

# Pareto-Improving Education Subsidies with Financial Frictions and Heterogenous Ability\*

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## Abstract

Previous literature has shown that missing credit or insurance markets do not necessarily provide an argument for educational subsidies based on the Pareto criterion, starting with a laissez faire competitive equilibrium. With heterogeneity in learning ability, we show that a Paretian rationale does exist. In an OLG economy with ability heterogeneity and missing financial markets, we prove: (a) every competitive equilibrium is interim Pareto dominated (and ex post Pareto dominated with sufficient parental altruism) by a policy providing education subsidies financed by income taxes, and (b) transfers conditional on educational investments similarly dominate unconditional transfers. The policies also result in macroeconomic improvements (higher per capita income and upward mobility).

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# 1 Introduction

Can education or investment subsidies make everyone better off when agents face borrowing constraints or uninsurable idiosyncratic risks? This is a central question pertaining to the normative role of government policies in economies with financial market imperfections. While a large literature in public economics, macroeconomics and development have studied dynamic models with financial frictions, this question has typically either not been addressed or answered in the negative. Consider for instance papers on occupational choice with borrowing constraints, such as Loury (1981), Banerjee and Newman (1993), Galor and Zeira (1993) and many successors. Most of these papers show that investment subsidies for poor agents (financed by progressive income or wealth taxes) can raise aggregate surplus and lower inequality, but whether such policies can be Pareto improving is not addressed. Mookherjee and Ray (2003) show that versions of such models with homogenous ability always admit steady states that are (unconstrained) Pareto efficient; indeed when investments are perfectly divisible there is a unique steady state which is Pareto efficient. In other words, policies that raise investment of poor agents must necessarily involve some redistribution that harms others.

Similar negative results appear in the public economics literature on optimal taxation in models with uninsurable income risk. For instance, in a two period model with uninsurable (ex post) income risk but no borrowing constraints, Jacobs, Schindler and Yang (2012) argue that

“... when there is no social insurance, governments cannot improve upon the laissez-faire outcome by subsidizing education. Intuitively, education subsidies are state-independent and cannot insure income risks. Thus, subsidizing education upsets the optimal private response to market risk by distorting investment in human capital. As long as insurance markets are missing and social insurance is unavailable, it is incorrect to argue that governments should correct under-investment or over-investment in human capital with education subsidies.” (Jacobs, Schindler and Yang (2012, p. 911))

In this paper we argue that the negative conclusions drawn by previous literature owe critically to their assumption of absence of (ex ante) ability heterogeneity. Suppose there is some idiosyncratic variation in abilities of newborn agents. Consider any cohort of parents with identical wealths. Within any such cohort, the children of some parents will be more

able than others, implying idiosyncratic variations in their respective rates of return to education. Parental decisions to invest in their children's education will depend on whether their child's ability exceeds some (endogenous) threshold. Owing to financial market imperfections, those whose children turn out to be gifted (i.e., above the threshold) will finance their education partly by sacrificing their own consumption. Hence ability 'risk' will translate into parental consumption volatility. Educational subsidies financed by a uniform tax levied on all parents will provide insurance against such consumption volatility, effectively transferring resources from parents that do not invest to those that do. As the subsidy is conditional on the educational investment, the provision of such insurance encourages greater investment. If one ignores general equilibrium effects then at the ex ante stage (when the ability shocks are yet to be realized) the subsidy program ends up being Pareto improving, besides raising per capita investment and income (net of educational costs).

This argument can be adapted to accommodate GE effects. We show that it applies quite generally in the context of an OLG model of occupational choice, and is robust to extensions of the model in various directions. The base model has two occupations (skilled and unskilled), and two levels of education (zero or one). Agents either do or do not receive an education, which is necessary to enter the skilled occupation. Parents pay for their children's education and cannot borrow for this purpose. The amount they need to spend is decreasing in their child's learning ability, which is drawn from an iid distribution. Parents decide whether or not to educate their child after observing the latter's ability. Wages in each occupation in any given generation depend on the relative supply of skilled and unskilled adults, i.e., on the aggregate of educational decisions made by parents of the previous generation. We initially consider the case where adults supply labor inelastically, do not bear any ex post income risk, have perfect foresight over future wages, exhibit Barro-Becker paternalistic altruism towards their children, and are unable to transfer wealth via financial bequests.

Starting with a laissez faire equilibrium, the government can offer a small subsidy to any parent that educates its child, which is financed by a tax paid by all parents in the same generation and occupation. The policy smooths parental consumption with respect to ability shocks of their children, besides lowering the ability threshold for education. *Ceteris paribus* this raises interim utility of parents in the given occupation-generation pair, as well as the proportion of the population in the next generation that are educated. In other words, the policy results simultaneously in higher education incentives and insurance of parental consumption against ability risk. This forms the primary source of the efficiency

improvement.

However, complications arise owing to induced effects on educational investments and utilities in other generations. Anticipation of the intervention affects educational incentives in previous generations; general equilibrium effects alter the income distribution between skilled and unskilled agents in subsequent generations. We show it is possible to address these obstacles to everyone being better off.

