Defining Drug Literacy

Drug literacy can be defined as acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to successfully navigate the world in which we live – a world full of drug-related pressures, promises and panaceas. Students need to develop the competencies to survive and thrive in this world.

Drug literacy is built by engaging students in honest, thoughtful discussions and projects that involve issues relevant to their daily lives. The goal is to encourage students to both express and think critically about their current drug-related beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

A socio-ecological approach suggests that awareness, actions, decisions and behaviours are influenced by multiple factors including personal factors requiring self-awareness and self-management skills, relationships requiring social awareness and skills, and the physical and cultural environments requiring life knowledge and navigational skills.

Therefore, in order to be "drug-literate," students need to learn to …

- assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies
- explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs

The drugs of primary interest for our purposes are psychoactive substances—including alcohol, tobacco, some pharmaceutical medications, cannabis and other illegal drugs. However these competencies, with minor modification, could be applied to many aspects of health and wellbeing as they encourage the development of both autonomy and social belonging.