The most decent girls make the best respectable teachers: Teacher selection for teacher education in northern Finland between 1921 and 1945

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Finnish teacher education has been admired since the Finnish pupils’ success in the international PISA-comparisons. Research of the history of Finnish teacher education has not been published extensively abroad. The purpose of this article is to introduce the early stages of the teacher college in Northern Finland; namely, the choices of teacher education at Tornio college between the years 1921 and 1945. The research problems of this research were the following: 1) how were the entrance tests organized? 2) what kind of students passed the entrance tests? and 3) what was the demographic background of those who were selected? The research is based on a variety primary sources consisting of archive sources, the annual reports of the seminar and students’ applications. This research brings out how the choices of teacher education reflect on the present-day teacher education. Students’ success is considered to be founded on a good teacher education and good teachers.

Key words: teacher selection, history of teacher education, teacher colleges, Finland

INTRODUCTION

Finnish college-type primary school teacher training began in the 19th century as a personal pursuit of a few concerned teachers and ministers of church. These “preparatory” institutions did not have any special curricula and hardly any information about their activities is available. In 1877-1878, the state authorities decided to grant a subsidy to those upper primary school teachers who, in addition to their normal teaching duties, were also involved in training lower primary school teachers. This law meant that the education of primary school teachers was separated from the church. Thus, the history of the selective admission policy on teacher education is also old (Halmela & Komulainen 1983; Hyyrö 2006).

The first elementary schools were founded in northern Finland starting from 1869. The primary school teacher colleges which were founded earlier located in southern Finland (Heikkinen 1995, 394; Hyyrö 2006, 200; Nurmi 1989, 19–20; 1995, 45-146; Salo 1950) and it was difficult to hire qualified teachers to northern Finland. To the northernmost Finland, that is Lapland, teachers were attracted by adding a so called Lapland’s supplement, extra money, to the salary and compensating work years in the amount of retirement allowance (Lassila 2005).

As Finland got the law of compulsory education in 1921, primary schools came also to the countryside and the need for teachers increased. The northernmost college for women had taken place in Raahen in 1896 and northernmost college for men in Kajaani in 1900. These colleges were located a long way from Lapland.

Earlier studies point out that the students of Finnish teacher colleges were mainly from the countryside. They came from middleclass and farmer families at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. After this period, the students represented the upper class. The men were from the countryside; usually they were farmers’ sons who did not inherit the farm. Female
students, on the other hand, were mostly upper class. (Hallila 1949; 1963; Hyyrö 2006; Kuikka 1985, 81-97; Kuikka 1988; Nummi 1995; Rinne 1989, 194).

A teacher college was founded in Tornio in 1921. The opening ceremony took place on the 16th of September 1921. (Paksuniemi 2009).

There were many reasons to establish the Tornio College. First, there was a need for preserving teachers’ countryside inwardness that was suspected to disappear as all the other teacher colleges were located in cities. Thus, the foundation of Tornio seminar was connected to the regional policy and the need for teachers in Northern Finland. The main goal was to preserve Finnish language in Finnish school world. It had been only four years since Finland had become independent in 1917. The Finnish school system was developed based on the conception of an independent state and this was how the position of Finnish language as the teaching language at schools wanted to be guaranteed (Kuikka 1991; Paksuniemi 2009). The Tornio College was located at the border of Finland and Sweden.

Therefore, the foundation of this particular college represented an important change to northern women education and for children’s education as well. There was a teachers’ college in Haparanda, Sweden, but the teaching was carried out in Swedish. The purpose of founding this new college in Finland aimed to keep the Finnish teacher material in Finland and to provide teaching in Finnish. All the students were women because they were aimed to teach 8-9 year old children and they were regarded as the most suitable for this demanding job (Cygnaeus 1910, 31-85).

The operation of the college started fairly modestly first at the facilities of a local elementary school and later on in rooms rented from a private owner. As the operation become wider and the number of pupils increased, the college needed more space. Finally in 1930, the college building was constructed which included quite functional and practical facilities compared to the previous ones.