For instance, if the primary intervention involved educational transfers for unskilled parents in generation  $t$ , a similar intervention for skilled parents in generation  $t$  can generate an increase in interim utility of skilled parents of the same magnitude as for unskilled parents in generation  $t$ , leaving the difference in utilities between skilled and unskilled parents unchanged. Then educational incentives in preceding generations are unaffected. General equilibrium effects of increased educational investment by generation  $t$  are detrimental for all skilled agents in generation  $t + 1$  whose generation  $t$  parents would have invested in education also under *laissez faire*. We demonstrate that this harmful distributional impact on subsequent generations can be offset with regressive income taxes.

The eventual fiscal intervention overlays all these different interventions together, in a way that raises interim utilities of parents in every occupation-generation pair. *Ex post*, parents who do not invest in their children's education end up cross-subsidizing the consumption of those who do. With sufficient altruism, the costs of this are outweighed by the gain in expected utilities of their descendants, resulting in an *ex post* Pareto improvement.

A similar argument works for any tax-distorted competitive equilibrium which does not involve educational subsidies, provided the initial taxes are progressive (which is required to ensure that an increase in the supply of skilled agents does not increase fiscal deficits). The argument does not require the government to borrow or lend across generations; nor does it require it to observe the ability realizations of children in the population. This result provides a theoretical foundation for conditioning welfare payments to poor households on enrolling their children in school, as in various conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs adopted in numerous low and middle income countries.

We show the argument is robust to extensions of the model that incorporate endogenous labor supply, paternalistic altruism, and an arbitrary number of occupations. However, the results do not generalize quite as straightforwardly when human capital investments can be supplemented by financial bequests. In particular, they do not apply to households wealthy (and altruistic) enough that they *always* make financial bequests, irrespective of how much they invest in education. Within such a wealth class, those who do not invest in education

end up spending more on their children overall, and thus consume less than parents who do invest in education. This reverses the pattern of consumption variation with respect to the realization of children’s ability risk – the educational subsidy policy described above would now impose additional consumption risk, and thereby create a welfare loss. Laissez faire competitive equilibria continue to be constrained Pareto inefficient, however. The nature of a Pareto improving policy is now reversed: requiring education for the wealthy (as defined above and corresponding to the top 5% in the US wealth distribution according to the calibrations by Abbott, Gallipoli, Meghir and Violante (2013)) to be taxed, and these taxes to fund income transfers to the same class. The nature of the Pareto improving policy is unchanged for poor households who invest if at all only in education and leave no financial bequests. The aggregate macroeconomic effects of such a Pareto improving policy are unclear, as the increased educational investments among the poor will be countered by falling investments among the wealthy.

This paper relates to a wide literature spanning macroeconomics, public finance, occupational choice and development economics on the policy implications of financial frictions. We present a detailed review of related literature in Section 5. To summarize, the distinguishing characteristic of this paper is a qualitative point which is simple but has not yet been made in this literature: ability heterogeneity implies that educational subsidies are interim Pareto improving under a wide range of circumstances. This conceptual insight helps explain findings of detailed quantitative models of various real economies that educational subsidies raise aggregate welfare (e.g., Berriel and Zilberman (2011), Cespedes (2014), Peruffo and Ferreira (2017)) . Our paper complements this literature by providing qualitative results concerning efficient fiscal policies that apply irrespective of the specific welfare function, technology or preferences. In particular, they illustrate the benefits of CCT programs adopted in various developing countries.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the baseline model, followed by the main results for this model in Section 3. Extensions are discussed in Section 4. The relation to existing literature is described in Section 5, and Section 6 concludes.

## 2 Baseline Model

We first describe the dynamic economy in the absence of any government intervention.

There are two occupations: unskilled and skilled (denoted 0 and 1 respectively). There

is a continuum of households indexed by  $i \in [0, 1]$ . Generations are denoted  $t = 0, 1, 2, \dots$ . Each household has one adult and one child in each generation. The utility of the adult in household  $i$  in generation  $t$  is denoted  $V_{it} = u(c_{it}) + \delta V_{i,t+1}$  where  $c_{it}$  denotes consumption in household  $i$  in generation  $t$ ,  $\delta \in (0, 1)$  is a discount factor and measure of the intensity of parental altruism, and  $u$  is a strictly increasing, strictly concave and  $C^2$  function defined on the real line. There is no lower bound to consumption, while  $u$  tends to  $-\infty$  as  $c$  tends to  $-\infty$ .

Household  $i$  earns  $y_{it}$  in generation  $t$ , and divides this between consumption at  $t$  and investment in child education. Education investment  $I_{it}$  is indivisible, either 1 or 0. An educated adult has the option of working in either occupation, while an uneducated adult can only work in the unskilled occupation. The ability of the child in household  $i$  is represented by how little its parent needs to spend in order to educate it. The cost of education  $x_{it}$  in household  $i$  in generation  $t$  is drawn randomly and independently according to a common distribution function  $F$  defined on the nonnegative reals.  $F$  is  $C^2$  and strictly increasing; its density is denoted  $f$ . The household budget constraint is  $y_{it} = c_{it} + x_{it}I_{it}$ . Every parent privately observes the realization of education cost of its child before deciding on whether to invest in education.<sup>1</sup>

The key market incompleteness is that parents cannot borrow to finance their children's education. Neither can they insure against the risk that their child has low learning ability, the main source of (exogenous) heterogeneity in the model. The former arises owing to inability of parents to borrow against their children's future earnings. The latter could be due to privacy of information amongst parents regarding the realization of their children's ability.

