

Adventure as an Intervention for Young People at Risk of Offending: The construction of a framework to enhance the theoretical underpinning for claimed outcomes

Fiona McCormack

Ref = Whose Journeys?
The Outdoor and Adventure
As Social + Cultural Phenomena
Humberstone et al (2003)
JOL Publisher.

Working with young people at risk of offending has been established as an important role for adventure and outdoor recreation initiatives in the post war years. This was further developed by growing pressures during the 1980s to extend non-custodial sentencing and the search for solutions to combat juvenile delinquency, so a variety of sports oriented projects for young people was introduced. The work of these organisations provides help in the form of activity programmes for inner city young people at risk of offending. The courses are designed to provide challenging and demanding activities at or from inner city centres, using predominantly outdoor pursuits as a method of capturing imagination and building trust between individuals and instructors. The work of such projects and their value for the young people concerned has become the centre of much debate as inner city areas face growing levels of youth crime.

This paper summarises a detailed literature review, which represents a unique attempt to draw together theory from three distinct academic areas; sociology, criminology, and leisure studies. Previous attempts to establish a rationale for intervention had focused on only one or two of these disciplines. This resulted in rationales and scheme outcomes that were difficult to substantiate by reference to the scheme's actual practice. This analysis of the situation was backed by the findings of the criminologist Robins in his study of provision in 1990:

A gap exists between straightforward assertions about the capacities of sports and outdoor adventure programmes to ameliorate social problems such as delinquency, and the scale, scope and variability of what happened on the ground.
(Robins, 1990: 88).

This review examines not only the causes of delinquency and the potential for outdoor recreation and adventure to address these causes, but it also considers the context of varying philosophies of intervention and desired outcomes. The resulting framework represents an important attempt to establish an understanding of the potential for interventions at different levels, via different disciplines and across different types of provision in Britain. The framework provides an analytical

tool to establish clear relationships between outcomes commonly cited (self esteem, diversion and recidivism), levels of intervention, and the internal or external causal factors which lead to delinquency.

This paper will conclude with a discussion about the value of achieving a deeper theoretical underpinning in the development of rationale for adventure based interventions with young people at risk.

Introduction

The basis for using outdoor activities and adventure in the personal development of young people can be found in the theories developed by Kurt Hahn, founder in 1934 of Gordonstoun School. The school was based on the philosophy of education to 'develop the righteous and the active citizen, with a strong emphasis on leadership and service' (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993: 24).

These objectives were to be achieved through the use of expeditions into the hills and on small boats, as well as through physical training and community service. However, the application of these theories was not restricted to public schools. Hahn developed the Moray Badge scheme, a forerunner of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Hahn's theory, centred on the power of adventure, used the experience to satisfy the needs of adolescents in their transition to adulthood. Basic to this philosophy, and that of Outward Bound, was that using adventure could be common to all, and was not a reflection of physical ability. A second major influence in the development of outdoor recreation for young people was Baden Powell, with his emphasis on outdoor activities for character building within the Scouting and Guiding movements.

The use of outdoor activities has therefore an important link with the concept of adventure. The concept of adventure has been expanded from both a philosophical and a romantic perspective, from ancient writers such as Plato to many modern educationalists. It is however, the philosophical view that can be used to establish a theory for the use of adventure activities. Mortlock (1971) was important in placing these philosophies regarding adventure into a theoretical framework. His definition gives an indication of the potential of outdoor adventure in the prevention of delinquency:

Adventure is a state of mind that begins with feelings of uncertainty about the outcome of a journey and always ends with feelings of enjoyment, satisfaction, or elation about the successful completion of that journey (Mortlock, 1973: 4)

The impact of adventure on individuals was also summarised by Everard as cited in Hopkins & Putnam (1993) as the development of self concept. The positive development of self concept is central in evaluating Outward Bound projects. Unfortunately, self concept is difficult to define and to measure, particularly in the long term. The benefits of improved self concept are often seen as self esteem, reduced anxiety and improved self confidence. Many attempts have been made to offer empirical evidence in support of these claims. Recent research, however, has

highlighted the current paradoxical perspectives around the 'celebration' of self-esteem (see Emler, 2001). Classically, Roberts, White and Parker (1974: 2) concluded in a study of the 'character training industry' that 'Following their training most young people feel 'different'', more mature, self confident, and better capable of handling relationships".