The three-storey college building had nine classrooms, a teachers’ room, library, drawing and PE classrooms as well as apartments for the leader, caretaker, and cook. The school for teaching practicum functioned at the second floor; there the teacher students trained teaching in practice. (OMA, TSeA, Ae: 19). Figure 1.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA, AND METHOD

This research covers the years 1921 to 1945, that is from the year the college was founded till the years of the wartime. The foundation year is one of the point marks of school history in Finland, because in the same year the law of compulsory education came into force. The War lasted from 1939 till 1945 in northern Finland. Soviet Union started the Winter War against Finland in November 1939. Education was interrupted at the College because the college building was needed as a war hospital. When the War ended in March 1940, education continued according to possibilities. For example, new students were not taken in. However, the peace did not last for a long time because in June 1941 a new war between Finland and Soviet Union started. The Continuation War affected education for its part. The college building was used as a war hospital again and education was scattered in the elementary schools of the city of Tornio. The War continued until the spring 1945, after which the College could continue its operation as normally according to the curricula. (Paksuniemi 2009).

This article is divided into three subcategories examined by the historic-quantitative approach. This study concentrates on the following research questions:

1) how were the entrance tests organized,
2) what kind of students passed the entrance tests, and
3) what was the demographic background of the selected students?

In this research, we have chosen the typical historical method which represents systematic and objective localisation, evaluation, and synthesis of the evidence. As in historical research in overall, our purpose is to re-evaluate the past events and data as well as to understand the dynamics of the educational change (e.g. Lakkala, 2011; Määttä, 1992; Renvall, 1965). Our target is the teacher student selection of the oldest teacher training college in northern Finland. For us, the authors, it is an interesting and close subject: we have both graduated as teachers (in different decades though) and worked as teacher educators in northern Finland after our graduation. Indeed, Carr (1963) points out that in historical research, it is important to be aware of the researcher’s own viewpoint. A historian, who realises as well as possible his/her own position and connections, is able to unchain himself/herself from them - whether the question was about societal or historical affiliation. Our aim has been to stick to the extensive data we have gathered in a controlled manner and not let our own preferences to tint the results. Still, we have pursued keep in mind that the teacher education in past and its life have not been today’s teacher education (e.g. Aurola, 1996). Our purpose has been to analyse the past as is with all its diversity, complexity, and dissimilarity (e.g. Lakkala, 2011; Muir, 1991).

The data were analysed with the help of comprehensive source material. The main source consisted of archive material in Oulu Provincial Archives. In addition, the students’ applications and results of the entrance tests were examined. The data included also some other primary sources, for example some school-year reports and teacher students'
Table 1. The written applications, the candidates who were invited for the entrance test, those who continued to the end of the entrance test and the ones who were selected to study at the lower primary school teacher college of Tornio in different school years (OMA, TSeA, Bb: 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the 1920s</th>
<th>Written applications (n)</th>
<th>Candidates invited for test (n)</th>
<th>Candidates who continued to the end (n)</th>
<th>Students who were selected to study (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921–1922</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922–1923</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>1923–1924</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>1924–1925</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>1925–1926</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926–1927</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>1927–1928</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928–1929</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929–1930</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>31</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the 1930s</th>
<th>Written applications (n)</th>
<th>Candidates invited for test (n)</th>
<th>Candidates who continued to the end (n)</th>
<th>Students who were selected to study (n)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930–1931</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931–1932</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932–1933</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933–1934</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>1934–1935</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935–1936</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936–1937</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937–1938</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938–1939</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<th>In the wartime</th>
<th>Written applications (n)</th>
<th>Candidates invited for test (n)</th>
<th>Candidates who continued to the end (n)</th>
<th>Students who were selected to study (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939–1940</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940–1941</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941–1942</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942–1943</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943–1944</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944–1945</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diaries. The data was written up and analysed in its original form as it was archived. This is important and relates to the reliability of the results. The use of primary evidence is crucial in the research of pedagogical history (Kalela 2000, 169–170; Kuikka 2001, 158–161, 166; Renvall 1965, 199, 204).

Our research analysis proceeded so that we have evaluated and examined the authenticity of our data (outer criticism) and assessed the reliability, versatility, sufficiency, and comprehensiveness of the documents we used (inner criticism). After the above-mentioned, we started to create a cohesive entity of the research data in order to answer the research questions. As analysing methods, we have utilised development, structure, and motive analysis of historical research (Kuikka, 2001; Lakkala, 2011; Paksuniemi 2009). Through the development analysis, we analyse the development and change that took place in the selection of teacher education. Through the structural analysis, we describe the selection criteria in teacher education and the teacher students’ demographic background in the target period of our research.

