

How children's physical literacy and skills can be developed through outdoor/adventure learning

Student name: Brooklyn Phillips

Student number: 2502317

AI Tool (with url)	Date used	Why did you use this tool	Example prompt(s)
https://chatgpt.com/	04/03/2026	Asked it for some websites that are relevant to the assignment	Can you give me some websites for How children's physical literacy and skills can be developed through outdoor/adventure learning
https://chatgpt.com/	04/03/2026	Use of bullet points and paragraphs	Can you tell me how many paragraphs/ bullet points do i need for 1500 words
https://chatgpt.com/	05/03/2026	To go over my writing to see if my gramma is correct	Can you read this assignment and tell me if i have properly used my gramma and it is all correct

Introduction

Physical literacy is a holistic concept that goes beyond mere physical skills; it incorporates the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding needed for lifelong engagement in physical activity. This disposition has been explicitly endorsed in Wales, where high-quality physical education is expected to enable every child to become physically literate and enjoy sport and physical activity throughout life. Accordingly, this essay evaluates how outdoor and adventure learning approaches, guided by theory, can develop children's physical literacy and skills.

Physical literacy: concept and components

(Whitehead's 2012) definition of physical literacy emphasizes the integration of affective, cognitive and physical domains. In practice, a physically literate child is not only capable of performing movements but is also motivated and knowledgeable about being active. Its core components include:

- Motivation and confidence – the willingness to engage in and persist with physical activity.
- Physical competence – proficiency in fundamental movement skills and physical tasks.
- Knowledge and understanding – cognitive grasp of tactics, safety and the benefits of activity.

When these elements are combined, children are more likely to enjoy and sustain active lifestyles. Developing physical literacy thus implies holistic growth: children must practice movements (e.g running, throwing, balancing) and also learn why they matter for health and well-being. For example, a climbing challenge demands balance and strength (physical

competence) while providing an exciting test that builds confidence. Research in Wales found that children playing freely outdoors improved basic locomotor skills but often failed to master object-control skills (e.g. throwing, catching) without specific teaching. This highlights the need for guided activity even in play teachers should scaffold development in all skill areas.

Outdoor and adventure learning contexts

Recent research supports broad benefits of learning outdoors. (Pikus, 2026) found that nature-based schooling “fosters literacy, physical health and social-emotional skills” suggesting that time in nature enhances multiple developmental domains. Natural environments afford rich movement possibilities. Gibson’s ecological theory suggests that children perceive affordances in their surroundings – features that invite particular actions. Forests, playgrounds and uneven terrain provide affordances for climbing, jumping, balancing and other activities. (Björger, 2016) observed that children attain higher activity levels in natural settings because these environments “offer potential qualities that are a catalyst for physical activity”. In practice, this means features like hills, tree stumps or uneven ground naturally invite energetic play.

Research also shows that outdoor play brings multi-faceted benefits. For instance, it is well documented that “playing outdoors... increases children’s physical activity levels, while also having several positive effects on children’s health, wellness, learning and development”. Beyond fitness, outdoor learning tends to enhance well-being, curiosity and social interaction. Learning outdoors often feels more authentic and engaging. For example, measuring the height of a tree with one’s own body or balancing on a beam gives concrete experience of measurement and physics.

Calculated-risk activities are especially powerful. Climbing trees or other obstacles gives learners the chance to assess manageable risk in a safe setting. Overcoming such challenges helps children “build confidence and resilience whilst also improving their balance, coordination, and physical strength”. These experiences support the affective component of physical literacy by proving to children that they can master new skills. In summary, outdoor/adventure learning provides a holistic context that engages physical, cognitive and emotional development, helping children build the competence, confidence and understanding central to physical literacy.

Pedagogical models and teaching approaches

Effective outdoor learning is guided by pedagogy and adapted to learners. Several frameworks can help teachers structure adventure activities:

- Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Mosston & Ashworth): This ranges from teacher-led (command) to learner-led (self-teaching) approaches. In outdoor settings, more learner-centered styles encourage children’s autonomy and creativity in solving movement challenges. For example, guided discovery might let pupils explore a nature-based obstacle on their own before the teacher provides feedback.
- Heron’s facilitation modes: Heron distinguishes hierarchical from cooperative or autonomous modes. A facilitative style outdoors in which teachers observe children experimenting and intervene minimally – supports self-directed learning and reflection. For instance, a teacher might pose a problem (like building a bridge across

a stream) and then act mainly as a catalyst, asking open questions to extend learning after the attempt.

