

## **Diversity in Civic Education: Finland in Historical and Comparative Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Education systems originally emerged alongside the creation of the nation-state system with the goal of constructing a loyal, unified national citizenry. But at least since the middle of the twentieth century, schools also increasingly aim to promote and support diversity. This shift in the purpose of schooling, however, remains poorly explained. Examining a unique dataset of civic education textbooks, we conduct both a longitudinal analysis of Finland, which has an extremely ethnically homogeneous population, and a contemporary cross-national comparison of 33 countries. We highlight that contemporary levels of emphasis on diversity in Finland outpace many countries that have greater ethno-linguistic diversity. We argue that increasing attention to the rights of diverse groups reflects an underlying social and cultural shift at the global level in the conception of ideal civic behavior, moving from the goal of constructing unquestioningly loyal national citizens to the creation of active, empowered, and globally aware individuals.

### **Introduction**

One of the most dramatic changes in civic education since the creation of mass schooling is the growing emphasis on diversity. Education systems originally emerged alongside the creation of the nation-state system starting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the goal of constructing a loyal, unified national citizenry (Bendix 1964; Tyack 1974; Fitzgerald 1979; Anderson 1991; Meyer et al. 1992; Moreau 2004). For roughly three hundred years in most countries of the world a range of social groups, such as women, indigenous peoples, immigrants, or visible minorities, were not considered full citizens, or were expected to shed their cultural identity and assimilate to dominant norms to be incorporated into the national polity. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, there has been a fundamental shift in the purpose of schooling that remains poorly explained. Schooling is increasingly intended to promote equality among all individuals and to support diversity rather than solely support ideas of a unitary national community (Torney-Purta et al. 1999; 2001; Banks 2004; Schissler and Soysal 2005; Stevick and Levison 2006). In this paper we provide evidence of the trend away from

national homogeneity towards diversity and individual equality, and offer a sociological explanation for this change.

We argue that the actual level of diversity in national society due to ethnic differences can, at best, only partially explain increasing emphases on diversity in civic education. We contend instead that increasing attention to the rights of diverse groups reflects an underlying social and cultural shift at the global level in the conception of ideal civic behavior, moving from the goal of constructing unquestioningly loyal national citizens to the creation active, empowered, and globally aware individuals. Using civic education textbooks as data, we conduct both a longitudinal analysis of Finland and a contemporary cross-national comparison of 33 countries to shed light on these changes. We focus primarily on Finland because its position as a relatively homogenous country makes contemporary emphases on diversity particularly striking. However the issues presented are applicable to a broad array of countries, including the United States.

We first analyze 14 Finnish textbooks over time, from 1930 to 2005, showing a striking increase in emphases on various forms of social diversity despite relatively low and stable levels of actual ethnic diversity in society. We chose Finland as an extreme case because its population is thought to be among the most ethnically homogenous in the world and thus has little direct rationale for emphasizing diversity. Second, we compare a contemporary cross-section of 154 civic education textbooks from a broad range of 33 countries, highlighting that contemporary levels of emphasis on diversity in Finland outpace other countries with far greater ethno-linguistic diversity. At the textbook level, we show that emphases on diversity are correlated with student-centered pedagogical styles that focus on student empowerment and agency in Finland and cross-nationally. At the country level we additionally show that diversity emphases are negatively associated with the level of ethno-linguistic diversity in society and positively associated with indicators of individualism in national society.

Very little research seeks directly to understand why contemporary civic education in so many countries increasingly emphasizes diversity or multiculturalism, and we have a poor understanding of why this trend is observed globally. Implicitly, scholars often attribute the shift to actual increasing levels of diversity in the world, largely due to global migration, and/or normatively assume it is a natural part of progress among liberal democratic societies. For example, Grossjean (1999) argues that in many parts of the world, such as Western Europe, multicultural education programs have developed to accommodate increasing numbers of immigrants, especially since World War II. Gutman (2004) points out that in other countries, such as Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands, and South Africa, discussions of diversity are concerned with the needs of settled national minorities and/or indigenous populations. In his book, *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*, Banks (2004, xix) begins with a similar rationale,

describing how “nation-states throughout the world have become more racially, ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse since World War II.

