

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

5-7-1996

## A descriptive analysis of students referred to a pre-referral intervention committee

Kelly A. Cruice

*Rowan College of New Jersey*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cruice, Kelly A., "A descriptive analysis of students referred to a pre-referral intervention committee" (1996). *Theses and Dissertations*. 2148.

<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2148>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [graduateresearch@rowan.edu](mailto:graduateresearch@rowan.edu).

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS REFERRED  
TO A PRE-REFERRAL INTERVENTION COMMITTEE

by  
Kelly A. Cruice

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in School Psychology  
of Rowan College  
May 07, 1996

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_ Professor

Date Approved 5/7/96

## ABSTRACT

Kelly A. Cruice  
A Descriptive Analysis of Students Referred  
To A Pre-Referral Intervention Committee  
1996  
Dr. Klanderman, Ph.D.  
School Psychology

The purpose of this study is to descriptively analyze the students referred to the pre-referral process in one New Jersey suburban school. The pre-referral process used in this school is a pre-referral intervention committee.

The sample size consists of twenty one students from elementary school grades kindergarten through grade six. The descriptive data was obtained by developing a coding instrument and coding data from student files. The major method of data analysis used is percentages.

This study yielded the following findings: a majority of the students referred were boys, the total sample scored below average on all areas of standardized tests, a majority of the referred students had a history of similar school problems, and most of the students were referred to the committee for either behavioral or academic reasons.

Mini-Abstract

Kelly A. Cruice  
A Descriptive Analysis of Students Referred  
To A Pre-Referral Intervention Committee  
1996  
Dr. Klanderma, Ph.D.  
School Psychology

The purpose of this study is to descriptively analyze the students referred to the pre-referral process in one suburban New Jersey elementary school. This study found the following: more boys than girls were referred, all students referred scored below average on all areas of standardized tests, a majority of the referred students had a history of similar school problems, and most of the students were referred for either academic or behavioral difficulties.

## Table of Contents

Chapter I The Problem.....	1
Need .....	1
Purpose .....	2
Research Questions .....	2
Background .....	3
Definitions .....	5
Assumptions .....	7
Limitations .....	7
Overview .....	8
Chapter II Review of Literature.....	9
The Committee .....	11
Previous Literature .....	15
Chapter III Design of the Study.....	20
Sample .....	20
Measures .....	21
Design .....	22
Setting and Apparatus .....	22
Procedure .....	22
Summary .....	23

<b>Chapter IV Analysis of Results</b> .....	24
<b>Table 4.1</b> .....	24
<b>Table 4.2</b> .....	25
<b>Table 4.3</b> .....	26
<b>Table 4.4</b> .....	27
<b>Chapter V Summary and Conclusions</b> .....	29
<b>Discussion</b> .....	31
<b>Implications for Future Research</b> .....	32
<b>References</b>	
<b>Appendices</b>	

## CHAPTER ONE

Presently the State of New Jersey has mandated that all public schools form and maintain some form of pre-referral intervention. As a result of this mandate several schools have established pre-referral intervention committees, which are sometimes labeled Pupil Assistance Committees or PAC. The school in which this study is conducted uses the committee form of pre-referral intervention. While the school terms their committee the Student Success Team (SST), PAC is a commonly accepted term for such committees. Therefore, for the remainder of this study the term PAC will be used to describe the committee form of pre-referral intervention. It is the duty of these committees to intervene when a pupil has been labeled as difficult-to-teach. The committee is to evaluate and assist the pupil prior to, and in many instances in lieu of, concluding that the pupil be referred to the Child Study Team (CST). This study evaluates the students who were referred to the committee in one suburban elementary school. The pre-referral intervention program has been practiced for four years in this particular elementary school and is still in the beginning stages. By evaluating the students referred to a committee, as a first step, future research of the pre-referral process can make a determination about whether or not this is a worthwhile and effective program. If the program should prove not to be effective then suggestions can be offered to help make the program more effective. This research is presented due to the need for all school

psychologists to consider the proficiency of these state mandated intervention procedures and the pupils they are attempting to assist.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to gather information regarding current intervention practices used in a suburban public New Jersey elementary school that will descriptively analyze students referred to the pre-referral process. This study uses existing data. Documentation, which has been collected over the past four to five years from the pre-referral intervention committee at one particular elementary school, is analyzed and information specifically related to the research questions posed later. An appropriate and comprehensive coding instrument is developed and piloted to record information. This coding instrument is also used to analyze trends and patterns over time which will establish a baseline for further study.

This study is designed to determine the effectiveness of a pre-referral intervention committee. The field of school psychology is rapidly moving towards a reliance on such committees as a form of pre-referral intervention, this is why their effectiveness must be evaluated.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are several research questions which are addressed in this study. Prior to the implementation of a coding instrument the following research questions are considered: Who was referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee?, Why were they referred?, Did these students have a history of similar school problems?, How did these



students score on standardized tests?, and Did these students receive any special services? Such as counseling, ESL, Speech/Language or Basic Skills?

## BACKGROUND

Pre-referral interventions have been implemented to ultimately decrease the number of pupils referred to the Child Study Team (CST) for eligibility, evaluation, and subsequent special education placement. A common form of pre-referral intervention, the pre-referral intervention committee, was an idea that had been discussed as early as the year 1979. Although at this time the committee was termed the Teacher Assistance Team or TAT. The TAT's purpose was to offer suggestions to troubled teachers on how to handle difficult-to-teach pupils and to offer recommendations for interventions which could take place in the regular education classroom prior to that teacher's filing a formal referral. These TATs typically consisted of three teachers with the referring teacher being the fourth member. Although other professionals, such as special education teachers, principals, and school psychologists, might be asked to partake of a meeting when their expertise was necessary. Yet, overall, TATs primarily consisted of regular education teachers. The evolution of the pre-referral intervention committee was not to stop at the TAT. Intervention committees, while maintaining a goal similar to the TAT, went through a series of labels, including the School Resource Committee (SRC), Mainstream Assistance Committee (MAT), Intervention Assistance Committee (IAT), and the label mentioned previously, and which will be used in this study, Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). And also the label used at the school under study, the Student Success Team (SST).

