

Portfolio

Student number: 2223470

Moving away from the traditional classroom: Outdoor education and learning (ECIE6001)

Element 1: Essay – Compare and contrast the scope, and approach to outdoor provision in two types of setting.

Element 2: Flyer

Element 3: Risk Benefit Analysis

Element 4: Literature Review – The role of Outdoor Education



(Gardening, 2019)

Element 1: Essay

This essay examines the scope and approach of outdoor provision in early years and secondary school settings, exploring how each context utilises outdoor spaces to support learning, wellbeing, and curriculum development. Outdoor learning, which occurs outside traditional classrooms, promotes exploration, collaboration, and critical thinking while enhancing creativity and social skills (Parker, 2022). It is applicable across subjects and ages, supporting holistic education and a connection to nature. By exploring pedagogies such as play-based learning in early years versus subject-specific outdoor activities in secondary education, valuable insights can be gained into how outdoor experiences contribute to holistic learning and personal development (Forest Healing, 2024). The writer has firsthand experience in both educational environments, having worked in early years education for several years while also having children who have attended secondary school, which offers a unique insight into the challenges and successes in each setting.

Outdoor learning in the early years is supported by the Early Years Foundation Phase (EYFP), emphasising holistic development through play-based learning, sensory experiences, and physical activities that foster cognitive and social growth, involve manageable risks, and connect to nature (EEF, 2023). Activities like climbing and mud kitchens nurture resilience, confidence, and independence in a safe environment (Nature Plays, 2023). Mixing mud in the mud kitchen, playing with sand, observing different insects, and collecting leaves enhance a child's appreciation for the natural world (Beach, 2024). Forest Schools are an outdoor learning approach providing movement-rich, sensory, and exploration experiences, building gross motor skills and coordination through natural movement, and supporting physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. The flexibility and child-led nature allow for experiential learning while appropriately managing risks. Children engage with natural materials and use real tools, prompting authentic learning experiences (Forest School Association, 2021). Loose parts play, utilising objects like crates, tyres, saucepans, planks of wood, and guttering, encourages creativity and problem-solving (Jasmine, 2024). Educators facilitate and observe learning by following children's interests, rather than directing everything, and using open-ended questions and modelling language (Leatherbarrow, 2025). Outdoor provision is an essential and continuous part of education, providing regular opportunities for outdoor activities. The outdoors is an extension of the classroom, with free-flow access supporting all seven key areas of child development, including physical, communication and language, personal, social, and emotional, understanding the world, expressive arts and design, mathematics, and literacy (GOV.UK, 2012).

In contrast, outdoor learning in secondary education takes a more subject-specific, structured approach that supports academic, personal, and social development. It connects subjects like science, geography, physical education, English, and art, enhancing the learning experience (Powell, 2025). Central to this approach is "learning by doing," which promotes investigations, experiments, and teamwork, fostering communication and

collaboration (Sensory Surroundings Limited, 2024). This method aligns with experiential learning principles that emphasise knowledge through experience and reflection (Balcaite, 2024). Moreover, outdoor learning develops practical, social, and personal skills while teaching ecosystems, conservation, and the human impact on the environment, fostering long-term environmental responsibility (Europass Teacher Academy, 2023). Group discussions encourage reflection on experiences and improvement (Love Outdoor Learning, 2026). Activities are adapted to be inclusive, addressing diverse physical, emotional, and cultural needs (Godwin et al., 2025). This approach aligns with the aim of the Equality Act (2010) to prevent discrimination (EHRC, 2018). Additionally, outdoor environments benefit mental health by reducing stress and improving focus, while encouraging physical activity (UNICEF, 2025). Schools utilise local spaces such as school grounds, parks, and community areas to make outdoor learning sustainable and relevant. However, it is less frequent for older children, usually timetabled rather than continuous (Müller-Kuhn, 2025).

The contrasts between the scope of the two settings are that early years education emphasises play, exploration, and sensory experiences integrated into daily practice. In contrast, secondary education focuses on planned curriculum-driven outcomes through field studies and scientific investigations. Early years focus on motor skills, communication, and social interaction, whereas secondary education prioritises critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork. Similarly, while outdoor learning is supported in both settings, it is more prevalent in early years, fostering a connection with nature and respect for the environment (Love Outdoor Learning, 2024).