Household earnings are defined by occupational wages:  $y_{it} = w_{0t} + I_{i,t-1} \cdot (w_{1t} - w_{0t})$ , where  $w_{ct}$  denotes the wage in occupation  $c$  in generation  $t$  obtaining in a competitive labor market.

Wages are determined as follows at any given date (so we suppress the  $t$  subscript for the time being). There is a CRS production function  $G(\lambda, 1 - \lambda)$  which determines the per capita output in the economy in any generation  $t$  if the proportion of the economy that works

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<sup>1</sup>Findings would not change if we assumed that parents receive a noisy signal  $\hat{x}_{it}$  of true education costs. Very mild conditions on the noise structure and risk attitudes would imply that uncertainty in ex post returns to education does not change the pattern in parental consumptions that is implied by ability heterogeneity. Same would apply if, e.g., the child stayed unskilled with a fixed probability between 0 and 1 despite a parental investment of  $x_{it}$ .

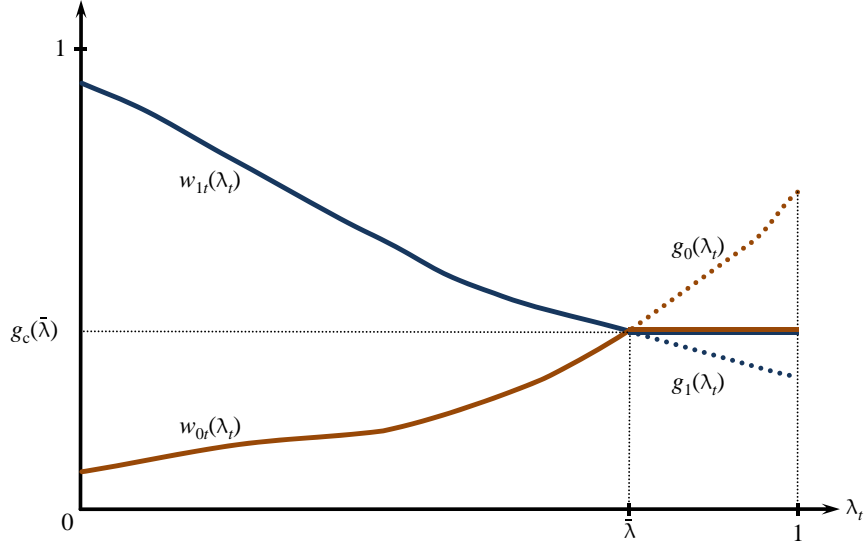


Figure 1: Labor Market

in the skilled and unskilled occupations equal  $\lambda$  and  $1 - \lambda$  respectively. We assume  $G$  is a  $C^2$ , strictly increasing, linearly homogenous and strictly concave function. Let  $g_c(\lambda)$  denote the marginal product of occupation  $c = 0, 1$  workers when  $\lambda$  proportion of adults work in the skilled occupation. So  $g_1$  is decreasing and  $g_0$  is an increasing function. Moreover,  $g_1(0) > g_0(0)$  while  $g_1(1) < g_0(1)$ . To avoid some technical complications we assume the functions  $g_i$  are bounded over  $[0, 1]$ . In other words, the marginal product of each occupation is bounded above even as its proportion in the economy becomes vanishingly small.<sup>2</sup>

Let  $\bar{\lambda}$  denote the smallest value of  $\lambda$  at which  $g_1(\lambda) = g_0(\lambda)$ . Then in any given generation  $t$ , all educated workers will prefer to work in the skilled occupation, with  $w_{1t} = g_1(\lambda_t)$  and  $w_{0t} = g_0(\lambda_t)$ , if the proportion of educated adults is  $\lambda_t < \bar{\lambda}$ . And if  $\lambda_t \geq \bar{\lambda}$ , equilibrium in the labor market at  $t$  will imply that exactly  $\bar{\lambda}$  fraction of adults will work in the skilled occupation, as educated workers will be indifferent between the two occupations,

<sup>2</sup>When the production function satisfies Inada conditions, i.e., marginal products are unbounded, we obtain the same results if every household is able to resort to a subsistence self-employment earnings level  $\underline{w}$  which is positive and exogenous. As the proportion of unskilled workers tends to one, the labor market will clear at an unskilled wage equal to  $\underline{w}$ , and the proportion of skilled households working for others will be fixed at a level where the marginal product of the unskilled equals this wage. The only difference is that wages in either occupation as a function of the skill ratio become kinked at the point where the marginal product of the unskilled equals  $\underline{w}$ . Except at this single skill ratio, the wage functions are smooth, and our results continue to apply with an ‘almost everywhere’ proviso.

and  $w_{1t} = w_{0t} = g_1(\bar{\lambda}) = g_0(\bar{\lambda})$ . See Figure 1. When more than  $\bar{\lambda}$  fraction of adults in the economy are educated, the returns to education are zero. Since education is costly, education incentives vanish if households anticipate that more than  $\bar{\lambda}$  proportion of adults in the next generation will be educated. Hence the proportion of educated adults will always be less than  $\bar{\lambda}$  in any equilibrium with perfect foresight. We can identify the occupation of each household  $i$  in generation  $t$  with its education status  $I_{i,t-1}$ , and refer to  $\lambda_t$  as the skill ratio in the economy in generation  $t$ .