The use of adventure as a therapeutic tool for social work and counselling has been predominantly developed in America. Gass (1993) explained the rationale for the use of adventure in the 1990s from a sociological perspective. Taking the basic idea from Kurt Hahn, that young people who feel unneeded will behave in a variety of inappropriate ways, Gass considered the role of adolescents in western culture. He suggested that they require certain life skills such as self confidence, self discipline, judgement and responsibility. However, the social structure of the 1990s no longer offers the same opportunity as previous decades for these skills to develop naturally. In analysing this problem he concluded that 'Outward Bound and its derivative, wilderness therapy, can be seen as educational processes where adolescents are initiated into pro-social values that form the basis of western culture" (Gass, 1993: 19).

To conclude, the basis for the use of adventure education with young people is found in the ideals of Kurt Hahn. Adventure education offers opportunities for the development of self concept and provides opportunities to mature to adulthood. Furthermore, the work of Gass would suggest that adventure offers the opportunity for socialisation into western culture and values. Based on these benefits, Blunkett, the Minister for Education, announced proposals in January 2000 to offer adventure activity weeks for all sixteen year olds through the national curriculum (*The Guardian*, 3/1/200, p.1). However, can these benefits contribute to a reduction in delinquency? This discussion will compare the benefits or claimed outcomes from adventure based programmes to the factors which may contribute to delinquency, in order to establish links which would support their use as interventions with young people at risk of offending.

Causation factors of deviance

In a review of the literature that seeks to explain deviance and delinquency the following potential causation factors were identified. These appeared to be divided into two distinct groups and so the theory of human behaviour in terms of agency and structure was considered. Giddens (1982) offers a critique of the agency versus structure debate, first introduced by Durkheim. This debate may be critical to assessing the causation theories of deviance quoted here. Durkheim suggests that our individual actions are not so much influenced by our personality or physical make up (internal factors) but by the society in which we live. Societies, he suggested, exert social constraints over our actions. Social structure constrains our activities and thus sets limits to what we can do as individuals. However, critics of this theory would argue that we are also the creators of our society, and not just creatures of it.

In the light of this analysis the causes have been grouped under internal and external factors as follows:

EXTERNAL Structural Factors

Poverty and urban deprivation
The social residential setting
A breakdown in public morality
A lack of early parental guidance and control
An attempt to conform to negative labelling by society



Peer pressure and group dynamics



INTERNAL Agency Factors

An expression of boredom or frustration
A search for status and recognition
A search for entertainment and challenge
A phase of rebellion against society

Adventure education or activities can offer benefits which may combat or alter some of the conditions which may contribute to delinquency.

A search for excitement as a result of boredom

Some theories explaining the motivation for delinquency suggest that an acceptable diversion and excitement is required, to lessen its attraction. The solution would need to be physically and mentally challenging for the individual, and offer personal thrills and excitement. The most popular solution both in Britain and the US has been the use of adventure or outdoor activity courses. Adventure activities are freer, with fewer rules and structures to impose. The challenge is offered on an individual basis by a non-personal force, the land and the weather conditions. It is therefore not necessarily a show of personal strength which wins against another, but the endurance of the individual against the unknown which offers all participants an opportunity to succeed in the activities.

Adventure activities are frequently dangerous. The level of risk can be controlled to some degree by training, equipment, activity session design and venue: mountaineering, abseiling and water sports all present some degree of excitement through the experience. The question which must be addressed, is whether this excitement will be sufficient to overcome the 'buzz' of delinquent behaviour.