We seek to contribute to an emerging body of sociological literature that provides an alternative account for the rise of diversity and multicultural emphases in civic education. Following institutional theories of education, we argue that in reaction to the human disasters of the early twentieth century and World War II, a world movement arose to protect the rights of individuals and minorities (Meyer et al. 1997). Thus, when nation states were rebuilding their societal structures after World War II, it was often in alignment with newly developed international standards. For example, in June 1945 the Finnish government established the Primary School Curriculum Committee, which pushed for reforms to modernize Finnish curriculum according to international standards. Sahlberg (2011, 17) states that “the committee put forth the idea that school should aim at educating young people to realize themselves as holistic individuals, possessing intrinsic motivation for further education.” Rapid social and cultural globalization following World War II has created a world in which there is an unprecedented legitimacy to the standing of the participatory and empowered individual person (Frank and Meyer 2002). In an older world, sovereignty was absolute, and rights belonged to a narrowly defined set of national citizens. In contrast, in the contemporary globalized context rights belong to all human beings and individuals are encouraged to actively promote the protection of their rights and the rights of others (Skrentny 2002; Stacy 2009).

In our view, actual increasing levels of diversity in society through, for example, immigration, may contribute to more multicultural approaches in civic education, but this mechanism is indirect. International migration plays a role in the creation of new social and cultural expectations in how immigrants should be treated in a world where all individuals are assumed to be equals and to possess inherent human rights. The construction of new national and global expectations of how immigrants and other minority groups should be treated drives changes in civic education, rather than the functional need of particular societies to “cope” with increasing numbers of immigrants. Thus, we expect (a) civic education in national societies will become concerned with the rights of minority groups mainly following the creation of a new conception of the standing of individuals after World War II, although diverse groups, such as immigrants, national minorities, and indigenous peoples, existed in national society for long periods before. Related, given the global impetus for such a shift, we expect (b) many countries will increasingly emphasize multiculturalism regardless of actual levels of diversity in national society. Finally, our argument suggests instead that (c) emphases on diversity in civic education will be found more often in textbooks and national societies that emphasize individual empowerment and agency.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify two key terms used loosely above.

Following Kymlicka (2007), the words “multicultural” and “diversity” are used interchangeably to refer to the broad idea of providing public support and recognition for (often marginalized) groups, including national minorities, indigenous peoples, and newer immigrant groups, to express and maintain distinct identities and practices. Although distinctions between these various terms and types of groups can be drawn, it is beyond the scope of our current purpose to speak to this debate. The next section of our paper discusses the data and methods in more depth and provides a brief overview of civic education in Finland.

## **Data and Methods**

The data for our study consists of two collections of social science textbooks, used in teaching history, civics, and social studies. The first is a longitudinal set of 46 books from Finland covering the period from 1930 to 2005 and the second is a cross-sectional analysis of 154 contemporary (published after 1999) textbooks from 33 countries. Appendix A lists the number of textbooks analyzed per country.

The Finnish data was collected mainly from history and civics teachers who had used the books in their teaching both at middle school and high school levels. Two teachers provided a sample of over ten books each. Seven books were borrowed from the collections of a few individual teachers. Three textbooks were coded in the Finnish National Library in Finland during the summer of 2010. Additional books were purchased from second-hand bookstores in Finland. There was evidence (e.g. notes) that all of the textbooks had been used either by a student or a teacher. For the present study, a subset of fourteen books was selected to equally represent each decade. From the selected fourteen books approximately half was used in middle schools and half in lower high schools. One-third of the textbooks were history books and two-thirds civics books. The time period (1930-2005) is the greatest historical range of books we could obtain, with the goal of starting soon after Finland gained independence in 1917.

In Finland, the education system is comprehensive and compulsory. Students begin school during the year that they turn seven and end when they turn sixteen or when they complete their comprehensive school syllabus, whichever comes first (Sahlberg 2011). As the textbook data covers several decades, it reflects historical changes in the Finnish education system. In the 1970s the government began a series of educational reforms relevant to our study, such as moving from a parallel to a comprehensive school system and introducing instruction in the Sami language (Ahonen and Virta 1999; Aiko-Puoskari 1998). Thus, in our analyses we show changes before and after 1970.

Within the Finnish Government, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for developing educational, science, cultural, sport, and youth policies as well

as international cooperation in these fields. Until the 1990s, all textbooks were approved by the National Board of Education. Since then the decision-making and responsibility for textbook adoption has devolved to the local level, but textbooks are required to closely follow a National Core Curriculum.

The majority of textbooks in the cross-national sample come from the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Germany, and were originally gathered and used as part of a project to examine human rights education led by John Meyer and Francisco Ramirez (Meyer et al. 2010). The Institute collects social science textbooks from countries around the world and has a library with over 60,000 social science books published since World War II.