Beginning in April of 1982 the concept of pre-referral intervention was tested by the Department of Education in New Jersey. The Department of Education engaged in

the Plan To Revise Special Education in NJ (PLAN) or P2R. The Department of Education describes the PLAN's purpose as "The PLAN proposes that building-based, decision-making teams, known as School Resource Committees, be established in each school building to strengthen the capacity of regular education to serve non-handicapped pupils with learning problems " (1990). Thirteen New Jersey school districts participated in the three year pilot project, which was financed by the New Jersey State Legislature and which concluded in June of 1990. All schools involved in the project had a School Resource Committee (SRC) in their building. The SRC is defined as "a regular education, building-based, decision-making team that is consistent with the PLAN's goal of increasing the capacity of regular education to serve pupils with learning or behavior problems without having to unnecessarily label them as handicapped" (1990). The SRC had two purposes, one of which was to serve as an intervention committee to design and recommend interventions. The SRC's other purpose was to develop annual recommendations for a building improvement plan. The SRC was comprised of three permanent members and the referring teacher. The three members were the building principal, or administrative designee, a Child Study Team (CST) member, and a regular education staff member, usually a building teacher.

Furthermore, pre-referral intervention committees were also known as MATs and IATs. While Mainstream Assistance Committees (MATs) believed that pupils should be placed in regular classroom environments regardless of accommodations for the difficult-to-teach pupil, Intervention Assistance Teams (IATs) were comparable to School Resource Committees (SRCs). IATs were school-based, problem-solving groups whose purpose was to assist teachers with intervention strategies for dealing with the learning needs and interests of pupils. Following these committees was the evolution of the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). Again the PAC is termed the SST or Student Success Team in the school in which this study is taking place. The committee will continue to be

termed the PAC in this study as that is a commonly accepted term for such pre-referral intervention committees. And regardless of the term, or the approach to intervention, the emphasis on prevention of inappropriate referrals to the Child Study Team remains the same.

The PAC is used when a regular education teacher needs assistance with aiding a pupil. The PAC is composed of a special educator (s), a regular educator (s), and/or a counselor (s) from that building. Due to the fact that pre-referral intervention is mandated, but not in the form of a PAC, each building can implement and coordinate the PAC as they wish, if this is the pre-referral intervention method they chose to implement. Therefore, each building may have different members on their committees. At the PAC meeting the specific targets for improvement are established and intervention strategies are determined. With the assistance of the PAC the referring teacher practices the interventions for a predetermined amount of time. The pupils progress is documented and communication continues between the PAC, the child's parents, and the referring teacher. Decisions are made about whether or not the pupil can maintain his or her place in the least restrictive environment, regular education classroom, or if a formal referral to the Child Study Team (CST) needs to be completed. It is this documentation and follow-up which this study revolves around, establishes a coding instrument for, and evaluates.

## DEFINITIONS

The following terms are mentioned in the study. It is imperative that the reader understand how the terms are being applied, hence, the terms are defined below.

1. Collaborative Consultation = a systematic process of planning and problem-solving that involves team members from diverse backgrounds.

2. Difficult-To-Teach = a pupil who has been identified as having a problem or difficulty in coping successfully with an academic or behavioral demand of the school or classroom.
3. Intervention Assistance Team = school-based, problem-solving groups whose purpose is to assist teachers with intervention strategies for dealing with the learning needs and interests of pupils.
4. Least Restrictive Environment = to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
5. Mainstreaming = placement in a regular education classroom environment with or without other accommodations.
6. Mainstream Assistance Teams = a multidisciplinary, school-based team which involve a consultant, teacher, and student. Their ultimate goal is to achieve mainstreaming.
7. Pre-Referral Intervention = refers to a teacher's modification of instruction or classroom management to better accommodate a difficult-to-teach (DTT) pupil without disabilities.

8. Teacher Assistance Teams = introduced as an alternative to traditional teacher in-service training. Created to function as day-to-day problem-solving groups for teachers.

## ASSUMPTIONS

In order to conduct this follow-up study several assumptions are made. These assumptions follow.

1. All the data being analyzed was collected in the same, unbiased manner.
2. The regular education teacher making the referral was aware of the pre-referral, PAC, process and understood the process.
3. The sample of pupils was a random sample.
4. The investment level for follow-up and implementation of the recommended interventions was the same for all regular education teachers who made a referral.

## LIMITATIONS

There are two limitations to this study. They are as follows:

1. A limitation of this study is that it is being conducted in a suburban school in a southern New Jersey town.

2. A further limitation of this study is that all the pupils attend the same public elementary school.

## OVERVIEW

It has become a common practice to provide educational and behavioral interventions within a regular education setting to avoid formal referral to a Child Study Team (CST). In turn pre-referral committees have been developed. They are designed to call early attention to student learning and behavioral problems, provide suggestions for intervention, and follow-up on the implementation and progress of those interventions. The committee concept is one step toward regular education responsibility for pupils who do not respond to traditional educational strategies. After providing some background on how the committee form of pre-referral intervention developed Chapter Two will now be dedicated to explaining the formation of a pre-referral committee and discussing other literature written about pre-referral intervention and its effects. After reviewing the literature an explanation of the study follows. The validity of the study and results are analyzed and interpreted. A discussion of planned future research follows a conclusion. This study hopes to show that a committee system of pre-referral intervention does accomplish the goals they are attempting to and the pupils in the school system are better served.

