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This proposal falls under following conference themes:
1. Changing identities, personal and cultural
2. Global economies and global justice

My work–in–progress deals with questions of education on population level. I will study the identity–influencing effects of education on future generations, and the duties and responsibilities these effects might construct for us. By contrasting philosophy of education with population ethics I intend to shed light on the following questions: in which ways is education connected into shaping of the identities of future generations? Do any of these ways construct special duties and responsibilities for us as educators and as theorists of education?

My working hypothesis is that on population level education has roughly three kinds of effects. First, education influences the personal identities of all living individuals. Second, education has influence on the number of people being born. Third, education might also have an effect on the individual identity of the people who will be born (on who are the ones being born). I assume that we will have to take these identity–influencing effects morally into account in educational theory. This will require studying the different effects, their possible relations and the possibility of harmful educational policies. At least second

1 In this paper the term identity is used in two separate ways. By personal identity I refer to the individual personality or the character every person possesses, and which can change over time when the person matures, for example. In contrast, identity of a person can also signify the individual itself. In this sense changing an identity means that we are talking about two different individuals altogether. I will claim that education can have both kinds of identity–influencing effects on population level.
and third of the effects outlined above seem to have a connection to the so called Non–Identity Problem in ethics: what kind of duties do we have towards individuals who do not yet exist? Can our actions and omission harm individuals who at the same time will exist only due to our choices?

It is certain that we become different kind of persons depending on our education. It can be said that our personal identities would have been (at least) slightly different had we received different kind of education. Furthermore, our personality and the manner we have been brought up has an effect on how we as educators treat children. When the children we have cared for – for instance in our families or as teachers – grow up, they will in turn influence on the newer generation, and so forth. The manner and content of education, therefore, has an effect not only on the ones being educated at the present moment, but also on the generations to come. This effect is prone to multiply when a main part of a generation receives a similar kind of education in a certain phase of its life. This is the case for instance in obligatory basic (or school) education regulated by national curriculum. Therefore, in certain cases, education seems to have an effect on people’s personal identities on a population level.

Education has also other kinds of effects on whole populations, starting from population size. Girls’ basic education especially seems to have quite direct consequences on fertility, because once girls attend school, they are more likely have fewer children in later age.\(^2\) In addition to the number of individuals being born, education might also have an influence on who are the individuals which will be born. For instance, education on family–planning or sexual health might influence a pregnant young girl to have an abortion, and to have an other child later when she is older, and when her life–prospects are likely to be better. She will obviously not have the same child later, but she might be able to give a better start in life to a child which will be born later.\(^3\) Arguably, basic education in general might have similar kinds of effects on the identity of individuals being born as the more specific education on family–planning or sexual health. Therefore, on population level, basic education might have identity–influencing effects on both 'personal' and 'individual' identities.


\(^3\) This is part of a thought-experiment Derek Parfit (1984) uses in his Reasons and Persons, p. 358–360.
If these speculations prove to be correct, what kinds of educational responsibilities would we then have towards future generations? We have direct influence on children within our closest social circles and this fact quite clearly constructs responsibilities for us, but do we have analogous educational responsibilities towards future generations? Population ethicists are concerned about the effects of our actions and omissions towards future generations. How much weight do we need to give to the interests of future generation? And do we need to consider education’s identity–influencing effects on the population level as such, or rather as a part of varying social policies?

The second and third types of identity–influencing effects (the number and identity of the individuals being born) might be connected to the so called Non–Identity Problem in ethics: what kind of duties do we have towards individuals who do not yet exist? Can our actions and omission harm these individuals who at the same time will exist only due to our choices? Education is in major part future–oriented activity, yet it is unclear what kind of role education has to play in connection with these questions. Therefore it seems plausible to study education (especially school education) in the light of the Non–Identity Problem.

In addition, also the first one of the three identity–influencing effects might turn out to be a case of Non–Identity. What kind of duties do we have towards individuals we have educated, especially if their personal identity was not the same had we not taken part in their education? Can the problem of Non–Identity be raised in education itself, at the present, if education always molds its subjects, and therefore is responsible for ‘creating’ those specific individuals? It would be a disagreeable outcome to conclude that any kind of education would be justified on the argument that no–one can be raised without education (yet this might be one suggested conclusion if the first effect was a case of Non–Identity).

Is it possible to outline an educational policy which would also be in the interests of future generations? Would it for instance be our responsibility to aim to safeguard the minimum basic level of living for the future generations or the fulfillment of their rights? In which ways education could contribute on fulfillment of interests and rights of the future generations? Clarification of these issues will in turn help setting and evaluating the overall educational aims and ideals.4

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