Day (1967) reported that in the results of a Rainer Foundation experiment with boys under detention in 1960:

It would be an over simplification to suggest that rock climbing or any other outdoor activity can give exactly the same combination of thrills and satisfaction, but these present alternatives which do not meet with the same censure.

(Day, 1967: 191)

From this, Day concluded that adventure can have a role in demonstrating to young people that some thrills and excitement can be achieved legitimately.

Social residential setting and poverty

Traditionally, adventure activities take young people away from their own environment for a short time. This has led to the major criticism of the use of outdoor pursuits that they fail to address the social setting, and therefore the most persistent and influential factor in the development of delinquent behaviour. Although the adventures may be exciting and effective in short lived attitude and behaviour changes, they fail to address long term problems, and therefore once returned to the home environment the young people will return to their delinquent sub-cultures. There are now two different responses to this criticism; firstly, that by going somewhere different, young people can adjust their horizons and see a wider perspective on the opportunities presented in society. Unfortunately, there is little evaluation to support this argument. The second response is to create adventure in the home or urban environment, which may be continued.

Socialisation or process of maturation (delinquency is phasic)

Developmental youth work stresses the need to develop the following abilities within the socialisation process :

- identify and develop their capacities - physical, intellectual, moral , spiritual, social and emotional;
 - recognise and accept their responsibilities, as individuals, citizens, group members;
 - evaluate the context in which they live and act accordingly.
- (Huskins, 1992: 5)

These skills must be developed if young people are fully to integrate into adult society and avoid delinquency. Adventure activities have been identified as a way of developing these skills. Firstly, since adventure activities are non-competitive, young people can develop an understanding of their own capacity in a positive way, not in comparison to other people, which had often been demeaning for them previously. Secondly, since many adventure activities cannot be undertaken alone, young people can develop an understanding of the importance of working as part of a team, co-operating with others and trusting each other. It is more difficult to see how adventure can achieve the third objective of a better understanding of their own home environment, whilst away on an adventure.

Perceived need for status

Although adventure will not confer status on any individual in conventional terms (scholastic, employment or community recognition), it is suggested that through the development of self concept, young people will develop a more realistic and optimistic view of themselves. This new self concept may help young people to rationalise their need for perceived status, and the adventures themselves may give self confidence. From this, young people may no longer need to strive for recognition

and status through delinquent means, since their improved self confidence will reduce feelings of status frustration.

Need to belong or conform to their peer group

Adventure activities can address this in two main ways; firstly, by removing youngsters from a delinquent peer group, or secondly, by altering delinquent aspects of their peer group. Adventure, if used individually, removes the young person from their peer group and introduces them to new groups of people. By successfully completing an adventure, the young person will develop team-work skills and will develop a sense of belonging to a new peer group. However, the weakness with this principle is that on returning to the home environment, the young person will be subject again to strong pressures to conform to the original peer group. Adventure activities can also be used to alter the attitudes and behaviour of the peer group. Through a group adventure experience, the young people can learn to work together closely, and to value new or different qualities within their members.

A lack of parental control and lack of moral guidance

Adventure alone will not replace a lack of parental control, nor will it seek to offer moral education in a formal delivery. However, the environment of adventure can be used to develop trust and respect for adult leaders in young people. These strong relationships can produce adult role models for young people when such models are lacking in family life. However the short-term nature of most residential adventure experiences would indicate that although role models may appear, and their short-term influence be very strong, the long term influences will be negligible or will diminish. McKay (1993) suggested from one American longitudinal study, that recidivism after five years is at the same level amongst those who have been on such a programme as those in custody.