Each textbook was analyzed using a questionnaire developed for the larger, cross-national and longitudinal project that examined social science textbooks from more than 65 countries since 1970 (Bromley 2009; Meyer et al. 2010; Bromley 2011). Coding procedures were developed to capture content related to human rights, diversity, and national identity, following guidelines in Krippendorf (2004). The coding protocol is available from the authors upon request. We made every effort to reduce error in the final coding document by using an iterative piloting process over the course of an entire academic year and continuous monitoring inter-rater reliability and adjusting the questions throughout this period. Further, the questions are mainly factual in nature, not calling for interpretation on the part of coders. Books were analyzed by fully bilingual translators (most often native speakers of the textbook language pursuing a higher education degree in English) sitting with the first author. Finnish textbooks were analyzed by the second author who also participated in the coding of the international sample. It took approximately one hour to one and a half hours to analyze each book. For our analysis of Finnish textbooks some questions were adapted slightly to suit the specific context, but the basic framework for analysis replicated the cross-national work. For example, the Finnish questionnaire asks directly about discussions of the rights of Swedish-language speakers, as well as Sami and Roma minority groups.

Naturally, there are a number of limitations to our database. We focus on formal curricula, but many celebrations of diversity occur informally through activities such as teaching a range of ethnic holidays, establishing relationships with “sister” schools, and the like. We certainly underrepresent the entire extent to which diversity emphases infiltrate schools. In the data we do have, it would be better to have a complete sample of textbooks for Finland over time, and complete samples of textbooks from a great many more countries both for the contemporary period and going back further in time. Our experience, however, indicates historical collections of textbooks are difficult to find, making it implausible to collect complete samples for the vast majority of countries. Our efforts here represent one of the largest cross-national attempts to systematically analyze

civic education textbooks that we have come across, and the striking, consistent patterns we observe suggest insight may still be gained from our analyses.

## Findings

### *National Social Diversity*

We begin our discussion of findings by illustrating a discrepancy between actual levels of diversity in society and discussions of the rights of diverse groups in textbooks, first in Finland and then cross-nationally. The next section of our findings considers our alternative explanation, the status of the individual in the textbook and in broader society.

**Figure 1. Increase in rights of diverse groups over time**

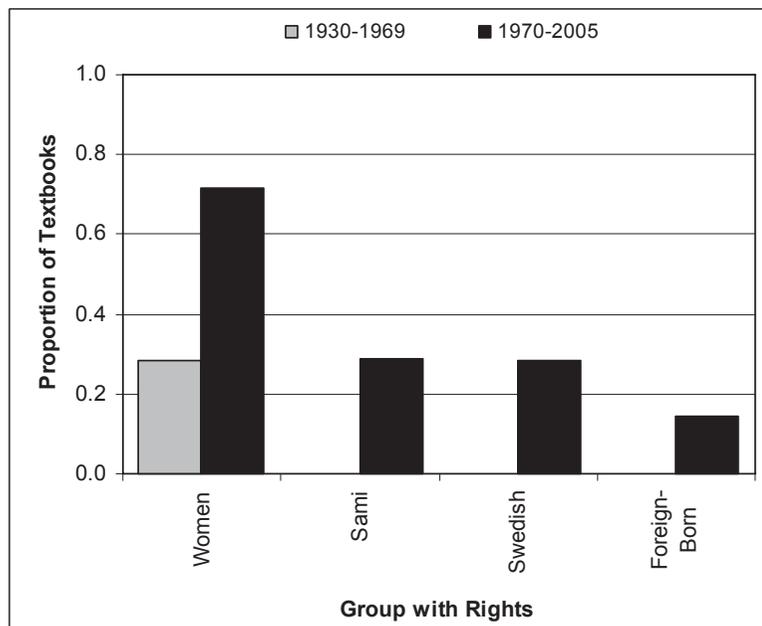
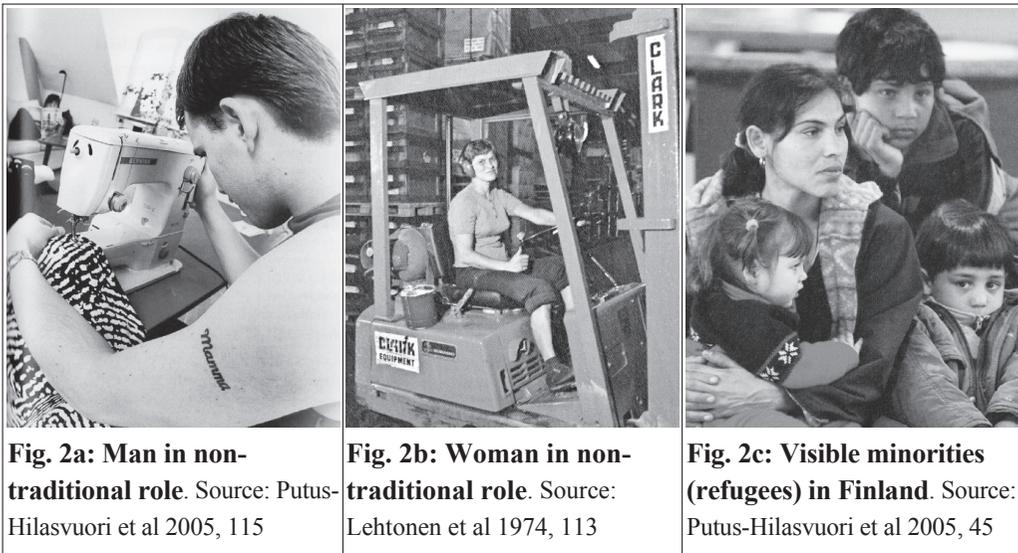


