data we get must be accurate during research studies. For this reason, the research data you provide may be looked at by people from: the study team, the study sponsor (University of Alberta), and the Research Ethics Board. After the study, we will encrypt and store all collected data securely at the University of Alberta, and for a period of five years, as is required by the Research Ethics Board. After five years, all collected data will be destroyed by the research team.

What if I have questions? If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact the principal investigator, Dr. Kate Storey, at (780) 492-9609 or the research coordinator, Genevieve Montemurro, at (780) 248-1863.

The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta has reviewed the plan for this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or how the research is being conducted, contact the Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca (Ethics ID Pro00124180)

How do I indicate consent for myself to take part? You can contact the research team directly by calling or emailing the principal investigator, Dr. Kate Storey (at 780-492-9609; kate.storey@ualberta.ca) and/or the research coordinator, Genevieve Montemurro (at 780-248-1863; g.montemurro@ualberta.ca).

The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta has reviewed the plan for this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or how the research is being conducted, contact the Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca or 780-492-2615 (Ethics ID: Pro00124180).

IN-PERSON WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

How do I indicate my <u>agreement</u> to be in this study?

By signing below, you understand:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study
- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

ONLINE VERBAL CONSENT FORM

The research study, information document and consent form were explained to:

_____

Name of Participant

□ - The participant confirmed that all their questions had been answered and they agreed to participate in this research study.

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____	_____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
	_____
	Date

APPENDIX G: Objective 2 Key Informant Interview Guide

Key Informant Interviews
One-on-One Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Thank you for taking part in this interview today. Have you received a copy of the information letter for this study?

[INTERVIEWER INTRODUCES THEMSELVES AND WALKS THROUGH THE INFORMATION LETTER WITH PARTICIPANT, EMPHASIZING IMPORTANT POINTS]

Today I hope we can talk about your experiences with the high school credit awarding process.

What we learn from you will be used to help develop an evidence-based approach to standardizing the credit awarding process for all IYMP youth mentors across Canada. I will be audio recording this session so that I can listen to it later. This interview will also be typed out but I will ensure no words or phrases that could be used to identify you will be included in reports to support the findings. Personal information such as your name and community name will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone. We will use codes to replace personal and community names in any written reports and publications, or conference presentations. Quoted words and phrases that do not identify you may be used to support the findings.

Please help yourself to refreshments. Before we being, I would like you to know the following:

- You do not have to answer anything you don't want to.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- What you share with me in this room will remain confidential.

Before we begin, do you have any questions? Comments? Concerns? If anything is not clear, please let me know. I will not proceed until you are familiar with and comfortable with the process.

Are you comfortable with beginning the interview? Are you okay if I turn on the recorder?

Key Prompts/Questions:

General Questions:

1. What is your role in the high school education system? (Where do you work? What is your job title?) (Are you a principal, teacher, administrator, etc)
    a. How long have you been in this role?
    b. Have you previously held different positions in the education system?
    c. How many years have you worked in the education system?
    d. Why and how did you come to work surrounding the credit awarding process?
2. Ask if not already answered: What courses/activities have you awarded credit for? How did you determine/create those courses?
3. Have you found that any essential partnerships are needed to successfully award credits? (encourage them to elaborate)
4. Have you had any unsuccessful attempts to award credit to students? (encourage them to elaborate)

IYMP-Specific Questions:

5. Have you had success awarding IYMP youth mentors with course credit for their IYMP-related work?
    a. Why did you decide to pursue this?
    b. Can you walk me through what this process was like for you?
    c. What problems/roadblocks (if any) did you encounter during this process?
6. If you could implement IYMP course credit in your ideal scenario, what would that look like?
    a. How would you go about awarding credit?
    b. What would the course itself entail?

Wrap Up:

1. Is there anything else about the process of awarding credits to high school students that you would like to share?

Thank you again for participating in this key informant interview. The information and personal experiences you have shared today will be incredibly useful in advancing this research and supporting IYMP. I will now have the audiotapes typed out. I will then analyze them and use the information in reports and presentations about the credit awarding processes available to peer-led community-based participatory projects, specifically focusing on IYMP. Do you have any questions about this process before we end our time together?