## CHAPTER TWO

Currently, in the State of New Jersey, it is mandated procedure to provide interventions for a pupil who has been labeled as having difficulty in coping successfully with an academic or behavioral demand of the school or the classroom. This intervention practice is state mandated in the public school setting. Furthermore, this intervention mandate is required as necessary prior to referring the pupil to the Child Study Team (CST) for an evaluation. On many occasions the interventions implemented at the time of the pre-referral process are sufficient to sustain the pupil in a regular education classroom or in the least restrictive environment. Therefore, there is no referral to the CST instituted. However, if a referral to the CST is deemed as necessary the Ohio Department of Education (1986) determined that pupils who were first referred to the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) were more often found to be in need of special education programs or services than pupils who were not first referred to the IAT (pg. 5). This determination was made subsequent to a project implemented in Ohio which evaluated the effectiveness of a committee established to provide pre-referral interventions. The committee was titled the Intervention Assistance Team and proved to be a successful endeavor. While the actual process of providing pre-referral interventions for a child will vary considerably from district to district, the goal is always the same.

According to Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr (1990), that goal is threefold. First, to reduce the number of invalid special education placements; second, to act as a means of

curtailing school testing, and lastly to create a harmonious school working environment (pg. 128). A commonly accepted form of pre-referral intervention is to establish a committee, of which the names may vary, to intervene when a pupil has been labeled as difficult-to-teach, yet does not have a disability. Regardless of the title of the committee, the goal is the same. This goal is to maintain difficult-to-teach children in regular education classrooms. Current literature suggests that three variables are most often related to classroom disruptive behavior:

- 1.) teacher attention
- 2.) peer attention, and
- 3.) escape from academic demands.

These variables would result in a pupil being labeled as difficult-to-teach (DTT). As Broussard and Northup state, the effects of teacher and peer attention have been demonstrated to be idiosyncratic across children and to function as both reinforcement and punishment. According to Broussard and Northup (1995) academic demands may also be aversive events that classroom behavior problems allow students to escape or avoid (pg. 153). Data from the functional analysis performed by Broussard and Northup (1995) indicated that similar topographies of disruptive classroom behavior were associated with different maintaining contingencies for each student (pg. 161). In light of this finding, it appears that interventions at the pre-referral level are most beneficial to the pupils, as each pupil is considered individually and not just administered a battery of standard tests by the Child Study Team (CST).

The committee is a school-based, problem-solving group whose purpose is to assist teachers with intervention strategies for dealing with the learning needs and interests of pupils. This committee could be labeled an Intervention Assistance Team (IAT), a Mainstream Assistance Team (MAT), a Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC), or a Student Success Team (SST), which is what the pre-referral intervention committee is labeled in



this study. The Ohio Department of Education has found that some indicators that a particular building in a district is in need of a committee are : teacher requests for assistance in meeting pupil needs, overreferrals to the CST of children who are found to not be in need of special education placement, retention rates for pupils are higher than average in that district, and community dissatisfaction with the school situation and the progress that the pupils are making. Establishing a committee is done at the individual building level, one building may incorporate a committee as their pre-referral process whereas another building may incorporate a different form of pre-referral intervention within the same district. For the continuation of this study and review the committee is used interchangeably with the pre-referral intervention. While only the intervention is mandated, and this can be processed by various methods, this study is done on the effectiveness of one pre-referral intervention committee. Furthermore, the remainder of this chapter is broken down to describe how a committee can be developed and the duties of the committee once it is developed, and to consider research which has already been performed, and which found pre-referral interventions to be a worthwhile and successful method of assisting pupils.

## THE COMMITTEE

According to the Ohio Department of Education (1986), a committee serves as a way to address acknowledged instructional problems and to enhance existing methods of operation within the school organization. The committee has the potential to produce results in six areas. These areas are : 1. enabling the school district's instructional program to meet a broader range of pupil needs, 2. offer structured support and assistance to teachers, 3. assist teachers in varying instructional strategies to promote pupil competence in basic skills, 4. reduce the number of inappropriate referrals for

multifaceted evaluation, 5. employ group problem-solving processes to solve problems, and 6. to serve as an impetus for teacher growth (pg. 4). Furthermore, teachers who partook of the Ohio study commented that they were also able to establish more successful programs for pupils with learning and behavioral problems when using the committee, or as it was labeled for the Ohio study, the IAT (pg. 5).

As to the question of who can develop and implement a pre-referral intervention committee the answer is that in most instances the administration requires a committee to be established and to serve as the school's pre-referral process, although administration is not the only party that can implement a committee. A further party is that of school staff, such as teachers or specialists. Once the committee has been established as the pre-referral process for that particular building, the committee needs to be staffed. The positions on the committee can be either permanent or transitional (changing at preset times, i.e. every other school year). All committees are usually staffed by the same school representatives. The positions on a committee can consist of the principal, or an administrative designee who usually serves as the chairperson of the committee due to the fact that this person can implement the committee's decisions, regular education and special education teachers, the school counselor, the media specialist, the school psychologist, the curriculum specialist, the speech and language pathologist, and the school nurse. Some of the above position representatives will be permanent, such as the principal. These permanent position representatives are considered core team members. Whereas others will be called upon to attend committee meetings only when they have a direct interest in the pupil being discussed. These supplementary position representatives are considered auxiliary team members. Also, the teacher who is referring the pupil to the committee is to attend the meeting, although they are only present for the time their pupil is being discussed. While nine possible positions are listed above it was found, in the Ohio

study (1986), that maximum intervention decisions were usually made with groups of seven or fewer (pg. 14).