The theory of adventure experiences as developed by Gass (1993) stresses that the experience, process and environment will contribute to producing:

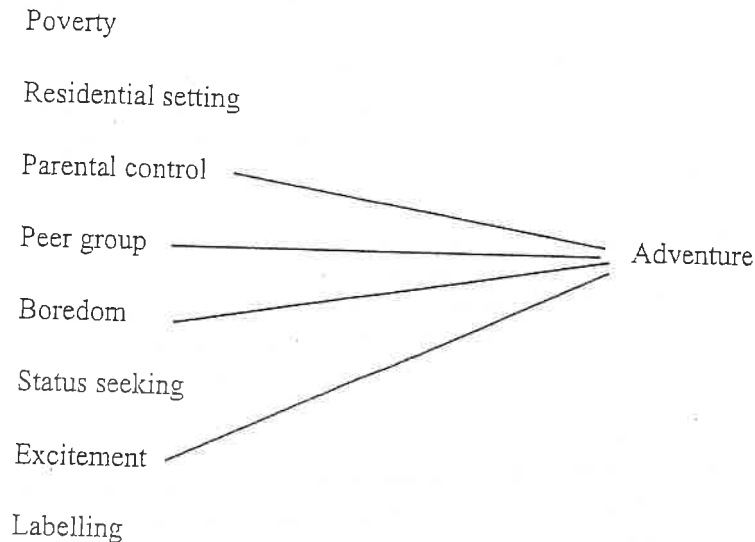
individuals who have not had the opportunity to develop a strong set of prosocial values. Given exposure to the proper experience, they will develop self worth, personal responsibility, and a sense of connection to society and others.

(Gass, 1993: 19)

Adventure activity offers a tool for personal development, a legitimate opportunity for physical challenge and excitement and, in the short term, offers relief from boredom. The use of adventure as an intervention in juvenile delinquency has both statistical and anecdotal evidence to support these outcomes, which will be demonstrated when it is considered in terms of intervention. The relationship between the causes of delinquency and potential outcomes from participation in adventure experiences is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The Relationship Of The Causes Of Delinquency To The Benefits
Of Participation In Adventure

Causes of Delinquency



The diagram as tool for analysis enables those with an interest in the potential for adventure activities with young people at risk to more accurately predict and record the impact of activities on 'at risk factors'. It would allow providers to offer clearer rationales for their claimed outcomes, and those charged with allocating resources and planning interventions for individuals at risk to more easily focus on the appropriateness of adventure given these individuals' at risk background.

Stages and philosophies of intervention

However in a climate of cost cutting and ever tightening budgets the media view of adventure as 'safari holidays' has been difficult to shake off. It was also important therefore in the analysis to consider the differing stages of intervention and philosophies behind intervention. The use of adventure within a strategy for juvenile crime prevention will be considered under Brantingham and Faust's (1973) three level framework: primary (community), secondary (targeted at risk) and tertiary (post offending) levels.

At the most simple level, it is difficult to envisage how adventure programmes can contribute to primary prevention, that is interventions which seek to alleviate the factors which may contribute to crime, such as poverty, unemployment and poor housing. Indeed, it would be naive to suggest that adventure and outdoor activity courses can improve the residential setting, though they do offer an opportunity to widen horizons for the participants. For disaffected young people

living in a run down environment, an opportunity for adventure, visiting somewhere different may help to inspire renewed enthusiasm for life. There is little evidence to support this theory, and even those anecdotal references involving feedback from participants, have been seen to show only short-term positive effects. Therefore, it is clear that there is a need to follow up such experiences in the home environment. The provision of adventure playgrounds, for example, can assist in improving the physical environment. This proposition was supported by research into the role of recreation and adventure activities by HM Inspectorate in 1990. Reporting on these findings, John Huskins suggested :

If young people are to grow up and achieve their full potential they need love and affection, stimulus and encouragement, positive role models and the support of a range of adults whom they can trust. Even under ideal conditions these are not easy to provide - in many urban areas they prove almost impossible.
(Huskins, 1992: 32)

Alternatively, adventure expeditions can reinforce the opportunities to survive and enjoy life with little in the way of material possessions. Education policy introduced in January 2000 proposed to offer an adventure experience to all sixteen year olds. However, given that many young people are already involved in offending behaviour and excluded from education, these measures in many cases failed to reach young people at risk of offending.