- STEP model: This model aids adaptation. Outdoors, a teacher can adjust the playing area (choosing varied terrain), modify task rules (simpler or harder objectives), vary equipment (light vs heavy objects) or change group sizes to make an outdoor game accessible to different skill levels. Such modifications ensure success and challenge for all learners.
- Models-based practice (e.g. TGfU, Sport Education): These curricular models frame lesson design. For instance, the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) model (Bunker & Thorpe 1982) is learner-centred, focusing on game-play and problem-solving. As one description notes, TGfU “focuses on developing pupils to attain a level of game competence, promoting enjoyment and involvement”. In an outdoor context, a TGfU-inspired approach might involve adventure games (e.g relay races or orienteering exercises) that emphasize decision-making and teamwork instead of isolated skill practice.
- Adventure Education models: These design sustained experiential challenges (e.g. multi-day expeditions or ropes courses) to develop personal and social skills. They emphasize “challenge by choice” letting learners opt in to tasks and structured reflection, so that students build resilience, leadership and teamwork alongside physical skills.

By combining these approaches, teachers can create coherent outdoor programs. For example, a teacher might use a guided discovery style (Spectrum) to pose a climbing problem, subtly facilitating (Heron) as children experiment. The teacher can adjust the challenge using STEP (e.g. shorter ropes or fewer obstacles) and frame the activity within an Adventure Education model that encourages teamwork and reflection. Over several weeks, an outdoor navigation unit could use Sport Education principles (forming teams, assigning roles and reflecting on performance) to teach map-reading and orienteering skills in context. In each case, the pedagogy is intentionally chosen: learners remain active and engaged, but with guidance that matches the outdoor context and the learners’ needs.

Alignment with Curriculum for Wales

The Welsh curriculum explicitly supports outdoor learning as a pedagogical approach. The Foundation Phase (ages 3-7) is play-based and “emphasises the use of the outdoors” as integral to learning. Research notes that this approach yields benefits in physical development and holistic learning. Outdoor learning can also engage learners who struggle in traditional settings: as one guide observes, a child who is disengaged in class may often “thrive in an outdoor setting”. As children progress to ages 7-14, “adventurous activities” form part of the formal physical education curriculum.

The new Curriculum for Wales also enshrines outdoor learning in law. Official guidance observes that “high quality outdoor learning will develop knowledge, skills and behaviours consistent with the desired outcomes of the four purposes”. In fact, Welsh guidance asserts that “Outdoor learning should be a natural, integrated and stimulating part of the curriculum”. In practice, this means that taking lessons outdoors – whether in mathematics, science or the humanities is explicitly seen as a way to achieve cross-curricular and personal goals. Welsh policy envisages a whole-school approach: for example, one report proposes that every subject should contribute to physical literacy and activity.

By incorporating movement into daily learning, outdoor approaches connect to Wales's wellbeing and learning aims. For instance, Science and Technology guidance explicitly endorses outdoor fieldwork, noting that such activities help learners "demonstrate care, responsibility and respect for all living things and the environment". Similarly, the Humanities guidance encourages students to "experience and reflect on the wonder of the natural world" through outdoor enquiry. In sum, outdoor and adventure learning naturally aligns with Welsh educational objectives. For example, a teacher might teach geometry by measuring tree heights outdoors or explore ecosystems in the school garden; such practices develop children's physical and cognitive skills simultaneously, supporting curriculum goals (e.g. creating healthy, confident individuals and informed citizens).

Conclusion

By leveraging theory and the dynamic outdoor environment, educators can significantly develop children's physical literacy and skills through adventure learning. Outdoor settings motivate children to move in varied and challenging ways, while activities built around play and problem-solving foster confidence and decision-making. Teaching frameworks like Mosston & Ashworth's Spectrum of Styles, STEP adaptations and models such as TGfU help structure these experiences for skill development. For example, Bjørger's research indicates that natural environments stimulate greater activity and holistic development, while practical examples show how risk-taking activities build children's confidence and resilience. By systematically applying models like TGfU and STEP in outdoor contexts, teachers can scaffold skill acquisition in these rich settings. Such theory-informed, adventure-based practice aligns with the aims of the Welsh curriculum and ensures that children acquire the physical literacy and confidence to lead active lives. Ultimately, by transforming how children interact with play and movement, outdoor/adventure education can truly "change the story" of their learning and health.

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