Figure 1 shows a striking increase in the discussions of rights of four diverse groups in Finnish society – women, the Sami, Swedish, and foreign-born residents (immigrants or refugees). We present our findings in two periods, for books published from 1930 to 1969 and those published from 1970 to 2005. This splits our sample relatively evenly and captures changes that come after the previously mentioned school reforms in 1970. For all four groups, we see an increase over time. The rights of women are explicitly discussed in five out of the seven books since 1970 and only in two books in the early period. The rights of foreign-born residents of Finland (immigrants or refugees), the indigenous Sami people, and the Swedish-speaking minority, do not appear at all in books from our early

period, emerging only after 1970 and even then less frequently than women. Specifically, in our study, the rights of the Swedish minority do not appear until the textbook from 1988, and the rights of the Sami and immigrants do not appear until the book analyzed for 2000. Our findings do not cover the entire sample of Finnish textbooks, and so cannot be used to pinpoint an exact date where minorities enter the curricula. Despite these limitations, the general trend is striking and consistent. Further, in our textbook analysis we observed increases in attention to, and promotion of, the rights of minority groups in ways that go beyond rights discourse. For example, contemporary textbooks include numerous images of traditional gender boundaries becoming blurred (Figure 2a and 2b) and of visible minorities (Figure 2c), both of which are entirely absent from the earliest books.

**Figure 2.**



Immigrants, Swedish-speakers, and the Sami, existed in significant numbers in Finland from the start of our study, but are not depicted as bearing special rights until recent decades. This timing in textbooks is paralleled by the emergence of national legislative developments to protect minorities. For example, Sami language instruction began in some schools after education reforms in the 1970s, and Finland recognized the Sami as a “people” in 1995 (Aiko-Puoskari 1998), rather than recognition from the start of Finnish independence in 1917 of a “need” for instruction in and about the Sami people. Further, there remain large silences about some groups in society both in the textbooks we examined and in national policies. For example, the Roma population in Finland is

estimated to be roughly equivalent to the Sami (both at about 0.1% of the population)<sup>1</sup>, but only one textbook mentions the Roma and there are not similar national legislative efforts to promote Roma culture in Finnish schools.

A qualitative example illustrates a modal discussion of rights of diverse groups. Often, there are references to conforming to international norms or treaties, and the rights of diverse groups are typically depicted as taken-for-granted and conflict-free. For instance, the book *Living Civics* published in 1988 contains the following discussion in a section titled “Foreigners”:

Based on international agreements, foreigners staying in Finland may have similar rights to those of citizens of Finland. In Finland there are permanently almost 15,000 foreigners, who are under the jurisdiction of the immigration law. The ministry of internal affairs has control over this matter. The office may grant permits of residence and working permits at first for a year. Processing these applications may take a long time. Without a permit of residence a foreigner cannot usually get a bus card or a medical insurance card. A foreigner can use a working permit only with a specific employer meaning that he or she cannot change to another job<sup>2</sup> (Katajamäki 1988, 117)