## 2.1 Dynamic Competitive Equilibrium under Laissez Faire

**Definition 1** *Given a skill ratio  $\lambda_0 \in (0, \bar{\lambda})$  in generation 0, a dynamic competitive equilibrium under laissez faire (DCELF) is a sequence  $\{\lambda_t\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  of skill ratios and investment strategies  $\{I_{ct}(x)\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  for every household in occupation  $c$  in generation  $t$  when its child's education cost happens to be  $x$  such that:*

(a) *For each household and each  $t$ :  $I_{ct}(x) \in \{0, 1\}$  maximizes*

$$u(w_{ct} - I_{ct}x) + \delta \mathbf{E}_{\tilde{x}} V_{t+1}(I_{ct}, \tilde{x}) \quad (1)$$

*and the resulting value is  $V_t(c, x)$ .*

(b)

$$\lambda_t = \lambda_{t-1} \mathbf{E}_x [I_{1t}(x)] + (1 - \lambda_{t-1}) \mathbf{E}_x [I_{0t}(x)]. \quad (2)$$

(c) *Every household correctly anticipates  $w_{ct} = g_c(\lambda_t)$  for occupation  $c = 0, 1$  in generation  $t$ .*

It is useful to note the following features of a DCELF.

**Lemma 1** *In any DCELF and at any date  $t$ :*

(i)  $V_t(1, x) > V_t(0, x)$  for all  $x$  if and only if  $\lambda_t < \bar{\lambda}$ .

(ii)  $\lambda_t < \bar{\lambda}$ ,  $w_{1t} > w_{0t}$ .

(iii)  $I_{ct}(x) = 1$  iff  $x < x_{ct}$ , where threshold  $x_{ct}$  is defined by

$$u(g_c(\lambda_t)) - u(g_c(\lambda_t) - x_{ct}) = \delta [W_{1,t+1} - W_{0,t+1}] \quad (3)$$

and  $W_{ct} \equiv \mathbf{E}_x V_t(c, x)$



(iv) *The investment thresholds satisfy  $x_{0t} < x_{1t}$ , are uniformly bounded away from 0, and uniformly bounded above, while  $\lambda_t$  is uniformly bounded away from 0 and  $\bar{\lambda}$  respectively. Consumptions of all agents are uniformly bounded.*

This Lemma shows that skilled wages always exceed unskilled wages, and those agents in skilled occupations always have higher utility. There is inequality of educational opportunity: children born to skilled parents are more likely to be educated. There is also upward and downward mobility: some talented children born to unskilled parents receive an education, while some untalented children born to skilled parents fail to receive an education. Finally, equilibrium consumptions and utility differences are bounded, which will be useful in our subsequent analysis.

## 2.2 Competitive Equilibrium with Taxes

We now extend the model to incorporate fiscal policies. The government observes the occupation/income of parents as well as the education decisions they make for their children. Transfers can accordingly be conditioned on these. Fiscal policy is represented by four variables in any generation  $t$ : income transfers  $\tau_{1t}, \tau_{0t}$  based on parental occupation, and transfers  $e_{1t}, e_{0t}$  based additionally on the parent's education investment decision. In particular, the government does not observe directly nor indirectly the ability realization of any given child.<sup>3</sup> This is the key informational constraint that prevents attainment of a first-best utilitarian optimum. We are also focusing on transfers that depend only on the current status of the household, thus ruling out educational loans and schemes which condition on a family's transfer or decision history. Similar to private agents, the government will also not be able to lend or borrow across generations, and will hence have to balance its budget within each generation.

**Definition 2** *Given a skill ratio  $\lambda_0 \in (0, \bar{\lambda})$  in generation 0, a dynamic competitive equilibrium (DCE) given fiscal policy  $\{\tau_{0t}, \tau_{1t}, e_{0t}, e_{1t}\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  is a sequence  $\{\lambda_t\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  of skill ratios and investment strategies  $\{I_{ct}(x)\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  for every household in occupation  $c$  in generation  $t$  when its child's education cost happens to be  $x$  such that for each  $c, t$ :*

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<sup>3</sup>Indirect observability of children's abilities from the parental education expenses or test results would allow policy to realize efficiency gains from explicit improvements in the talent composition of investors. We think of education costs  $x$  as having a major unverifiable component, possibly also reflecting parental time that would be dedicated to a child's education and training in a more sophisticated model of labor supply.

(a)  $I_{ct}(x) \in \{0, 1\}$  maximizes

$$u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} - I_{ct} \cdot (x - e_{ct})) + \delta \mathbf{E}_{\tilde{x}} V_{t+1}(I_{ct}, \tilde{x}) \quad (4)$$

and the resulting value is  $V_t(c, x)$ .

(b)

$$\lambda_t = \lambda_{t-1} \mathbf{E}_x I_{1t}(x) + (1 - \lambda_{t-1}) \mathbf{E}_x I_{0t}(x). \quad (5)$$

(c) Every household correctly anticipates  $w_{ct} = g_c(\lambda_t)$  for occupation  $c = 0, 1$  in generation  $t$ .