Early years offer continuous access to well-organised outdoor provision beyond playtime, which is vital for learning through play, as outlined in the Curriculum for Wales (hwb.gov.wales, 2022). Educators provide natural resources and integrate safe risk-taking into their practice (Early Education, 2021). Outdoor spaces extend the indoor curriculum, with resources regularly rotated to maintain stimulation. Educators encourage shared thinking and use observations to inform planning. Children are equipped for all-weather participation (McHugh, 2024). Piaget's Constructivist theory and Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural theory support hands-on and collaborative learning (McArdle, 2023). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's theory underscores the significance of environments in child development, suggesting how outdoor spaces connect children to their ecological context (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022).

In contrast, in secondary education, outdoor learning is integrated into the curriculum. Staff training is essential for effective implementation, and providing defined outdoor areas and equipment is important (Love Outdoor Learning, 2025). Pupil-led exploration is encouraged, and risk-benefit assessments are embedded into the learning process. Local spaces are utilised while ensuring inclusivity by adapting tasks to diverse abilities, needs, and interests. Key theories underpinning this approach include Constructivism, which emphasises learning through experience as highlighted by Piaget, Vygotsky, and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory,

which focuses on knowledge gained through experience (Kurt, 2020). Outdoor learning promotes hands-on activities and fosters collaboration, as outlined in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, enabling children to learn from one another through exploration and discovery (Main, 2022).

The key differences between the two settings are that early years are child-led and play-based in natural settings, allowing free exploration with high supervision. In contrast, secondary education is structured and teacher directed. Assessment in the early years is informal and observational; in secondary education, it is more formal, linked to exams and grades. In contrast, the role of the adult in early years is to facilitate learning and to observe children at play. Froebel stated that play is the most critical tool for a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. When children engage in play, it offers educators the best opportunity to observe and assess their skills. In contrast, secondary teachers act as instructors and evaluators. Lastly, the early years curriculum is flexible and broad, guided by the Early Years Foundation Phase. In contrast, secondary education follows a structured national curriculum that reflects different developmental needs and expectations.

Outdoor learning in education faces significant challenges. Weather can limit activities, and safety is crucial due to potential hazards. Policies such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 ensure that activities are carried out safely (Health, Safety, and Welfare, 2010). Space restrictions, particularly in urban areas, can hinder access to safe environments, while integrating outdoor experiences with curriculum standards can be complex. Budget constraints may limit resources. Some educators may need training to feel confident leading outdoor activities (Welsh Government, 2023). Parental support is important, but safety concerns can create hesitance.

Additionally, managing behaviour outdoors and ensuring inclusivity for all children, including those with special needs, adds complexity. Transitioning between indoor and outdoor settings can require extra time. Each setting aims to help children develop transferable skills such as problem-solving, observation, and decision-making, while also fostering risk awareness and safety. Furthermore, these settings enhance mental wellbeing, increase physical activity, and boost engagement and motivation (MIND, 2025).

In summary, while early years and secondary outdoor education differ significantly in focus, objectives, activities, and educator roles, they share key similarities in promoting experiential learning, teamwork, and critical skills. Despite their differences, outdoor learning in both environments emphasises learning through direct experience rather than classroom instruction alone. Each setting accommodates various learning styles and provides hands-on experiences, benefiting those who may struggle in traditional classrooms. Secondary education could benefit from adopting some early years principles, such as experiential learning to support outdoor learning (Welsh Government, 2023). Recognising these aspects enables educators to tailor outdoor experiences to their children's unique needs effectively.

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The Great Escape - A camping experience for all! 😊

Saturday 8th August 2026 – 10am (everyone to meet at Willow Tree Primary School)



(Summer, 2025)

Get ready for an unforgettable adventure! Whether you're a seasoned camper or a beginner, we're excited to offer you and your family a **FREE** authentic camping experience (🌲 or 😊) inclusive to all, with activities for all skill levels. (Easy-Peasy.AI, 2024)



We've partnered with Serenity Camping, a local campsite passionate about children's wellbeing. Activities include making fires, scavenger hunts, storytelling, nature walks, and lots s'more!

Event - Night under the stars with Serenity Camping ★ Focus - Children's wellbeing and outdoor adventure 💧 Essentials Provided - Tents, sleeping bags, pillows, torches, blankets, and food 🏕️ What to Bring - Warm clothes and an adventurous spirit. Memories - Create unforgettable experiences under the night sky. 🚌 - Available for those who need it.