Now that a committee has been established and has been fully staffed there will be referrals from teachers to process. Just how to process these referrals will now be discussed. When a referral is received by the committee the chairperson reviews the referral to determine if all the necessary information is included. If additional information is needed it is obtained at this point and the chairperson proceeds to the next step of standard operation. At this point it is determined if an observation of the referred pupil needs to be completed, if so a committee member is assigned the task of observing the pupil. The chairperson distributes the information on referred pupils to the committee members prior to their meeting so that the material can be reviewed. Meetings are as diverse as the titles of the committees. Some committee's meet one a month, and others only when deemed necessary by the number of referrals received. Regardless, once a meeting has been planned all members are to arrive with the previously distributed materials and review the materials as a group. Committee members arrive at a consensus regarding the problem to be addressed and proceed to brainstorm as to offer a variety of intervention strategies which may lead to a solution. During this phase of the meeting the referring teacher may interject with the fact that she or he has already attempted the recommended strategies and they have failed. This brainstorming continues until a strategy or two are chosen as never being previously tried and as the best possible solution at this point. Some pupils are repeatedly referred to the committee and new strategies are implemented on each occasion. A committee member is assigned the task of producing a written intervention plan. This plan includes the selected intervention strategies along with the related material and human resource identified, and a timeline for implementation. At this point responsibilities for carrying out the projected plan are assigned and a date is set for revision of the intervention. When the review date arrives it is determined if the

pupil is no longer in need of further intervention, and if so the case is closed, or if the pupil is in need of further intervention, at which point brainstorming may reoccur or a referral to the Child Study Team (CST) may be instituted.

Paul T. Sindelar (1992) states that prior to a teacher's referring a pupil to the committee, they should complete a four-step process which he believes will better enable the committee to provide intervention strategies. This four-step process is as follows: 1. operationalize instructional outcomes, annual goals for the pupil, 2. establish criterion levels for performance, 3. determine the expected rate of progress toward the criterion level, determined by the amount of time available for instruction, the pupil's learning characteristics, and the current discrepancy between the pupil's pre-instructional level of performance and the criterion level, and 4. evaluate the pupil's actual progress toward the criterion level (pg. 236). While Sindelar believes if a teacher completes this four-step process prior to a committee referral the committee will be better able to provide interventions, Patrick J. Schloss (1992) provides a list of pre-referral intervention strategies, both instructional interventions and environmental adaptation. Examples of instructional interventions are cooperative learning and peer tutoring, the latter of which is recommended often in this follow-up study of a pre-referral intervention committee, paraprofessional assistance, home-school coordination, which requires a parent to be active in the intervention process, special motivational approaches, such as a token economy system, or something as simplistic as improved time management (pg. 236). Furthermore, examples of environmental adaptations include instructional technology, such as the use of computers, prosthetic technology, proximity control, and revised instructional groupings, such as pairing a slow learner with a pupil who is willing to help that slow learner with class material (similar to a peer tutor) (pg. 236).

Now that the implementation of a committee, the duties of the committee once it has been implemented, and possible intervention strategies have been discussed an

additional notation is necessary. In some instances the committee placements are voluntary for regular or special education teachers and in other instances the committee placements are based on previously developed criteria, such as if the teacher is a tenured teacher or if the teacher has any additional education, such as a Masters degree. Regardless of how the committee is staffed, pre-referral interventions have proven to be a successful and collaborative endeavor which reflect a style that considers the idea and contributions of peers as a means for influencing one's own actions. At this juncture previous literature will be reviewed. All of the reviewed literature has found the pre-referral process to be beneficial to the pupils and educational staff involved. Subsequent to the literature review will be a summary and discussion of this chapter and an outlook on the following chapters.

## PREVIOUS LITERATURE

There has been several studies and reviews of research completed in regards to pre-referral intervention and the implementation of a pre-referral committee or team. In an article written by Paul T. Sindelar et al. (1992) the term pre-referral intervention refers to "remedial actions undertaken by teachers for the purpose of maintaining students in regular programs" (pg. 245). They denote their key word as "remedial" as pre-referral intervention does not occur until teachers recognize learning or behavioral problems and take remedial actions to correct them (pg. 245). While Sindelar et al. (1992) acknowledge the fact that pre-referral intervention takes various forms they conclude that the success or failure of an intervention is dependent on the appropriateness of the intervention and the quality of that intervention's implementation (pg. 246). Sindelar et al. (1992) continue to submit that a teacher's involvement in the pre-referral process plays a paramount role in the eventual successful outcome of the intervention. Some researchers also submit that

the role of the referred pupil's parents is also paramount in the outcome of the intervention. It is the reason for referral that would constitute the differing roles played by possible influences of the outcome. Sindelar et al. (1992) state three goals that any pre-referral intervention process is hoping to obtain. These goals are as follows: a reduction in the rate of inappropriate referral for special education placement, consumer satisfaction (participants in successful interventions should be satisfied with the outcome and should benefit from their role in producing that outcome), and finally pre-referral intervention is hoping to achieve an improvement in educational practice (pg. 248).