The government has a balanced budget if at every  $t$  it is the case that

$$\lambda_t \{ \tau_{1t} + e_{1t} \mathbf{E}_x [I_t(1, x)] \} + (1 - \lambda_t) \{ \tau_{0t} + e_{0t} \mathbf{E}_x [I_t(0, x)] \} \leq 0. \quad (6)$$

A DCELF with a (trivially) balanced budget obtains as a special case of a DCE when the government selects zero income transfers and educational subsidies.

It is easy to check that a DCE can also be described by investment thresholds  $x_{ct}$  satisfying the following conditions. Define the interim expected utility of consumption of a parent in occupation  $c$  in generation  $t$  as follows:

$$\mathcal{U}_{ct} \equiv u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct}) [1 - F(x_{ct})] + \int_0^{x_{ct}} u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + e_{ct} - x) dF(x) \quad (7)$$

The thresholds must then satisfy

$$u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct}) - u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + e_{ct} - x_{ct}) = \delta \cdot \Delta W_{t+1} \quad (8)$$

where  $W_{it}$  denotes  $\mathbf{E}_x V_t(i, x)$ ,

$$\Delta W_t \equiv W_{1,t} - W_{0,t} = \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \nu_k [\mathcal{U}_{1,t+k} - \mathcal{U}_{0,t+k}] \quad (9)$$

with  $\nu_0 = 1$ ,  $\nu_k = \delta^k \prod_{l=0}^{k-1} [F(x_{1,t+l}) - F(x_{0,t+l})]$  for  $k \geq 1$ . A DCE is then described by a sequence  $\{\lambda_t, w_{1t}, w_{0t}, x_{1t}, x_{0t}, \mathcal{U}_{1t}, \mathcal{U}_{0t}\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  which satisfies equalities (5) and (7)–(9).

### 3 Results for the Baseline Model

Our first result is an efficiency as well as a macroeconomic role for fiscal policy. The efficiency criterion is *interim Pareto dominance*, which requires parental expected utility  $W_{ct} \equiv \mathbf{E}_x V_t(c, x)$  to be higher for every  $c, t$ . The criterion of *macroeconomic dominance* is that the skill ratio  $\lambda_t$  must be higher at every  $t$ , and the investment threshold  $x_{ct}$  must be

higher for every  $c, t$ . This ensures higher per capita skill and output at every date, as well as greater educational opportunity in the sense of a higher probability for every child to become educated (both conditional on parent's occupation, and unconditionally).

**Theorem 1** *Consider any DCELF starting from an arbitrary skill ratio  $\lambda_0 \in (0, \bar{\lambda})$  at  $t = 0$ . There exists a balanced budget fiscal policy with educational subsidies for each occupation funded by income taxes, and an associated DCE which interim Pareto as well as macroeconomically dominates the original DCELF.*

A more general version of this result is the following: any fiscal policy involving income transfers alone is Pareto dominated by a policy with educational subsidies.

**Theorem 2** *Consider any DCE given an initial skill ratio  $\lambda_0 \in (0, \bar{\lambda})$  and a balanced budget fiscal policy consisting of income transfers alone ( $e_{ct} = 0$  for all  $c, t$ ), satisfying the following conditions:*

- (a)  $\tau_{0t} \geq \tau_{1t}$  for all  $t$ ;
- (b) there exists  $\kappa > 0$  such that  $-\tau_{1t} - \tau_{0t} < [g_1(0) - g_0(0)] - \kappa$  for all  $t$ ;
- (c)  $\tau_{ct}$  is uniformly bounded.

*Then there exists another balanced budget fiscal policy consisting of income transfers combined with educational subsidies ( $e_{ct} > 0$  for all  $c, t$ ) and an associated DCE which interim Pareto as well as macroeconomically dominates the original DCE.*

Condition (a) of Theorem 2 requires the income transfers to be progressive in the weak sense that unskilled parents receive a higher transfer (or pay a lower tax), while (b) restricts the marginal tax rate to be less than (and bounded away from) 100%. Condition (c) is a technical restriction needed to ensure that competitive equilibria always involve bounded consumptions and investment thresholds. The role of (b) is to ensure that skilled households earn more both before and after government transfers, so agents always have investment incentives (that are bounded away from zero). Condition (a) ensures that the direct effect of any reduction in the proportion of unskilled households is to weaken the government budget balance constraint. These conditions imply that equilibria with fiscal policy continue to satisfy the same properties as equilibria under laissez faire that were shown in Lemma 1.

It is evident that Theorem 1 is a special case of Theorem 2. In both versions, the new policy provides educational subsidies to a given occupation which are funded by higher

