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https://app.grammarly.com/	02/03/2025	Look over my grammar, etc	Please check the following text for readability, grammar and syntax
https://copilot.microsoft.com/	02/03/2025	Help structure and Research	Can you advise me on how to structure my essay. Can you find some research on so and so subject.

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‘Change the Story’: Evaluating How Children’s Physical Literacy and Skills Can Be Developed Through Outdoor and Adventure Learning

Introduction

Physical literacy is mostly described as having the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activity for life (Whitehead, 2010). However, recent research argues that physical literacy is not all about performance, but about meaningful and inclusive movement experiences that shape long-term participation (Pushkarenko, Causgrove Dunn and Wohlers, 2021). This moves the focus away from just ability and instead makes sure that all children feel able and motivated to take part.

Developing fundamental movement skills in early childhood is strongly associated with higher levels of physical activity later in life. Piotrowski et al. (2025) In a recent scoping review, they explain that movement competence links early physical education experiences with continued participation. This shows how important primary school PE is for developing physical literacy.

This essay looks at my primary school PE lessons and my Year 6 trip to Pendine. It explains how these experiences helped my development, but also looks at times when they may not have included everyone or had a lasting impact.

Primary PE and Participation

In primary school, PE mostly included football, rugby, hockey and gymnastics. More often than not, we had lessons once a week, and they usually followed a drill-based activities. Skills were practised separately first, and then used in a game at the end of the lesson. While this helped improve technique, it also showed a traditional style of teaching that focused mainly on performance.

Because I was already involved in club football and swimming outside school, I felt confident and always participated in lessons. Research shows that pupils who see themselves as competent are more likely to enjoy physical activity and continue with it (Piotrowski et al., 2025). Playing football every day at breaktime also helped my development, as practising regularly can improve movement skills and confidence. Because of this, the school environment supported my own physical literacy.

However, not everyone had the same experience. Some pupils in my class disliked PE, and it was noticeable that more girls than boys sometimes chose to sit out. Research shows that girls often disengage when PE feels overly competitive or dominated by traditional team sports (Women in Sport, 2022). Bracco, Lodewyk and Morrison (2019) found that disengaged girls frequently report feeling marginalised in performance-oriented lessons, particularly where decision-making and autonomy are limited. This suggests that the structure of lessons may unintentionally favour those already confident in sport.

Cross country wasn't inclusive in my opinion, as we had a practice race as a school, and whoever did well would then go on to compete. While this rewarded high performers, it excluded less confident runners. Pushkarenko et al. (2021) argue that physical literacy must prioritise inclusion and accessibility. In this case, competition supported excellence but did not support broad engagement. Representing the school became more about showing ability rather than being a learning experience for everyone.

There was also limited differentiation within lessons. Tasks were often the same for everyone, regardless of ability. Without adaptation, pupils who struggle may repeatedly experience failure, which can negatively affect motivation. Physical literacy frameworks emphasise creating positive and meaningful experiences for all learners (Whitehead, 2010; Sport Wales, 2018). Where differentiation is limited, this aim is weakened.

Teaching Style and Skill Development

Most lessons were led by the teacher, with clear instructions and pupils copying the demonstrations. While this gave structure and control to the lesson, it limited chances for pupils to make their own choices. Leyton-Román, Núñez and Jiménez-Castuera (2020) Research shows that supporting student choice in PE can improve their intention to stay physically active. When pupils are involved in making decisions, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership over their learning.

In my experience, there were not many chances to try different ways of moving or to adapt skills in a creative way. This may have supported short-term technical performance but limited deeper understanding. Roberts, Newcombe and Davids (2019) argue that a constraints-led approach encourages pupils to adapt skills in dynamic environments, which better reflects real game situations. Compared to repetitive drills, this approach promotes decision-making and problem-solving, both key aspects of physical literacy.

Another issue in the lessons was that we didn't get many chances to work together or learn from each other. Most activities were done on our own or in groups chosen by the teacher, so we didn't really use teamwork or help each other improve. Studies show that working in groups can help pupils feel more confident and motivated, especially those who don't see themselves as "sporty" (Bracco et al., 2019). When pupils solve problems together or support each other, success isn't just about being the best performer. In my PE lessons, the focus on drills meant there wasn't much space for this kind of learning. Because of that, some pupils may have felt less included, and the wider aims of physical literacy, like building confidence and social skills, were not fully supported.

Lunchtime football was a lot different to actual lessons. It was less structured, more competitive and more pupil-led. The playground environment provided varied opportunities to run, change direction and make quick decisions. From an ecological perspective, different environments can provide better learning opportunities because they make people adapt to new situations

(Roberts et al., 2019). In this case, informal play may have helped develop transferable skills more than structured drills.

However, these opportunities were not available to everyone equally. Older and more confident pupils often dominated the goals. While the environment provided possibilities for development, access to those opportunities was unequal. This also raises questions about inclusion. Physical literacy cannot be fully developed where participation is informally restricted by confidence or social hierarchy (Pushkarenko et al., 2021).

Outdoor and Adventure Learning

The Year 6 residential trip to Pendine included climbing, canoeing, bodyboarding, hiking and extreme river activities. These activities were instructor-led and introduced experiences that were not part of the regular curriculum. According to the UK Chief Medical Officers (2019), varied and enjoyable physical experiences are important in encouraging children to value active lifestyles. Exposure to new environments can broaden perceptions of what physical activity involves.

Scrutton (2020) found that residential outdoor education can improve teamwork, resilience and self-awareness, particularly when pupils face unfamiliar challenges. In my case, the activities were enjoyable because they were new and different from traditional team sports. The experience changed my understanding of physical activity, as I realised there were alternatives beyond football and rugby.

However, the impact on my confidence was limited because I was already confident in physical activity. For less active pupils, the experience may have been more transformative. Yet the residential was a one-off event, not clearly connected to the rest of the PE curriculum. Scrutton (2020) says that the impact of outdoor learning is strongest when experiences are revisited and embedded over time. Without continuation, its long-term influence on physical literacy may be reduced.

If outdoor learning had been integrated more regularly within school grounds, it may have supported broader engagement. Piotrowski et al. (2025) emphasise that consistent exposure to varied movement experiences strengthens overall competence. A single residential, while memorable, can't replace ongoing curriculum development.

Critical Reflection and Change

Looking back at my experiences, it's clear that primary PE helped me develop because I already felt confident and capable. As I wrote, "the pupils who start off confident often get even more out of PE, while others may lose interest," which shows how easily some children can be left behind. Traditional lessons, competitive activities and limited differentiation often supported those who were already sporty, rather than helping everyone progress.

Another thing that stands out when looking back is how little PE is connected to pupils' wider wellbeing. Most lessons focused on skills or performance, but we rarely talked about why being active matters for health, confidence or enjoyment. Physical literacy includes understanding the value of movement, not just being able to perform it (Whitehead, 2010). If teachers had explained these ideas more clearly, some pupils might have seen PE in a more positive way. This could have helped those who were less confident realise that PE is not only about being good at sport, but about finding activities that make you feel good.

To improve this, PE needs to focus less on performance and more on providing every child with a positive, meaningful experience. More regular lessons, chances for pupils to make choices, and activities that encourage problem-solving would help build motivation and confidence for all learners. Outdoor and adventure learning should also be used more often, not just during a single residential trip, so that pupils who don't enjoy traditional sports can still find activities they connect with.

Overall, physical literacy develops best when children feel included, supported and able to succeed. My experiences show both the benefits and the limits of the PE I received. If schools want to "change the story," they need to create PE environments that are enjoyable, varied and welcoming for every child, not only those who already feel confident in sport.

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