Furthermore, as previously discussed, a committee form of pre-referral intervention is building-based. Sindelar et al. (1992) acknowledge this phenomena and comment that the individual needs of the students are better assessed when the intervention process occurs building to building and when parent and teacher contact is successful and maintained (pg. 250). Also, as previously mentioned peer tutoring is seen as a valuable intervention method. In a meta-analysis of sixty-five studies researchers discovered that peer tutoring "has significant positive effects on tutor and tutee achievement and attitude toward subject matter" (Cohen et al., 1982). Although Cohen et al. (1982) continued to state that peer tutors must receive direct instruction on tutoring procedures prior to implementation of this practice and to ensure a successful peer tutoring program. Therefore, while this is a proven successful form of pre-referral intervention it is costly to the school using this form.

When intervention in the form of committees was researched by Chalfant and Pysk (1989) it was concluded that "the probability of success of an intervention was related to the severity of the original problem (the reason for referral) and the quality of the teachers' implementation of the intervention plan" (pg. 56). This statement by Chalfant and Pysk concurs with Sindelar et al.'s (1992) earlier statement which submitted that the success or failure of an intervention was dependent upon more than just the intervention itself.

Chalfant and Pysh (1989) also discovered, in their research, that pupils were mainly referred to the committee for reasons other than academics. This established their belief that teachers were more often concerned with classroom management difficulties than with a pupil's academic difficulties. Overall, Sindelar et al. (1992) believe an "effective pre-referral intervention should result in a decrease in the number of students referred for testing and an increase in the proportion of referred students placed in special education. After all, one purpose of pre-referral intervention is to make referral a more accurate process by reducing the number of students who are referred unnecessarily" (pg. 253). Therefore, while they believe pre-referral intervention should result in less inappropriate referrals for special education placement they do not specify that a committee is the most valid method of pre-referral intervention, although committees are discussed in their article. In contrast Chalfant and Pysh (1989) state that a committee is the most relevant form of pre-referral intervention (pg. 57).

A review of the research done on pre-referral intervention was completed by J. Ron Nelson et al. (1991). Nelson et al. also found pre-referral intervention to be essential in the trend toward reducing inappropriate referrals for special education placement. Their findings also demonstrated that teachers views of difficult-to-teach pupils were improved when they were given intervention strategies for helping to educate these pupils (pg. 251). Nelson et al.'s (1991) article broke down pre-referral intervention approaches to six categories. The first category was a Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) which was developed by Chalfant Pysh and Moultrie. The outcome of this approach was that referrals to special education were reduced. The second category was a School Consultation Committee (SCC) which was developed by McGlothlin. The outcome of this approach was that referrals for formal assessment were reduced. The SCC is described as "a team of regular and special education teachers who help teachers design, implement, and evaluate interventions. The third category was a Pre-referral intervention

model which was developed by Graden, Casey, and Christenson. The outcome of this approach was that formal assessment and special education classification rates dropped. This model is described as being composed of a consultant, teacher, who is assigned by the school administration to provide assistance to classroom teachers. The fourth category was a Teacher Resource Team which was developed by Maher. The outcome of this approach was that pupil and teacher met their improvement perimeters and referrals to the Child Study Team (CST) decreased. The fifth category was a Mainstream Assistance Team (MAT) which was developed by Fuchs and Fuchs. The outcome of this approach was that pupils behavior problems decreased in frequency. It appeared that Fuchs and Fuchs had targeted the form of intervention that Chalfant and Pysk (1989) had demonstrated would be most beneficial to schools since teachers referred pupils to the committee for classroom disruptiveness more than for academic shortcomings (pg. 252). And finally the sixth category was Peer Problem Solving which was developed by Pugach and Johnson. The outcome of this approach was that a teacher's tolerance for the range of teachable students increased. This is direct proof that a committee form of pre-referral intervention is most effective as it demonstrates that when a teacher is given assistance by fellow teachers about how to deal with a difficult-to-teach (DTT) pupil, and they implement the recommended assistance, they are more likely to accept those DTT pupils as teachable and in turn, be more receptive to those pupil's needs and wants. The Peer Problem Solving committee is described as occurring when a peer is assigned the task of assisting the referring teacher in clarifying classroom problems (sometimes done by observation), brainstorming on possible interventions, and assisting that teacher in developing an intervention evaluation plan (pg. 246).

Again, the success of a pre-referral intervention strategy depends on the appropriateness of the intervention team's proposed action; did the team target the most problematic behavior for intervention?, and the degree to which the proposed action is



implemented by the regular education teacher . Both of these phenomena are analyzed in this follow-up study. Also, why some regular education teachers chose to follow the process and others to deviate from the process is analyzed. It is believed that high teacher satisfaction is a variable that effects implementation of an intervention strategy, along with professional collaboration. While the literature reviewed has proven pre-referral intervention to be a valuable method of reducing inappropriate referrals, regardless of the title of the committee , which is demonstrated by the work completed by Nelson et al. (1991), and changing a pupil's behavior for the duration of his or her time in the classroom this study hopes to further prove that submission.

## CHAPTER THREE

In an attempt to determine the effectiveness of a pre-referral intervention committee there are several research questions which are addressed. Those questions considered prior to the development of a coding instrument are as follows: Who was referred to the committee? [males or females, grade levels, and current Math and Reading levels], Why were they referred?, Did these students have a history of similar school problems?, How did these students score on standardized tests?, Who referred the students?, and Did these students receive any special services? Such as counseling, ESL, Speech/Language or Basic Skills? This chapter focuses on the design of the study. The chapter describes the setting for the study and the procedure used in collecting the data which will be descriptively analyzed.

### SAMPLE

There was a total of twenty one subjects for this study (N = 21). Those subjects were all elementary school children who attended the same public school in an upper middle class area of southern New Jersey. The elementary school consisted of grade levels K through 6th. The subjects were chosen based on if they were referred to the committee for pre-referral intervention some time within the previous four to five years.