(Creativeplayuk.com, 2026)



(Freepik, 2026)

Our vision - connect the forest school pedagogy with the Curriculum for Wales. Embracing John Dewey's belief, we recognise that camping offers real-life, hands-on experiences that foster meaningful educational growth (Clarke , 2022).

Camping benefits include - better sleep 🛏️ - reduced stress and anxiety- increased vitamin D – boosts happy hormones- stronger relationships - disconnect from technology-enjoy a digital detox 📵 (Cotswold Outdoor, 2022)

Hurry! Only 8 family spots are available for an exciting adventure at Serenity Camping, Honeyborough, SA73 1DU. To book and find out more, contact Lisa on 07926198545 or email lithomas5582@gmail.com (Parents/carers are responsible for their own children during this event, with staff supervising activities).

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RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:	Fresh Water East Beach	Date:	
Assessor:		Review date:	

The boxes in the table below will expand as you type into them; pre-entered text is simply for illustration. You should delete irrelevant items and replace with text relevant to your circumstances.

Your overall risk rating – Low, medium or high – is based on your judgement about whether the BENEFITS of the activity or opportunity outweigh the RISKS.

ACTIVITY	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk RATING: L/M/H
Exploring rock pools to observe sea life.	- Physical development – relaxation, improves balance, and develops fine motor skills - Mental and social wellbeing - encourages teamwork, appreciates nature, boosts creativity, fosters curiosity and exploration - Real-world learning experiences - problem-solving, supports decision-making, raises environmental awareness	- Drowning - Slippery surfaces - Sharp rocks - Weather exposure - Dogs - Rubbish - Rising tide - Falling into a rock pool - Bites/stings - Lost child - hygiene	Young people, adults	- no swimming - sunscreen/hats – appropriate clothing such as waterproofs - inspect the area for rubbish - first aid kit - Check tide time before visit - safety boundaries introduced - check ground conditions - appropriate footwear - check the weather forecast - If children see a dog, tell them not to touch it - no running - adult-to-child ratio - no climbing - regular headcounts - no hand-to-mouth during activity - handwashing/sanitiser	Low
Supervised paddling	Physical development – relaxation, improves balance and coordination,	- Drowning - Non-swimmers - Underwater hazards - Sharp rocks	Young people, adults	- Check the area before the activity for danger - First aid kit - Spare clothing	Medium

	strengthens muscles • Active play - supports circulation and resilience • Sensory development – engages multiple senses, supports sensory processing • Mental and social skills – encourages cooperative play, supports communication – reduces stress, is less restricted, promotes curiosity, learning to appreciate the natural environment, stimulates creativity • Real-world learning - problem-solving develops critical thinking skills • Risk awareness – creating confidence • Encourages independence	• Bites/stings • Current • Seaweed • Hypothermia • Sun exposure • Lost child		• Children only paddle up to their knees • Safety boundaries • Water shoes • No running • Check tide time before visit • Limit time in water • Sunscreen/hats • Drink water • Regular headcounts • High- visibility jackets • Weather forecast	

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Element 4: Literature Review

This literature review will examine the role of outdoor education. Outdoor learning is a pedagogical approach that leverages both natural and constructed environments to enrich educational experiences and complements traditional classroom learning (Clarke, 2022). Outdoor education encompasses any organised educational activity outside the classroom, though it is not limited to structured formats. Effective outdoor learning requires an understanding that goes beyond simply taking indoor activities outside. Outdoor learning encompasses activities that encourage discovery and a connection with nature, according to The Institute of Outdoor Learning (2020). It involves environmental and adventure-based activities (Robb, 2023).

Examples include Forest School sessions, community projects, and leveraging the environment's unique qualities for play-based learning. Outdoor learning, particularly through the Forest School approach, exemplifies the Montessori approach by promoting exploration and child-led learning (Montessori Education — Montessori Northwest, 2025). Similarly, the Reggio Emilia approach, founded by Italian teacher Loris Malaguzzi in the 1940's, emphasises exploration beyond the classroom, fostering children's curiosity and interests, and a connection to the environment (Hargraves, 2020). Theories from John Dewey (1938) and Friedrich Fröbel (1826) emphasise experiential learning and the importance of outdoor environments. Dewey argued that educational experiences should relate to real life. At the same time, Froebel, who created kindergarten, believed that outdoor environments are vital for children's understanding of their world, promoting engagement through outdoor play. Together, their ideas highlight the role of outdoor education in fostering personal growth, critical thinking, and appreciation for nature and community (Froebel Trust, 2022). This perspective aligns with the four core purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, which highlights outdoor learning as crucial for developing capable, creative, and responsible individuals. The new Curriculum for Wales emphasises the importance of outdoor learning for both children and educators (Welsh Government, 2022). The Welsh Government considers it essential for effective, learner-centred teaching that promotes wellbeing, confidence, and engagement while supporting social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development. Outdoor learning enhances cross-curricular skills, creativity, and environmental empathy, while also enhancing learners' ability to assess risk and build resilience (Edwards, 2022).