Intervention at the secondary level identifies individuals or groups at risk of offending and either seeks to offer a diversion, or alternatively, to change behaviours and attitudes in order to reduce the likelihood of delinquency. Adventure education offers benefits that are useful in each approach. In terms of diversion, adventure activities seek to replace for young people with time and little perceived leisure opportunity, needs for excitement and challenge through delinquent means. Adventure can satisfy the search for excitement and stimulus, negating the need to joy ride and abuse drugs in this search.

Outdoor and adventure activities also can be used to develop self esteem and self confidence. These changes can help to support adolescents' personal development and reduce those behaviour patterns which may lead to delinquency. The HM Inspectorate report (1990) concluded that 'adventure activities further the personal development of many young people' (HMI, 1990:1).

The study that the discussion above refers to was centred on adventure experiences for young people in urban areas, and assessed the impact of several different projects over a four month period. The findings summarised above, could therefore be criticised as lacking sufficient time truly to assess any significant lasting impact on young people's behaviour and development.

Research reviewed by McKay (1993), often American, showed that rather than conventional team sports, most delinquents prefer adventure activities. These findings are supported by the proposition which seeks to explain delinquency as a search for challenge, excitement and adventure. It appears that conventional sports are less popular with confirmed young delinquents, but adventure activities may offer a satisfactory diversion. This idea can be traced to the early part of this century when

Thrasher as long ago as 1935 suggested:

The common assumption that the problem of delinquency will be solved by the multiplication of playgrounds and social centres in gang areas is completely erroneous. The physical layout of gangland provides a realm of adventure with which no playground can compete.
(Thrasher, 1935)

Tertiary intervention may seek to rehabilitate or to punish offenders. The effectiveness of adventure activities in altering behaviour patterns is difficult to assess, but studies of Outward Bound courses in America have attempted to consider other factors than purely recidivism and include studies of psychological factors and self esteem. The results of the Cooperstown-Outward Bound Summer School measured changes in self-deprecation, sociability, achievement, motivation, social consciousness, hopelessness and self confidence. The results show improvements in all aspects except achievement motivation (Sakofs, 1988). This study, however, was based on observations during the attendance on the project. In order to really understand the value of these projects, there is a need for post course evaluation and observation.

The use of outdoor activities and adventure has been developed over several decades by the British probation service. Maitland (1986), reporting on the Inner London Probation Service's use of these experiences, explained its rationale for addressing deficiencies in the offenders' lives, which were:

often lacking legitimate outlets for energy and excitement. The use of client's leisure was often described as being over-reliant on money-consuming, mechanical sources of entertainment, which were without challenge and unable to provide a lasting source of satisfaction.
(Maitland, 1986: 147)

The courses were used as a way of working with clients as therapy; 'such activities would appear to be a useful way to facilitate the client/officer relationship' (Maitland, 1986: 160). They were also used as a measure of diversion from delinquent activities through widening their horizons.

Maitland concluded that, as part of a rehabilitation programme, adventure activities can offer benefits to a wide range of clients. These include one-off experiences to improve client/officer relationships and longer term participation to develop social skills, which may contribute to overcoming a history of violence or lacking self confidence.

Taylor & Nichols (1999) reported on the use of physical activity with probation clients. Their study of probation services in 1997 showed that 'Outdoor activities are the most commonly provided but there are no clear cut theories or evidence that they are better or more effective than other activities for changing offending behaviour' (Taylor & Nichols, 1999: ii).