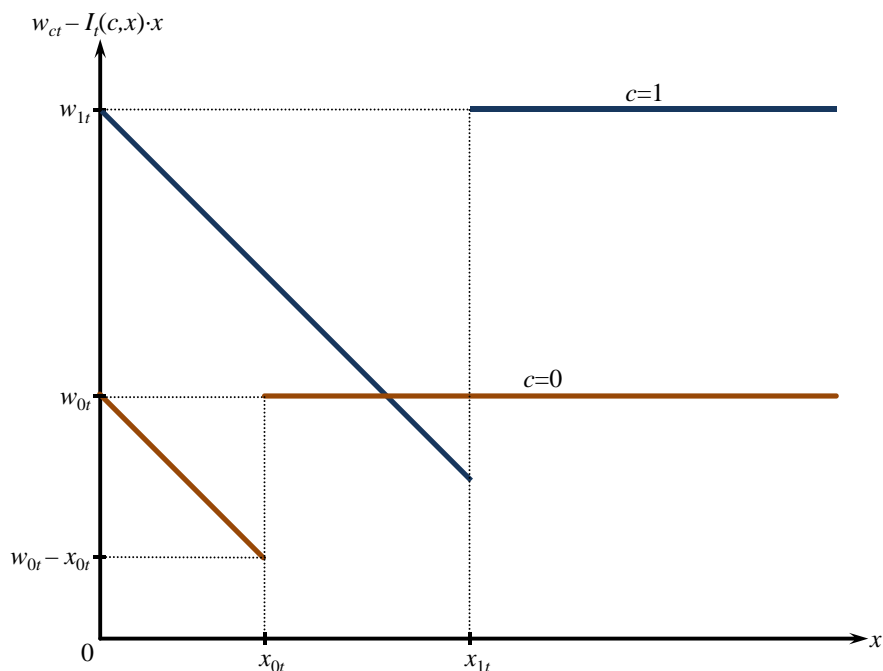


Figure 2: Variation of Parental Consumption with Education Cost

income taxes *levied on the same occupation*. In this sense, the policy does not redistribute across occupations. Instead, it redistributes across parents within each occupation class, between those that do and do not invest in their children’s education. The key underlying idea is to provide insurance against the uncertain realizations of children’s ability. The ‘accident’ in question is that one’s child is born with enough talent that the parent invests in education, resulting in lower consumption than other parents in the same occupation who do not invest (i.e., whose children are not so talented). The nature of variation of parental consumption with the realization of their child’s ability is illustrated in Figure 2. If the child is a genius and can be costlessly educated, the parent’s consumption equals his earning. The same is true when the child has low enough ability that it is not educated. For intermediate abilities where the child is educated, the parent invests a positive amount, lowering consumption. Hence parental consumption varies non-monotonically with respect to the cost necessary to educate the child.

An educational subsidy increase  $\epsilon(1 - \mu_t)$  raises the consumption of the investors, while financing it by income taxes on the same occupation lowers the consumption of the non-investors.<sup>4</sup> See Figure 3. If  $\mu_t$  were zero, average consumption would be unaffected but

<sup>4</sup>Lowered consumption utility of non-investors may – despite a universal increase in the dynastic utility

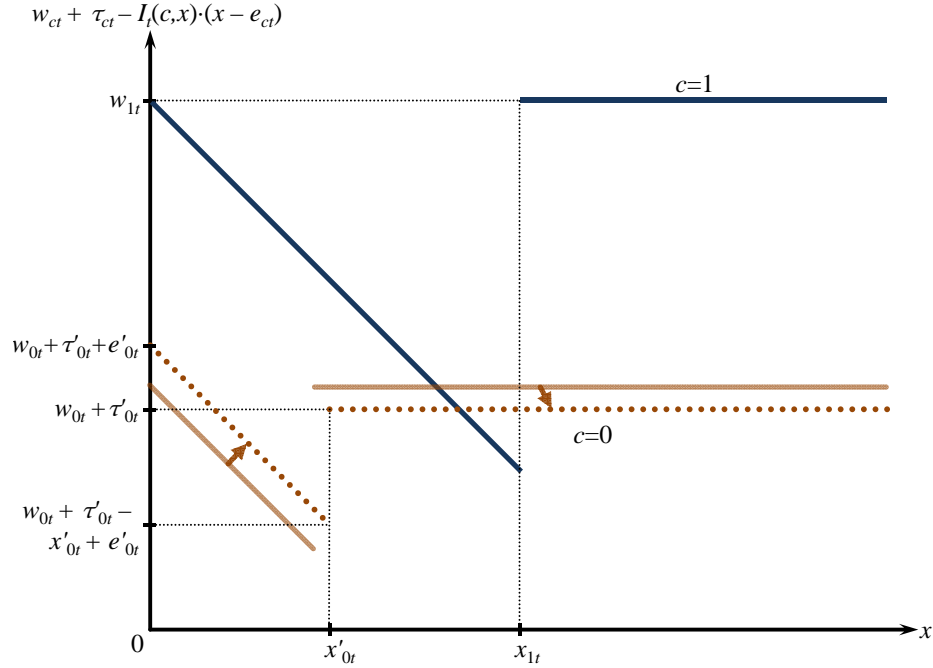


Figure 3: Effects of Steps 1 and 2 of Fiscal Policy Variation on Parental Consumption

differences in consumption associated with heterogeneity of the children's education costs would be reduced (assuming that education is not subsidized to start with and hence non-investing households consume more than every household in the same occupation that does invest). This would result in a mean-preserving reduction of the variation in parental consumption, thus raising the interim expected utility of current consumption in occupation  $c$ .

The parameter  $\mu_t$ , however, is set so as to reduce the mean consumption enough that there is no change in the expected utility of current consumption at date  $t$  for each occupation. Assuming wages are unchanged, this implies that dynastic utilities of both occupations are unchanged. Hence the future benefit of investment is unchanged. The subsidization of education in occupation  $c$  on the other hand lowers the sacrifice parents must endure to educate their children. Hence households invest more often.