The committee had only existed at the particular school for that amount of time. The subjects were both male and female pupils.

Furthermore, this study was done in one school building within a large suburban school district. For years 1993-1994 the school enrollment totaled 489 (1995), and for years 1994-1995 the school enrollment totaled 477 (1995). School enrollment figures for the year of this study, 1996, are unavailable. However, the most recent available figures on average class size show that for years 1994-1995 the school was slightly below the New Jersey state average. While the average for the state was 21.9 the school's average was 21.7 (1995).

Consent for this follow-up study was obtained from the school board of the school district allowing the study. Approval was granted on one contingency, that all the files under scrutiny would be closed committee files. Therefore, all the pupils evaluated have had their files closed with the pre-referral intervention committee, termed the Student Success Team (SST), at the school used in the study.

## MEASURES

The data to answer the research questions for this study are being collected by use of a coding instrument developed by the researcher. This coding instrument is a questionnaire which asks questions regarding the information in the student files. The coding instrument asks such questions as REFERRED BY: 1 = teacher 2 = parent 3 = counselor. The information is coded onto the coding sheet from the student files by circling the appropriate number response. For example, if the teacher referred the student to the pre-referral committee then a rater would code REFERRED BY with a 1. When each question has been coded the data is then processed for frequencies which will be discussed in the next chapter. This coding instrument is enclosed in the Appendix. This

coding instrument has been tested for inter-rater reliability with six other raters. These raters coded data from student files onto the coding instrument. Results were identical for both the researchers coding sheets and for the six raters coding sheets.

## DESIGN

The design of this study is a descriptive analysis of students referred to a pre-referral intervention committee in one particular school. Frequencies and percentages were processed.

## SETTING AND APPARATUS

The study was conducted in one suburban public elementary school in southern New Jersey. The school was located in an upper middle class township. The materials used to conduct the study were closed files of the pre-referral intervention committee at the one school. The files were reviewed and material relevant to the research was extracted. The relevant material was extracted by using a questionnaire or coding instrument which listed questions, such as GENDER: 1 = male 2 = female and which is demonstrated above. Again, this coding instrument is enclosed in the Appendix.

## PROCEDURE

At the start of the study all twenty one files were reviewed and material relevant for answering the research questions was extracted. A coding instrument was then developed. This instrument aided in the collection of data from the student files. Frequencies were then run on the data obtained from the files and a determination was

made about the students referred to a committee form of pre-referral intervention in this particular school.

## SUMMARY

This chapter reiterates the research questions and explains how the questions were answered. This chapter explains the coding instrument which was tested for reliability and found to be a reliable method of organizing the data contained in the student files. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data obtained on the students referred to a pre-referral intervention committee. The school this study was conducted in is a suburban school where class size is smaller than the state average and where school enrollment is average. Results are not attempted to be generalized to other school populations. Following will be a discussion of the results this study found along with several Tables portraying those results. After that there will be a discussion of this study and implications for future research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Several research questions were addressed in this study of pre-referral intervention and the students referred to a pre-referral intervention committee. The research questions addressed include the following: Who was referred to the pre-referral intervention committee? [males or females, grade levels, and current Math and Reading levels], Why were the students referred?, Did these students have a history of similar school problems?, How did these students score on standardized tests?, Who referred the students?, and Did these students receive any special services? Such as counseling, ESL, Speech/Language or Basic Skills? This chapter will list tables demonstrating the descriptive analysis of the data extracted from student files.

For the academic years 1992 through 1995 this study found that more male students than female students were referred to the pre-referral intervention committee, see Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 - Gender of students referred to the pre-referral intervention committee

GENDER	n	%
Male	12	57.1
Female	9	42.9
Total	21	100.0

For academic years 1992 through 1995 this study, performed in one suburban elementary school, found that there was an even distribution of students referred between grade levels, with the exception of third grade and fifth grade, see Table 4.2. Considering the entire sample there were no referrals to the committee for grades three or grades five. In the school where this study was conducted there are three third grades and three fifth grades. According to the frequencies and percentages the most referrals to the committee occurred in first grade.

Table 4.2 - Grade level of students referred to the pre-referral intervention committee

<u>GRADE LEVEL</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
kindergarten	4	19.0
first	6	28.6
second	5	23.8
third	0	00.0
fourth	3	14.3
fifth	0	00.0
sixth	3	14.3
Total	21	100.0

Current Math and Reading level of the students referred to the pre-referral intervention committee varied. While 62% of the referred students were at grade level for Math, 48% were below grade level for Reading. The majority of these referred students

receive special services for their low Reading levels. 81% of the referred students receive Basic Skills for Reading while only 52% receive Basic Skills for Math.

It was found that the reason students were referred to the pre-referral intervention committee was due to academic and behavioral reasons. The students receiving Basic Skills are some of the same students being referred to the committee for academic reasons.

Furthermore, twelve of the referred students had a history of similar school problems, see Table 4.3. Referrals to the committee can be processed on several occasions and by several different teachers or school personnel. In some instances a parent may refer the child to the committee. In this study it was determined that in only two cases did the parent refer the child to the committee. 91% of the sample was referred to the committee by the teacher.

Table 4.3 - History of similar school problems prior to a referral to the pre-referral intervention committee

<u>HISTORY</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
yes	12	57.1
no	2	9.5
unknown	7	33.3
Total	21	100.0

Although more students were referred to the committee for academic and behavioral reasons than for either attention, social/emotional, or work habits, their standardized test scores do not show a significant deficit in skills. While five students had



no scores available, of the remaining sixteen students four scored above average in Math on the IOWA test. Furthermore, six students scored average and another six scored below average. In Reading only one student scored above average and nine students scored below average. Six students scored average on the Reading section of the IOWA test.