Outdoor education provides numerous benefits for children, enhancing their academic growth and their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing (Forest Healing, 2024). Activities like hiking, rock climbing, and cycling encourage exercise in a natural environment, improving fitness, strength, and endurance, while supporting a healthy lifestyle. This approach helps counter sedentary habits and encourages children to stay active, with schools integrating outdoor activities into physical education to combine fitness with experiential learning (UK, 2025). Outdoor education significantly influences children's mental health and wellbeing. Research indicates that time spent in nature can alleviate stress and anxiety, reduce cortisol levels, and combat depression. The physical activities associated with outdoor education trigger the release of endorphins, natural mood boosters that help children feel more relaxed and positive (Writer, 2024).

Furthermore, nature has a calming effect on the brain, enhancing children's focus and attention. Studies suggest that children participating in outdoor learning activities demonstrate improved concentration in the classroom following their time spent outdoors (Mason et al., 2022). Consequently, many schools have integrated nature-based learning into subjects such as science and geography, fostering a more holistic and engaging educational experience (Muddy Puddle Teacher, 2025). A 2019 study conducted by the Institute of Education on behalf of The Wildlife Trusts revealed that 79 per cent of children felt more confident after engaging in outdoor activities, while 84 per cent felt capable of attempting new activities. This research highlights that time spent outdoors enhances the happiness and wellbeing of young people (Sheldrake, Amos and Reiss, 2019).

Additionally, a 2021 study by Natural England revealed that 85 per cent of young people believe being in nature contributes to their happiness, with those who spend time outside at least once a week more likely to report experiencing high levels of happiness (Harman, 2024). Outdoor learning offers significant advantages, particularly in fostering a lasting appreciation for nature. When children interact with the natural environment, they develop a sense of responsibility that shapes their attitudes towards sustainability (padayichie, 2022). Early enjoyment of outdoor play fosters a profound appreciation for the environment, influencing their lifelong behaviours. This exposure can enhance mindfulness about energy consumption, responsible waste disposal, and recycling practices (Lawrence, 2023).

In addition to environmental awareness, outdoor play significantly enhances fine motor development in numerous ways. Activities such as holding ropes, swinging on chains, and balancing small objects during imaginative play help build hand strength, coordination, and agility in a fun, natural, and safe environment. Engaging with outdoor materials, drawing with chalk, and manoeuvring through spaces promote controlled, purposeful movement (Giesen, 2025). Moreover, outdoor play is vital for children's social skills development. Interactions with peers in natural environments enhance communication skills, social awareness, and problem-solving skills. Outdoor activities provide opportunities to practice important soft skills, such as taking turns and sharing, which are foundational to building relationships and navigating social contexts (Creative Play, 2023).

Research suggests that outdoor learning has numerous positive effects on children's mental health and wellbeing (Morgan, 2025). However, it is essential to recognise that these benefits do not apply universally to all children. Some may face challenges, particularly those with sensory processing issues, which can influence their experience, motivation, and engagement in outdoor learning environments. Addressing these individual differences is crucial to ensuring that all children can benefit from outdoor education (Harvey, 2025). Additionally, some children may prefer more structured and predictable environments. For these children, the unpredictability of nature or the vastness of outdoor spaces may trigger anxiety or discomfort. It is essential to consider these preferences and concerns to provide enriching opportunities that outdoor education provides (Gray et al., 2025).