Aggregate investment in the economy will then rise, which will tend to lower skilled wages and raise unskilled wages. These general equilibrium changes would reduce the ben-

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component – preclude the policy from achieving also an *ex post* Pareto improvement. By restricting tax-funded education subsidies to the minority occupation defined by  $\lambda_t \geq \frac{1}{2}$ , a government could prevent any political commitment problems which might derive from having too many *ex post* losers.

efits of investment and therefore fiscal policy is adjusted further to neutralize the wage changes. This results in a new competitive equilibrium sequence with a higher skill ratio at every date, and a zero first order effect on interim utilities. However, the government has a first order improvement in its surplus, owing to the rise in the skill ratio and the extraction of resources from households by setting  $\mu_t > 0$ . The progressivity of the original fiscal policy implies that the government budget surplus also improves as a result of the decline in the proportion of unskilled households.

In the last step of the argument the government constructs another variation in its tax-subsidy policy. It distributes the additional revenues so as to achieve a strict interim Pareto improvement, while preserving investment incentives. Note that by construction the dispersion in utility of consumption between occupations is unchanged, while a fraction of agents move up from the unskilled to the skilled occupation in every generation.

The consumption losses which the policy imposes on non-investing parents stay bounded while the dynastic gains which are created for all parents grow without bound as  $\delta \rightarrow 1$ . So with a sufficiently high degree of parental altruism, parameterized by  $\delta$ , the policy-induced gains in expected utility of descendants outweigh any loss in own consumption relative to laissez faire. The constructed policy then achieves an ex post Pareto improvement. Formally, we can show:

**Theorem 3** *Let a collection of economies with identical consumption utility function  $u$ , production function  $G$  and ability distribution  $F$  but different parental discount factors  $\delta \in (0, 1)$  be given. For each corresponding DCELF that starts from skill ratio  $\lambda_0 \in (0, \bar{\lambda})$  at  $t = 0$ , consider fiscal policies  $\{\tilde{\tau}_{0t}^\delta(\epsilon), \tilde{\tau}_{1t}^\delta(\epsilon), \tilde{e}_{0t}^\delta(\epsilon), \tilde{e}_{1t}^\delta(\epsilon)\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  which induce an interim Pareto improvement according to Theorem 1. Then there exist  $\underline{\delta} \in (0, 1)$  and  $\bar{\epsilon} > 0$  such that for any  $\epsilon \in (0, \bar{\epsilon})$  and  $\delta \in (\underline{\delta}, 1)$  the fiscal policy also ex post Pareto dominates the respective DCELF for all  $t$ .*

## 4 Extensions

### 4.1 Endogenous Labor Supply

A first extension of the baseline model could be to consider households who choose how many hours of labor they supply, together with the binary decision whether to invest in education or not. That is, each household in occupation  $c$  selects  $I_{ct}(x) \in \{0, 1\}$  and

$l_{ct}(x) \geq 0$  to maximize

$$u(l_{ct} w_{ct} - I_{ct} x) - d(l_{ct}) + \delta \mathbf{E}_{\tilde{x}} V_{t+1}(I_{ct}, \tilde{x}) \quad (10)$$

for strictly increasing and convex disutility of labor  $d$ . The optimal investment strategy  $I_{ct}(x)$  in this case is of the same threshold form as in the baseline model. Namely, if we define

$$v(w_{ct}, x, I_{ct}) \equiv \max_{l_{ct}} \left[ u(l_{ct} w_{ct} - I_{ct} x) - d(l_{ct}) \right] \quad (11)$$

then a parent in occupation  $c$  in period  $t$  who faces education cost  $x$  will invest iff  $x < x_{ct}$ , where threshold  $x_{ct}$  is defined by

$$v(w_{ct}, x_{ct}, 0) - v(w_{ct}, x_{ct}, 1) = \delta [W_{1,t+1} - W_{0,t+1}] \quad (12)$$

and  $W_{ct} \equiv \mathbf{E}_{\tilde{x}} V_t(c, \tilde{x})$ . Parents in occupation  $c$  with cost  $x = 0$  or cost  $x \geq x_{ct}$  have identical (indirect) utilities of consumption  $v(w_{ct}, 0, 1) = v(w_{ct}, x, 0)$ , while those with cost  $x \in (0, x_{ct})$  consume less. In particular, from (11) and the envelope theorem, we have

$$\frac{\partial v(w_{ct}, x, I_{ct}(x))}{\partial x} = -u'(l_{ct}(x)w_{ct} - x) < 0 \text{ for each } x \in (0, x_{ct}). \quad (13)$$

It follows that consumption utilities  $v(w_{ct}, x, I_{ct}(x))$  are decreasing on  $[0, x_{ct})$ , jump back to  $v(w_{ct}, 0, 1)$ , and then stay at this level. That is, they exhibit a non-monotonic pattern with respect to education cost  $x$  just like in the baseline model (cf. Figure 2). A variation of the baseline policy intervention can therefore be applied in order to raise interim utility.