Moving to the international level, Figure 3 presents findings of the relationship between the average number of diverse groups mentioned in a country’s textbooks (out of four possible groups, women, indigenous peoples, racial or ethnic minorities, and foreign-born) and ethnic-diversity in society. At the national level we employ a common indicator of ethnic diversity developed by Fearon (2003), which is the probability that any two individuals selected at random from a country will be from different ethnic groups. For 27 countries we were able to obtain this measure of ethnic diversity and code at least two contemporary civics textbooks. Despite the sparseness of our data, the pattern is clear. In our sample there is a correlation of -0.33 (significant at the 0.08 level using a two-tailed test) between the level of ethnic diversity in society and the extent to which textbooks emphasize the rights of diverse groups. These findings parallel a quantitative analysis by Bromley (2011) using a larger, longitudinal sample of textbooks and countries holding constant other relevant factors such as economic and political development.

If diversity emphases in civic education were linked to actual levels of ethno-cultural

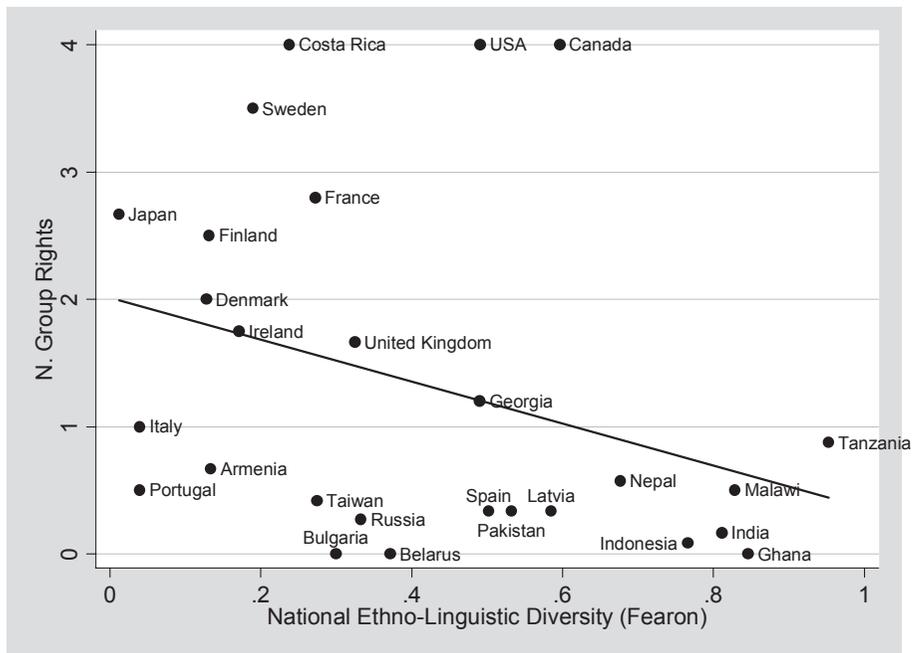
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<sup>1</sup> From <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fi.html>. Accessed January 24, 2011. Note, however, that it is very difficult to obtain accurate estimates of the total number of Sami and Roma in Finland and there is no consensus on how to count these groups. The Finnish government uses the designations of native tongue (which underestimates the number of Sami) and whether citizens are foreign-born. In 2010 just 0.03% of citizens were foreign born, 0.003% spoke Sami as their native language, and there were roughly 25,000 immigrants (0.005% of population) (Statistics Finland 2010).

<sup>2</sup> All translations were done by the second author, original Finnish available upon request.

diversity in society, we would expect relatively homogenous countries like Finland or Japan to rarely mention diversity, and highly diverse countries like India or Indonesia to place more emphasis on multiculturalism. A likely explanation is that governments in more ethno-linguistically fractionalized countries feel their “imagined community” is more threatened or less stable and seek to use schooling to emphasize national similarity to a greater extent.

**Figure 3. Correlation between Discussions of Group Rights in Textbooks and National Ethno-Linguistic Diversity**



*Individual Empowerment*

This evidence indicates that the level of ethnic diversity in national society provides a weak explanation of why and when countries incorporate emphases on the rights of diverse groups into civic education. Our approach suggests that an additional factor to consider is the status of individual persons as agentic and empowered. At the textbook level, the elevated status of individuals is most evident in a variety of pedagogical strategies referred to most commonly as student- or learner-centered. Generally, these approaches place the students’ developmental stage and/or interests at the center of the learning process. Learners are conceptualized as active participants in creating knowledge rather than passive recipients of a sacred canon.