Demographic factors significantly impact outdoor engagement. Cultural differences may lead some families to deprioritise outdoor activities due to varying values or limited access to nature. This can influence lifestyle choices and environmental appreciation (Waite et al., 2021). Furthermore, restricted access to safe outdoor spaces may foster fear and anxiety, reduce social interaction, and weaken community cohesion (Forest School Learning Initiative, 2025). Social and emotional barriers, such as low confidence, peer pressure, and social dynamics, can inhibit participation in group activities (Ulset et al., 2025). This aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in which children's lower-level needs must be met before they can engage socially or confidently (Cherry, 2024). Research indicates that outdoor learning positively influences children's engagement with nature and their understanding of sustainability (Kiviranta et al., 2024). However, it is essential to recognise that these benefits are not experienced universally. Pro-environmental attitudes do not always result in consistent behaviour change, as actions are frequently influenced by practical and social factors rather than solely by individuals' beliefs. Some individuals may feel that their personal efforts to make a difference have minimal impact (Markowitz et al., 2012).

Children are naturally inclined to imitate the behaviours and habits of those around them, particularly their parents and caregivers (The Conscious Mind, 2025). This inclination means that the everyday practices observed within the home can significantly influence their development and worldview. One of the most effective ways to instil eco-conscious values in children is to model these principles through our own actions. By fostering an environment that values the outdoors, children can develop a lasting appreciation for

nature (Mugan, 2025). Children imitating behaviours, according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, consider how different environmental layers influence development. He believed that the role of the home, the microsystem, is to model sustainable behaviours, directly shaping children's values and attitudes toward the environment (Cherry, 2023). This modelling can also extend to the exosystem, including community and institutional influences, which reinforce or challenge what children learn at home. Understanding these layers reveals how various contexts collectively shape children's perceptions of sustainability. This connection highlights the importance of consistent modelling of eco-conscious behaviours in fostering a strong environmental ethic in children (Guy-Evans, 2025). To integrate sustainability into education, it must be embedded within the curriculum to ensure that initiatives do not come across as merely tokenistic. Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) is designed to equip young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate and contribute to life in the 21st century (Welsh Government, 2023). It encompasses more than a mere body of knowledge; it embodies values and attitudes, understanding, and skills. It represents an ethos that can be integrated throughout schools, encouraging the adoption of certain attitudes, fostering a value system, and promoting a way of life. ESDGC connects the environment to the people who inhabit it, exploring the interrelations among all living beings. It acknowledges the injustices and inequalities present in the world while emphasising that it can be reshaped and transformed through the attitudes, values, and behaviours of its inhabitants (Adran and Oes, 2008).

One notable initiative in this realm is Farms for City Children, a UK charity founded in 1976 by author Sir Michael Morpurgo and his wife, Clare. The charity provides urban children, particularly those from underprivileged areas, with a week-long residential stay on a working farm to connect with nature. The initiative fosters independence, teamwork, and resilience through hands-on activities. A survey conducted by Farms for City Children found that 87 per cent of young people reported a better understanding of nature following their visit; 72 per cent showed improved perseverance, while 76 per cent gained greater awareness of food origins. Furthermore, 78 per cent said they either made or strengthened friendships during their visit (Countryside Classroom, 2026). The role of outdoor education is both multifaceted and crucial in fostering a holistic learning experience. It enhances engagement, as outdoor settings often capture children's interest more effectively than traditional classrooms, making the learning process more dynamic and enjoyable (Welsh Government, 2023). Outdoor education promotes active learning by encouraging hands-on, experiential opportunities that allow children to engage directly with their environment and develop practical skills. Moreover, it fosters environmental awareness, helps children connect with nature, and cultivates a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the environment. Social skills are also enhanced through group activities in outdoor settings, which promote teamwork, communication, and leadership as children collaborate and support one another. Evidence suggests that outdoor learning should be formally adopted into the curriculum rather than treated as an occasional activity (Learning through Landscapes, 2023). Outdoor education is integrated into the Curriculum to incorporate various subjects, such as science, history, and physical education, reinforcing interdisciplinary learning.

In summary, outdoor education is crucial in developing well-rounded individuals prepared to navigate modern challenges while fostering environmental respect. Critics, however, raise concerns about practical issues such as space, safety, weather, and training, as well as the academic rigour of such initiatives in secondary education. Play is a fundamental right of childhood, as outlined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that children have the right to rest, leisure, and play, as well as to engage in cultural and artistic activities (Holland, 2018). To enhance outdoor education, it is vital to integrate it into the curriculum and invest in staff training (Welsh Government, 2023). Collaboration with local partners and a whole-school approach that listens to children's voices in decision-making can further strengthen these

initiatives. Addressing barriers like excessive paperwork and curriculum pressures will help maximise the benefits of outdoor education for all children.

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