RESULTS
The three steps of selection
Entrance tests were divided into three steps. The first step included all the written applications which were sent to the teaching staff. This step showed the real amount of the applicants. Those, who were seen suitable for becoming and working as proper teachers, were invited to the second step. The third step was the last one: those, who succeeded in the second step, were invited to the third. This division is really important because it reveals the strictness of the entrance tests. (Table 1).

The first step: written applications
The archive data shows that the teacher’s occupation was desired during the period researched (Table 1). The least applications were sent to the college in 1921 and 1922. The explanation for these low numbers is mainly that the college was just founded. It took several years to achieve its place among the other colleges. The amount of the applications increased until the year 1932. (OMA, TSeA, Bb: 1). The world-wide economic crises were mainly the reason for the lower numbers in the early 1930s (Heikkinen 1995, 236; Rinne 1973, 128; Virrankoski 1975, 194–195). It caused reductions in
Finnish school system. There was a bill to cut down the lower elementary school teachers’ vacancies but it did not pass (Hyyrö 2006, 280–281; Rinne 1973, 128). As a result of this type of discussion, women did not apply for a college which might not provide work for them. This tendency was also noticed at other lower primary school teachers’ colleges in Finland (Hyyrö 2006, 280–281; Rinne 1973, 128). After the discussion settled down, the number of the applications started to increase and achieved noticeable numbers in the 1940s. Did a teacher’s occupation become more popular? The high numbers are explained by the changes in school policy. In the 1940s, there were only two lower primary school teachers’ colleges where one could apply with the degree of lower primary school education. The one was located in Tornio and the other one in Vaasa, Western part of Finland, and it was for Swedish spoken students only. (Hyyrö 2006, 138, 203-204, 252). Therefore, the Tornio College was the only possible place to study to become a lower primary school teacher for Finnish spoken women who had a degree of primary school education.

The second step: applicants’ personal qualities
In the second step, the ones, who were regarded as suitable for the occupation, were selected for the entrance test. The applicants had to be under 30 years old (OMA, TSeA, Da: 1). This second step selection was based on the written applications which included certificates from the local minister and doctor as well as a school report. At the beginning of the 1920s, four facts about an applicant were listed in the certificate signed by the minister but the requirements grew into six in 1935. The document proved that the person was baptised, was a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, had been confirmed, has been in Communion, was vaccinated, and was a reliable citizen. If the applicant played an instrument or was musically talented, she could prove that by buying a certificate. The doctor’s certificate proved that there were not any medical reasons to prevent the studying. In 1935, also the medical certificate was changed between times when the old six requirements changed into 15. Into the end of the doctor’s certificate, the doctor could write down any defects he noticed on the applicant. (OMA, TSeA, Ee: 1; Ee: 7; Ee: 14; Ee: 21; Ee: 25). This certificate actually embodied a pre-selection for the college.

The second column in Table 1 shows how many candidates were selected for the entrance test which was held in the college building. And how many of them were selected to study.

The third step: Final selection
The requirements did not vary much during the years that were studied in this research. The candidates showed their skills in different school subjects and they were interviewed by the teachers. In the 1930s and 1940s the examination lasted for more days than it did in the 1920s. The third step selection was based on the written applications which included certificates from the local minister and doctor as well as a school report. At the beginning of the 1920s, four facts about an applicant were listed in the certificate signed by the minister but the requirements grew into six in 1935. The document proved that the person was baptised, was a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, had been confirmed, has been in Communion, was vaccinated, and was a reliable citizen. If the applicant played an instrument or was musically talented, she could prove that by buying a certificate. The doctor’s certificate proved that there were not any medical reasons to prevent the studying. In 1935, also the medical certificate was changed between times when the old six requirements changed into 15. Into the end of the doctor’s certificate, the doctor could write down any defects he noticed on the applicant. (OMA, TSeA, Ee: 1; Ee: 7; Ee: 14; Ee: 21; Ee: 25). This certificate actually embodied a pre-selection for the college.