**Figure 4. Increases in Student-Centrism over Time**

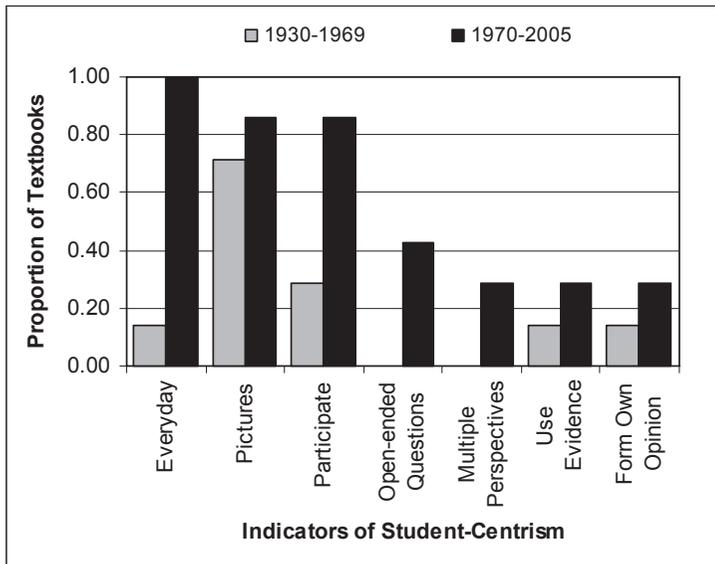


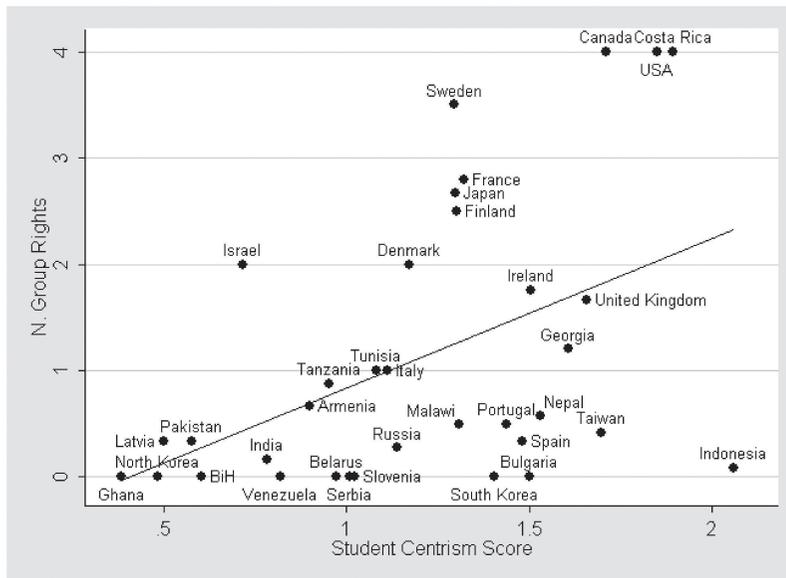
Figure 4 shows that in Finland a series of indicators of student-centrism all increase over time, parallel to increases in discussions of the rights of diverse groups. For example, the types of sources used to teach about historical events shift from official documents to focusing on the lives of ordinary people. In our sample the proportion of textbooks that use official sources as primary documents (e.g. excerpts from speeches by politicians) remains constant at 29%, but the proportion of books that include everyday sources of primary documents (e.g. diaries of ordinary people) jumps from 14% to 100%. Similarly, the pictures in textbooks shift from showing items or people of interest in traditional history (e.g. photos of political figures or important monuments) towards pictures of children and everyday people. Overwhelmingly, contemporary textbooks encourage students to participate in society, whereas in older texts they were simply to learn the facts of history and society. Finally, four items illustrate the change in students' relationship to knowledge. Questions are increasingly open-ended, meaning they do not have clear right or wrong answers. History is shown to differ depending on one's perspective, and students are taught to weigh historical evidence and to form their own opinion.

Taken together, these student-centered trends endow students with the authority to make decisions about historical knowledge and social events. Whereas older textbooks depict history as a single narrative of the nation's "true" story, contemporary textbooks emphasize multiple perspectives or interpretations of history and critical thinking, thereby giving legitimacy to the experiences of a range of groups. When history moves towards being told through the eyes of different people, and students are taught to weight evidence about historical narratives with a critical eye, then diverse experiences are legitimated

as part of the national experience. In this way, national stories rest more in the hands of “regular” people and diverse groups than a dominant ethno-cultural group.