Furthermore, frequencies and percentages were conducted to determine if the students referred to a pre-referral intervention committee were receiving any special services, such as ESL, counseling or Speech/Language. The results follow in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 - Special Services received by students referred to the pre-referral intervention committee

<b>SPECIAL SERVICES</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>ESL</b>		
yes	2	9.5
no	19	90.5
Total	21	100.0
<b>COUNSELING</b>		
yes	3	14.3
no	18	85.7
Total	21	100.0
<b>SPEECH/LANGUAGE</b>		
yes	2	9.5
no	19	90.5
Total	21	100.0

While students could have been referred to the pre-referral intervention committee for several reasons frequencies show that students were predominantly referred to the committee for academic or behavioral reasons. The students who were referred were mostly male students with 29% of the referrals being processed in first grade. While few students received any special services, other than Basic Skills, 57% of the students had a history of similar school problems. A majority of the referred students were operating below the grade level in academics, especially in the Reading area. Although on two occasions the parent referred the child to the committee, on nineteen occasions it was the teacher who processed the referral. This study was conducted by evaluating the committee student files from academic years 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995. Ten of the referrals were from 1993, ten of the referrals were from 1994 and one referral was from 1992. At the time this study was conducted all referrals to the committee for 1995 were still in the process of being handled by the committee.

## CHAPTER FIVE

This study was designed to gather information regarding current pre-referral intervention practices used in a suburban public New Jersey elementary school. Presently the State of New Jersey has mandated that all public schools form and maintain some form of pre-referral intervention. The school in which this study was conducted uses the committee form of pre-referral intervention. The committee, commonly labeled PAC or Pupil Assistance Committee, at the school under study has been in operation for four years. This study was arranged to analyze the students referred to a particular committee so as to gain a better understanding of who is referred to these committees and how best to help these referred students.

The total sample size was twenty one. The subjects were all elementary school children who attended the same suburban public school in southern New Jersey. The children ranged in grade level from kindergarten to sixth grade. No referrals were found for grade three or grade five. The children were both male and female. The sample consisted of any student who had been referred to the pre-referral intervention committee within the past four to five years.

By evaluating data contained in the committee's closed student files a coding device was developed which allowed for more efficient data processing and organization of variables. This coding device is enclosed in the Appendices. After rating this coding device for reliability the information contained in the files was coded and the following

research questions were considered. Who was referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee? Why were they referred?, Did these students have a history of similar school problems?, How did these students score on standardized tests?, and Did these students receive any special services? Such as counseling, ESL, Speech/Language or Basic Skills?

The research questions were answered by descriptively analyzing the coded information. Frequencies and percentages were processed to yield the following results: More male than female students were referred to the pre-referral intervention committee. Students were referred evenly between grade levels with the exception of no referrals for third or fifth grade. There are three third grade classrooms and three fifth grade classrooms at the school where this study was conducted. The most referrals occurred in first grade with second grade being the second highest for referrals to the committee. Furthermore, 48% of the referred students were below grade level for Reading with only 19% being below grade level for Math. 81% of the students referred to the committee receive Basic Skills for Reading while only 52% receive Basic Skills for Math.

Students were referred to the pre-referral intervention committee for predominantly either academic or behavioral reasons. 91% of the referrals to the committee were implemented by the teacher of the student. Two cases from the sample were referred by their parent. Also, the available information shows that twelve of the students have a history of similar school problems. While it is definite that two students have no prior history of trouble there were seven cases in which this information was not available. The performance of the referred students on a standardized test, the IOWA, yielded no significant results. Five student scores were not available for any aspect of the standardized test.

The services that students were receiving were also analyzed to determine if students referred to the committee receive special services. It was found that students referred to the committee receive very few special services. Two of the twenty one

referred students receive ESL, three of the twenty one referred students receive counseling, and two of the twenty one referred receive Speech/Language. In one case the same student received both counseling and Speech/Language.

## DISCUSSION

In evaluating the research it appears that further investigation is needed into the lack of referrals for both third and fifth grade. Each grade, third and fifth, has three classrooms, hence, three teachers. It is unknown the length of time these teachers have been employed as teachers or employed in the district where the school is located. Considering the large amount of referrals for first and second grade it would be optimistic to assume that the interventions have been successful and by third grade no further intervention is needed. A further plausible explanation may be that the teachers have worked as a team for some time and do not feel the need to utilize the committee for interventions, they may implement their own interventions.

Further investigation could also be introduced by means of evaluating the school's curriculum or teaching methods. With students being primarily referred for academic purposes there may be a reason more than just that the child has difficulty learning. Not only should the teaching methods be evaluated but also possibly each child could sit with the school counselor to find out some information on what is happening to that child outside of school which may be affecting their performance on school-related tasks.

Furthermore, while the committee form of pre-referral intervention is a developing concept there are many similarities between the present-day committee and the pilot committees. The committee is composed of the same school personnel as the pilot committees and interventions are implemented in the same manner. When an intervention is suggested the responsibility of producing that intervention lies with the teacher. It is an

assumption of this study that the referring teacher is aware of the pre-referral process and is able and willing to implement the recommended interventions. Also, as Sindelar et al (1992) comment "the individual needs of the students are better assessed when the intervention process occurs building to building and when parent and teacher contact is successful and maintained". Although the school did not have any data available on parental satisfaction with the interventions the committees are established building to building. Possible future research could evaluate why there is no data on parental satisfaction. Is there no contact between school and parent other than the mandated notification that their child has been referred to the committee?, Is there contact but no record of that contact? are some possible questions which could be discussed. Other implications for future research will be discussed.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study can be continued by moving forward. Now that data has been obtained and analyzed regarding a descriptive analysis of students who were referred to the committee future research can use this information to conduct a larger study. The future researcher can track the referred students forward in their present-day classrooms and evaluate if the proposed interventions are successful. The future researcher can determine if the files should have been closed by the committee or if the students need further interventions. The future researcher can also consider the questions posed above, such as parental contact, and academic policies. If tracking the students forward is too large a task then the future researcher may only evaluate the interventions implemented. This can be done in much the same way that this study was conducted, by descriptively analyzing the intervention data. Then, in the distant future, another researcher can take both studies and perform a follow-up study of students and interventions.