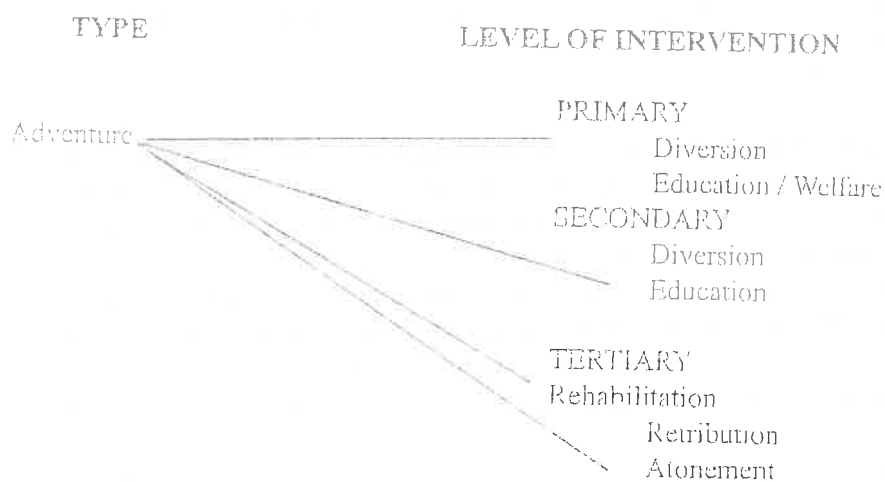
However the more detailed research suggested that these experiences were 'more likely to be away from the home locality and are therefore one-off, potentially life-changing experiences' (Taylor & Nichols, 1999: ii).

At a tertiary level, in a rehabilitation process, adventure activities provide evidence to support their use as both diversion and as a forum for individual and group therapy. Although modern practitioners shy away from terms such as 'character-building', the adventure experience in certain physically severe conditions can meet one requirement of advocates of a punitive regime. Where adventure experiences stress physical endurance, challenge and lack of home comforts their use has been established within the punitive regimes of character building.

An early experiment by the Rainer Foundation in 1960 and 1961, can offer evidence to support this role. Day (1967) reported that adventure activities can help to reinforce young people's acceptance of the need for discipline, since the circumstances are created by natural dangers not arbitrarily imposed from without. The experience was restricted to boys between 14-18 years who were physically fit and not severely disturbed. His research concluded that 'a period of outdoor activity away from the normal school setting could be a beneficial part of reformative training' (Day, 1967: 188).

By considering adventure in terms of intervention a second diagram was created explaining these relationships as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
The Relationship Between Adventure Participation and the Objectives of Intervention



Finally to integrate these strands of research it was important to merge the two frameworks in order to identify not only the appropriateness of the interventions for the participant but also for the objectives of the intervention.

Figure 3
A Framework to Link the Causes of Delinquency, Benefits of Adventure Programmes and Philosophies of Intervention