Moving to our cross-national analysis of textbooks, Figure 5 shows a similarly strong association between student-centrism and emphases on the rights of diverse groups. The student-centrism score is an index created from items capturing the pedagogical student-centrism of textbooks similar to those described above for Finland (from Bromley et al. 2011) and the group rights measure remains the same. Among the 33 countries in our sample, there is a correlation of 0.49 between these two indicators (significant at the 0.004 level, two-tailed test). Thus, in Finland we see an increase over time in both discussions of diversity and student-centered pedagogical approaches. Cross-nationally, we see a parallel trend; countries that use more student-centered pedagogy also discuss the rights of a greater number of groups.

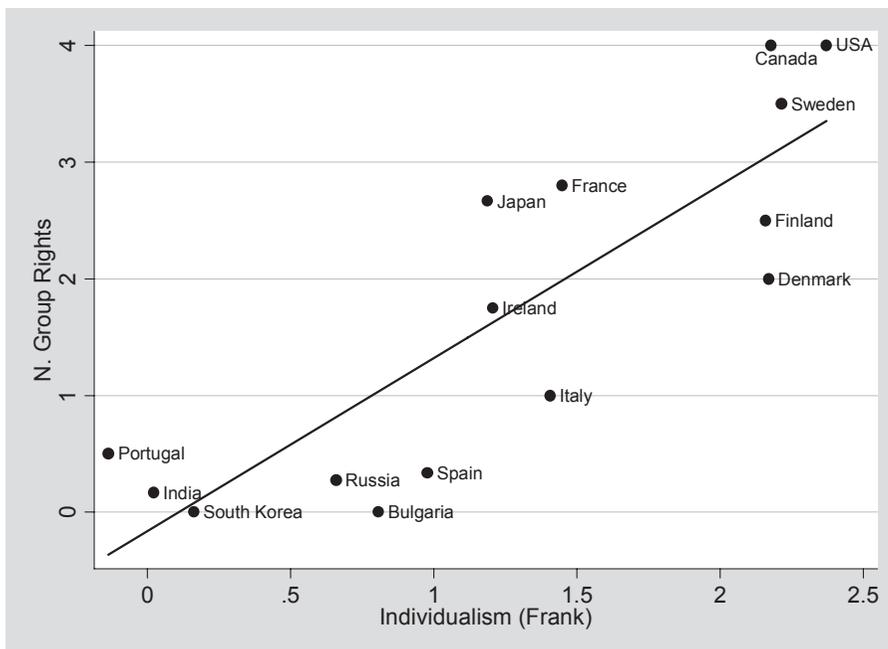
**Figure 5. Correlation between Average Number of Group Rights Mentioned and Average Student-Centrism Score**



Student-centered emphases are a way to consider individual empowerment within textbooks, but our arguments also suggest that we would observe a relationship between national levels of individualism and diversity emphases in textbooks. A challenge of this approach is that it is extremely difficult to obtain a measure of individualism for large numbers of countries. Thus, we consider this association in a highly preliminary way using data for fifteen countries. For these cases we consider the association between an individualism indicator developed by Frank et al. (1995) that is an index of the prevalence of professionalized psychology in a country and discussions of the rights of diverse groups

in textbooks. Figure 6 shows a positive relationship between national individualism and the average number of group rights mentioned in textbooks (the correlation is 0.84 and significant at the 0.0001 level using a two-tailed test). The indicator of individualism developed by Frank et al is highly correlated with other measures of national individualism, such as that developed by Hofstede (1984) and Triandis (1995), and a robustness check (not reported here) shows the pattern of our results is similar regardless of which measure we use although we lose a number of cases. In sum, our evidence suggests that at both the textbook and country level, if there is greater emphasis on the student and individuals, there are more discussions of the rights of diverse groups in civic education textbooks.

**Figure 6. Correlation between Average Number of Group Rights Mentioned and National Individualism**



## Conclusion and Implications

Actual ethnic diversity in society is, at best, only a partial explanation for contemporary multicultural emphases in civic education. Our theoretical approach suggests that an alternative explanation lies in the emergence of a view of all persons as agentic, empowered individuals. Our analysis of Finnish textbooks suggests that minority groups can be present in society long before they become a topic of concern in curricula and education systems, and other groups may exist that are given little to no attention.