The comparison between the numbers in Table 1 shows that the third step worked effectively. The wartime affected to the college’s entrance test and during that time new students were not selected. (OMA, TSeA, Bb: 1; Ca: 1). There was not any school activity at the college and the building was used as a war hospital for part of the war time (OMA, TSeA, Ba: 1). Only 30 to 36 students passed the entrance test yearly; thus, when thinking of percentages, it was rather difficult to become selected. (OMA, TSeA, Bb: 1; Ca: 1). The entrance tests were well-designed and the teachers selected suitable women for this demanding college. The low percent of the drop outs refers to the importance of the college place (OMA, TSeA, Bb: 1; Ca: 1; Ca: 2).

Figure 2 illustrates that the students selected at the Tornio College for women were young ladies of about the same age. The practice was that the students were selected among 17-30-year-old women (OMA, TseA, Da: 1). The students were dressed quite temperately and acted with the certain air that typifies teachers. The teacher students sat on double desks as it was the habit at elementary schools as well. It was considered beneficial to follow the established sitting order from elementary schools and a teacher would find it easier to implement the habit in her work at her own classroom later on (OMA, TSeA, Ca: 1).

The entrance tests and the demands were very similar in other teacher colleges in Finland as well (Heikkinen 1995, 395; Rinne 1989, 174–175).

Students’ demographic background
All the living areas of the students were carefully studied and two major questions were asked: Firstly, from what part of Finland did the students come from? Secondly, from what kind of living area did the students come from?
There are not any studies with this type of point of few. This clarifies the fact whether the students came from the area where the college was built or not. The main idea of founding this college was to provide education for the women of northern Finland. The archive sources pointed out that the students for this particular college spread interestingly (Figure 3).

The locations of the colleges that operated in Finland in 1926 are presented in Figure 3. By 1945, several changes took place; for example, the requirement of the level of teacher students' basic education was raised. It was possible to get in teacher education with only elementary school education at the Swedish college in Vaasa and Finnish college in Tornio. Together, the changes had the influence that people applied at Tornio College widely from the area of Finland.

According to the sources the students in the years 1921 to 1945 were from all provinces of Finland but mainly from the North. The high number the students originated in northern Finland is partly explained by the fact that the other colleges were located in the South (Hyrö 2006, 200; Heikkinen 1995, 394; Nurmi 1989, 19–20; 1995, 45-146; Salo 1950) and the women from those areas wanted to study near home. The province of Vaasa is highly presented mainly because there was a college in that city but it was for Swedish spoken people (Hyrö 2006, 138-252). Thus, the Finnish spoken women applied to Tornio. In conclusion, it is proved that the purpose of founding the college in Tornio to give education to women from nearby provinces came true.

When looking at the locations of the native places of students, a division into three is used. During that time, there were three kinds of living areas in Finland: city, country town and countryside (Iltanen 2004, 6–7, 174–176).

The students were mainly from the countryside in every decade. The second high amount is from cities. Because the economic base of Finland was starting to change from agrarian society into an industrial one, the number of urban students was increasing while the number of those ones from countryside decreasing (Alapuro 1987, 78–97; Karisto & 1988, 31).

Figure 3 points out that the most of the students came from Lappish countryside. It is interesting that the students’ background was the same as the one of the pupils that they were going to teach after graduation.

From Figure 4, it can be perceived that the teacher students were still temperately dressed young women. According to the college rules, the students had to behave, speak, and dress in a way that belongs to a teacher’s role and thus demonstrate that they belong to the educated people. (OMA, TseA, Ca: 1). On the other hand, a teacher was also a model for her students; indeed, the purpose of school education was to civilise the people. (Kuikka 1991; Paksuniemi 2009).

DISCUSSION

The first teacher college of northern Finland was established in Tornio in 1921, at the time when Finland gained independence and got the law of compulsory education. The college axed in 1945, after the war years. The lower primary school teacher college of Tornio provided its students with knowledge and skills. It was important that students were educated by means of strict discipline and order to become ideal teacher.
personalities. During the years studied, the image of the teacher did not change from the definition launched by Uno Cygnaeus, known as the father of the Finnish primary school. The goal of the teacher training was to develop into “God’s workers, teachers with a vocation” (Hyyrö 2006).

Prototypically, the primary school teacher was seen as a faithful public servant who taught the “3 Rs” – reading, writing, arithmetic (Simola, Kivinen & Rinne 1997) – and the “fourth R”, religion (Malmberg 2006). In addition, for example Rodwell (2003) describes the Australian teacher selection in his article “Shoes well cleaned and heels repaired” how the academic or creative ability played a very minor role compared with personality characteristics. A punctual attitude to meals and lectures was of great importance. And, “the signs of maladjustments” were also known in selection (e.g. Eltis 1987; Kerr 1983).