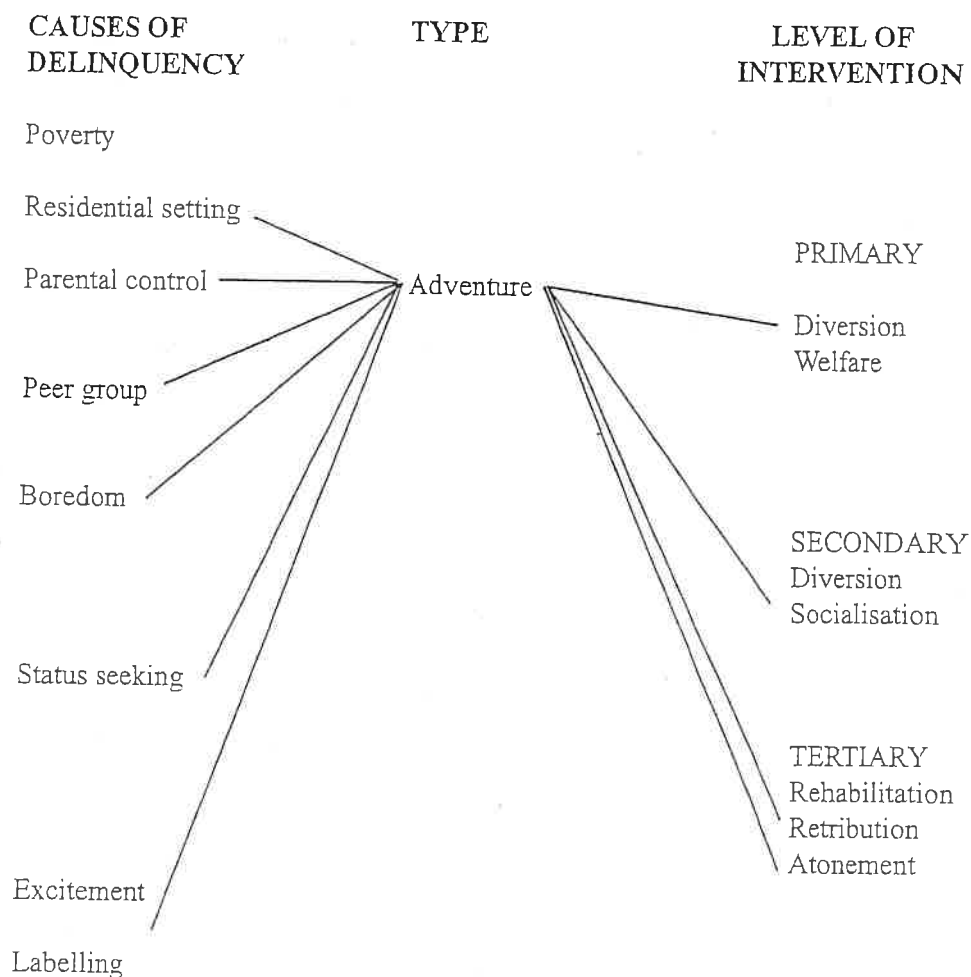


Figure 3 represents a new approach to the problem of rationales for schemes involving adventure. The analysis represents an important attempt to establish an understanding of the potential for adventure at different levels, via different disciplines and across different types of provision in Britain. The framework provides an analytical tool to establish clear relationships between outcomes commonly cited (self esteem, diversion and recidivism), levels of intervention and the internal or external causal factors, which lead to delinquency.

References

- Brantingham, P. & Faust, F. (1976) A Conceptual Model of Crime Prevention. *Crime and Delinquency*, 22: 248-296.
- Day, M. (1967) *An Adventure Experiment with Boys on Probation*, in A. Mays (Ed.) *The Social Treatment of Young Offenders*.
- Emler, N. (2001) *Self-esteem: The costs and causes of low self-worth*. YPS.
- Gass, A. (1993) *Adventure Therapy*. Debunque, Iowa: Kendall / Hunt.
- Giddens, A. (1982) *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- HMI (1990) *Adventure Experiences for Young People From Urban Areas*. London: DES.
- Hopkins, D. & Putnam, R. (1993) *Personal Growth through Adventure*. London: David Fulton Press.
- Huskins, J. (1992) *Adventure - A solution to Urban Problems? Challenge Opportunities for Inner City Youth*. Penrith: Adventure Education.
- McKay, S. (1993) Research Finding Related To the Potential Of Recreation In Delinquency Intervention. *Trends*, 30,(4): 27-30.
- Maitland, C. (1986) 'Oh God. It's going to be Awful' : Clients and Officer's Perceptions of Adventure Activities in J. Pointing, (Ed.) *Alternatives to Custody*. London: Blackwell.
- Mortlock, C. (1973) *Adventure Education*, Private publication, Ambleside
- Robins, D. (1990) *Sport as Prevention*. University of Oxford: Centre for Criminological Research.
- Roberts, K. et al (1974) *The Character Training Industry*, London: David & Charles.
- Sakofs, M. (1988) *The Cooperstown Outward Bound Summer Program Report*. Greenwich, USA: Outward Bound Office.
- Taylor, P. and Nichols, G. (1999) *Demanding Physical Programmes For Young Offenders Under Probation Supervision*. London: HMSO.
- Thrasher, F. (1936) *The Gang*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.