Yet over time there is increasing attention both to the rights of a range of groups and to student-centered approaches. Cross-nationally, we provide evidence that discussions of the rights of diverse groups appear less often in countries with greater ethno-linguistic diversity, but more often in textbooks and countries that emphasize the individual.

Although our main goal here is conceptual, our theory has important implications for civic education. First, our findings highlight the point that emphases on multiculturalism and diversity in civic are more a socially constructed phenomenon than a naturally occurring phenomenon driven by social need. The “need” for protection of diverse groups existed long before such emphases emerged, and is not consistently found in countries with the most diversity. We argue the social context needed to change towards placing value on individual agency and empowerment in order for contemporary diversity emphases to develop. As a socially constructed phenomenon, contemporary emphases on diversity often take the character of a taken-for-granted or natural part of modern education. However, the specific groups that are represented in textbooks, and how they are depicted, are also influenced by power and dominance relations in society. Many groups remain excluded in textbooks, such as gays and lesbians, which appeared in just a handful of the 154 contemporary textbooks we examined, or the Roma in Finland, who are mentioned rarely despite existing in large numbers. Moreover, our country-level findings provide support for the disturbing argument that notions of multiculturalism and diversity perhaps appear least in the education systems of countries in most need. High levels of ethno-linguistic fractionalization are found especially in many sub-Saharan African countries, while the developed world has generally lower levels of ethnic fractionalization and higher emphases on diversity.

Second, our view suggests civic education is increasingly de-nationalized in a number of ways. We argue that increasing emphases on diversity and student-centrism in civic education are a form of social globalization driven by the emergence of global cultural principles that elevate the status of individuals and the protection of rights. Further, emphases on diversity and student-centrism prepare students for life as active, empowered individuals, but de-emphasize preparation for life as citizens of a particular national society. For some, increasing emphasis on diversity and individual empowerment may contribute to the creation of a more just, inclusive, equitable world. But others (e.g. Huntington 2004) argue such trends come at the expense of national unity and may contribute to greater fractionalization within countries. Related, student-centered approaches can be criticized as a form of “tot sociology” that fail to teach students the lessons of national history and culture that bind the nation together (e.g. Ravitch 1987). A key implication of our work is that civic education is being repurposed away from its original goal of constructing a unitary national citizenry and towards a new view emphasizing human diversity, empowerment and equality in a globally interconnected world.

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**Appendix A: Countries and Variables in Cross-National Comparisons**

Country (n=33)	N. Textbooks Analyzed (n=154)	Avg. N. Group Rights in Textbooks	Avg. Student Centrism in Textbooks	Natl Ethnic Diversity Score (Fearon 2003)	NatlIndiv. Score (Frank et al 1995)
Armenia	3	0.67	0.90	0.13	.
Belarus	2	0.00	0.97	0.37	.
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7	0.00	0.60	.	.
Bulgaria	4	0.00	1.50	0.30	0.81
Canada	3	4.00	1.71	0.60	2.18
Costa Rica	4	4.00	1.89	0.24	.
Denmark	2	2.00	1.17	0.13	2.17
Finland	2	2.50	1.31	0.13	2.16
France	5	2.80	1.32	0.27	1.45
Georgia	5	1.20	1.61	0.49	.
Ghana	4	0.00	0.38	0.85	.
India	6	0.17	0.78	0.81	0.02
Indonesia	12	0.08	2.06	0.77	.
Ireland	4	1.75	1.51	0.17	1.21
Italy	2	1.00	1.11	0.04	1.41
Japan	3	2.67	1.30	0.01	1.19
Latvia	3	0.33	0.50	0.59	.
Malawi	2	0.50	1.31	0.83	.
Nepal	7	0.57	1.53	0.68	.
North Korea	2	0.00	0.48	.	.
Pakistan	3	0.33	0.58	0.53	.
Portugal	2	0.50	1.44	0.04	-0.14
Russia	22	0.27	1.14	0.33	0.66
Serbia	2	0.00	1.01	.	.
Slovenia	2	0.00	1.02	.	.
South Korea	3	0.00	1.40	.	0.16
Spain	3	0.33	1.48	0.50	0.98
Sweden	2	3.50	1.30	0.19	2.21
Taiwan	12	0.42	1.70	0.27	.
Tanzania	8	0.88	0.95	0.95	.
Tunisia	3	1.00	1.08	.	.
USA	3	4.00	1.85	0.49	2.37
United Kingdom	7	1.67	1.66	0.32	.