## References

- Bahr, Michael W. "The Status: Impact of Pre-Referral Intervention." Psychology in the Schools 31.4 (October 1994) : 309 - 318.
- Broussard, Carmen D., and John Northup. "An Approach to Functional Assessment and Analysis of Disruptive Behavior in Regular Education Classrooms." School Psychology Quarterly 10.2 (1995) : 151 - 164.
- Coufal, Kathy L. "Collaborative Consultation for Speech-Language Pathologists." Topics in Language Disorders 14.1 (November 1993) : 1 - 14.
- Flugum, Kristi R., and Daniel J. Reschly. "Prereferral Interventions: Quality Indices and Outcomes." Journal of School Psychology 32.1 (Spring 1994) : 1 - 14.
- Fuchs, Douglas, Lynn S. Fuchs, and Michael W. Bahr. "Mainstream Assistance Teams: A Scientific Basis for the Art of Consultation." Exceptional Children 57.2 (October-November 1990) : 128 - 139.
- McCarney, Stephen B., Kathy Cummins Wunderlich, and Angela Marie Bauer. The Pre-Referral Intervention Manual. Missouri: Hawthorne, 1993.
- Nelson, J. Ron. "Prereferral Intervention: A Review of the Research." Education and Treatment of Children 14.3 (August 1991) : 243 - 253.
- New Jersey Department of Education. A Plan to Revise Special Education in New Jersey: An Overview of Pilot Project Outcomes. November 1990.
- "New Jersey School Report Card." (1994 - 1995) : 1 - 12.

Ohio Department of Education. Intervention Assistance Teams: A Model for Building Level Instructional Problem Solving. A Document in the NASP Acquisition Series. 1986.

Roberts, Alyson H., and James O. Rust. "Role and function of School Psychologists, 1992-1993: A Comparative Study." Psychology in the Schools 31.2 (April 1994): 113 - 119.

Schloss, Patrick J. "Mainstreaming Revisited." The Elementary School Journal 92.3 (January 1992): 233 - 244.

Sindelar, Paul T., et al. "Prereferral Intervention: Encouraging Notes on Preliminary Findings." The Elementary School Journal 92.3 (January 1992): 245 - 259.



## APPENDICES

***Student Information***==

**STUDENT NUMBER:**

01	12
02	13
03	14
04	15
05	16
06	17
07	18
08	19
09	20
10	21
11	

**GENDER:**

- 1 = male
- 2 = female

**GRADE:**

- 1 = K
- 2 = 1
- 3 = 2
- 4 = 3
- 5 = 4
- 6 = 5
- 7 = 6

**REFERRED BY:**

- 1 = teacher
- 2 = parent
- 3 = counselor

**YEAR OF REFERRAL:**

- 1 = 1993
- 2 = 1994
- 3 = 1995
- 4 = 1992

**IOWA SCORES:**

**A.) READING**

- 1 = above average
- 2 = average
- 3 = below average
- 4 = scores not available

**B.) MATH**

- 1 = above average
- 2 = average
- 3 = below average
- 4 = scores not available

**C.) LANGUAGE**

- 1 = above average
- 2 = average
- 3 = below average
- 4 = scores not available

**CURRENT READING LEVEL:**

- 1 = grade level
- 2 = below grade level
- 3 = information not available

**CURRENT MATH LEVEL:**

- 1 = grade level
- 2 = below grade level
- 3 = information not available

**INITIAL REFERRAL CONCERNS: (CHOOSE 2 CATEGORIES BASED ON FILE INFORMATION)**

**MAJOR CATEGORIES W/ CHARACTERISTICS**

**1 = A.) ACADEMIC**

- \*appears unable to do work
- \*difficulty with homework, classwork, and/or tests
- \*difficulty grasping concepts
- \*poor achievement
- \*resists doing homework and/or classwork

2 = B.) ATTENTION

- \*lack of attention
- \*difficulty understanding directions
- \*daydreams

3 = C.) BEHAVIORAL

- \*overly active
- \*aggressive
- \*disruptive
- \*uncooperative/noncompliant
- \*frequent absenteeism

4 = D.) SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

- \*seems unhappy
- \*passive / withdrawn
- \*undermotivated
- \*poor peer relations

5 = E.) WORK HABITS

- \*poor organization skills/disorganized
- \*poor class participation
- \*works at a slow pace
- \*poor study habits

**HISTORY OF SIMILAR SCHOOL PROBLEMS:**

- 1 = yes
- 2 = no
- 3 = unknown

**DOES STUDENT RECEIVE BASIC SKILLS?:**

**A.) IN READING**

- 1 = yes
- 2 = no

**B.) IN MATH**

- 1 = yes
- 2 = no

**DOES STUDENT RECEIVE ESL SERVICES?:**

1 = yes

2 = no

**DOES STUDENT RECEIVE COUNSELING?:**

1 = yes

2 = no

**DOES STUDENT RECEIVE SPEECH/LANGUAGE SERVICES?**

1 = yes

2 = no