This article concentrated on studying the student selection from the whole time the Tornio College existed from 1921 to 1945. Even at that time, there were a great number of applicants to the teacher education. The selection aimed at control carefully the suitability of the prospective teachers.

In 1974, all the seminars were abolished and incorporated into universities. This reform created university-level departments where teachers for the lower grades of the comprehensive schools were trained. This innovation was completed in 1979 when the reform in the basic degrees started at the universities. In the field of education, the basic degree in Finland is a Master’s degree and the Finnish teacher education has the academic position nowadays. When aiming at a master’s degree and being fully integrated in the university system, teacher education has a research-based approach. This may also explain Finnish PISA success for almost a decade now (cf. Simola 2005) which has increased a wide international curiosity on the factors that might have possibly had a role in this success story.

Despite many complimentary statements and evaluations, today’s Finnish teacher education still struggle with several dilemmas (Hansén & Forsman 2009; Hölkkä, Eteläpelto & Rasku-Puttonen 2010; Maaranen 2010). One of them is the selection procedure for teacher education. Nowadays, the Finnish selection system emphasizes students’ performance and success at school. Only those who are good at school are able to get in the teacher education departments. In future, there may be difficulties with teachers’ satisfaction and engagement with their work resulting for example in quitting.

Through the selection for teacher education, we control the quantity and quality of the group of people who are allowed to become teachers and to work as teachers in our schools (Kansanen 1991). Through this process, we are able to distinguish those who are expected to be good teachers from the unsuitable ones. In spite of numerous new research on applicants’ career choice motives (e.g. Jussila 1976; Koskenniemi et al. 1965; Määttä 1978; Perho 1982) and selections for teacher education nowadays (e.g. Heikkilä-Laakso 1995; Kivinen & Rinne 1995; Liikanen 1987; Uusikylä 1990), we do not know particularly well which kind of selection criteria would be the best nor what kind of consequences this selection process has. The selection procedure of teacher education has been constantly under renewal and student selection also constitutes one essential development goal in the present teacher education (Ministry of Education 2008, 9, 68-69).

The popularity of teacher education has been great since the 1920s. Although, today’s entrance examinations and education differ from the previous, the interest in a teacher’s career has not faded out from Finnish adolescents’ occupational dreams. There were plenty of applicants to the teacher education already during the operation of Tornio College. Still, teachers’ high professional standard and occupational engagement are not matters of course in future. The selection phase has been and will be both theoretically and practically the most important matter to develop and research.
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Oulu maakunta-arkisto (OMA) [Provincial Archives of Oulu]
Tornion seminararin arkiisto (TSEa) [Archives of the College of Tornio]
Ba: 1 Viran- ja toimenihajotetun nimikirjan [Registers of the Officeholders and Employees]
Bo: 1 Opplaiden nimikirjan [Registers of the Students in 1921–1962]
Ca: 1 Opettajakunnankokousten pöytäkirjan [The Minutes of the Teaching Staff Meetings in 1921–1928]
Ca: 2 Opettajakunnankokousten pöytäkirjat 1928–1936 [The Minutes of the Teaching Staff Meetings in 1921–1928]
Cb: 1 Tarkastuspöytäkirjat 1922-1960 [The Control Minutes 1922-1960]
Da: 1 Kirjetoisteet 1921–1928 [Copies of the Letters in 1921–1928]
Ee: 1 Oppilaaksi hyväksyttyjen hakemukset 1921 [Applications of the Students in 1921]
Ee: 7 Oppilaaksi hyväksyttyjen hakemukset 1925 [Applications of the students in 1925]
Ee: 14 Oppilaaksi hyväksyttyjen hakemukset 1930 [Applications of the Students in 1930]
Ee: 21 Oppilaaksi hyväksyttyjen hakemukset 1938 [Applications of the Students in 1938]
Ee: 25 Oppilaaksi hyväksyttyjen hakemukset 1943 [Applications of the Students in 1943]
Ia: 2 Tornion seminaarin ja harjoituskoulun opettajia ja oppilaita [Teaching Staff and Students of the College of Tornio and Teacher Training School]