## 4.2 Paternalistic Altruism

Next suppose parents do not have Barro-Becker dynastic preferences. Instead, they value (only) the earnings of their children according to a given increasing function  $Y(w_{t+1})$ , as in Becker and Tomes (1979) or Mookherjee and Napel (2007) – perhaps incorporating parental concern for their own old age security. A parent in occupation  $c \in \{0, 1\}$  at date  $t$  with a child who costs  $x$  to educate then selects  $I \in \{0, 1\}$  to maximize  $u(w_{ct} - I x) + I Y(w_{1,t+1}) + (1 - I) Y(w_{0,t+1})$ . Theorems 1 and 2 continue to extend with this formulation of parental altruism. The wage neutralization policy preserves after-tax wages in each occupation, whence the altruistic benefit of investments remain unchanged. The costs of investing are lowered by providing educational subsidies, and at the same time the variation of parental consumption is lowered. So investment incentives continue to rise, while enhancing interim expected utilities.

### 4.3 Continuous Investment Choices

What if educational investments can be varied continuously, rather than being indivisible? Our results extend straightforwardly to this context, too, as we now explain.

Let the extent of education be described by a compact interval  $E \equiv [0, \bar{e}]$  of the real line. Assume that the relation between wage earnings and education is given by a real-valued continuous function  $w(e)$  defined on  $E$ . If the earnings function depends endogenously on the supply of workers with varying levels of education, the analysis can be extended using a similar strategy of following up on educational subsidy policies that increase the supply of more educated workers with a wage-neutralization policy that leaves the after-tax remuneration pattern unchanged. To illustrate how our results extend, it therefore suffices to take the earnings–education pattern in the status quo equilibrium as given.

Let  $I(e'; x)$  denote the expenditure that must be incurred by a parent to procure education  $e' \geq 0$  for its child whose learning ability gives rise to a learning cost parameter  $x$ . The latter varies according to a continuous distribution with full support on  $[0, \infty)$ , similar to the preceding section. The function  $I$  is strictly increasing and differentiable in both arguments. It satisfies  $I(0; x) = 0$  for all  $x$ , while for any given  $e' \geq 0$  the marginal cost  $\frac{\partial I}{\partial e'}$  is increasing in  $x$ , approaching  $\infty$  as  $x \rightarrow \infty$ .

The value function of a parent with education  $e$  and a child whose learning cost parameter is  $x$  is then

$$V(e|x) \equiv \max_{0 \leq e' \leq \bar{e}} [u(w(e) - I(e'; x)) + \delta W(e')] \quad (14)$$

where  $W(e') \equiv \mathbf{E}_{\tilde{x}} V(e'|\tilde{x})$ . Let the corresponding policy function be  $e'(e; x)$ . Given that wages are bounded above by  $w(\bar{e})$ , consumptions are also bounded above. Given this and the feature that  $u$  is unbounded below, consumptions can be bounded from below almost surely.<sup>5</sup> Hence the marginal utility of consumption is bounded almost surely, implying that  $W'(0) \equiv \mathbf{E}_{\tilde{x}} [u'(w(0) - I(e'(0; \tilde{x})))]$  is bounded.

We can therefore define  $x^*(e)$  as the solution for  $x$  in the equation  $\frac{\partial I(e'; x)}{\partial e'} \Big|_{e'=0} = \frac{\delta W'(0)}{u'(w(e))}$ . Then the optimal policy function takes the form  $e'(e; x) = 0$  if  $x \geq x^*(e)$  and positive otherwise.<sup>6</sup> In other words, parents decide to acquire no education for their children if and only if their learning cost parameter is larger than a threshold  $x^*(e)$ . These ‘non-investors’ consume their entire earnings  $w(e)$  – just like those parents with the same education  $e$

<sup>5</sup>Any policy where consumption approaches  $-\infty$  with positive probability will be dominated by a policy where parents never invest.

<sup>6</sup>This follows since the value function is concave, owing to a direct argument.



whose children have a learning cost parameter of  $x = 0$ . For those whose children have intermediate learning ability, parents spend a positive amount on education.

We thus have a similar non-monotone pattern of variation of parental consumption with their children's learning costs as in the two-occupation case. This ensures that a similar policy of educational subsidies funded by income taxes on all parents with the same education will reduce the riskiness of parental consumption, and thereby permit a Pareto improvement.

The essential argument is thus simple. Non-investing parents within any given occupation will by definition consume more than investing parents. The educational subsidy funded by the income tax on this occupation then redistributes consumption away from those consuming high amounts to those consuming less. Since these consumption variations arise from the 'ability lottery' of their children, the policy increases interim expected utilities of each occupation. The preceding analytical details were needed to ensure that there is a positive mass of investors and non-investors respectively, so as to allow a strict Pareto improvement.

#### 4.4 Financial Bequests

There is however one important assumption underlying the above reasoning: that educational investments constitute the sole means by which parents transfer wealth to their children. In practice parents have other means as well, such as leaving them financial bequests or physical assets. The simple logic then breaks down: a parent that does not invest in his child's education owing to low learning ability of the latter could provide financial bequests instead. It no longer follows that education non-investors invest less when we aggregate across different forms of intergenerational transfers.

We now consider the consequences of allowing parents to leave financial bequests besides investing in their children's education. To simplify matters, suppose that the rate of return  $(1 + r)$  on financial bequests is exogenously given, as in Becker and Tomes (1979) or Mookherjee and Ray (2010). This could correspond to a globalized capital market where the savings of any given country leave the interest rate unaffected. Even if the interest rate depends on the supply of savings, a 'neutralization' policy allows policy-makers to ensure that the after-tax interest rate is unchanged. For the same reason we here abstract from general equilibrium effects in the labor market and suppose that wages of different occupations are exogenously given.

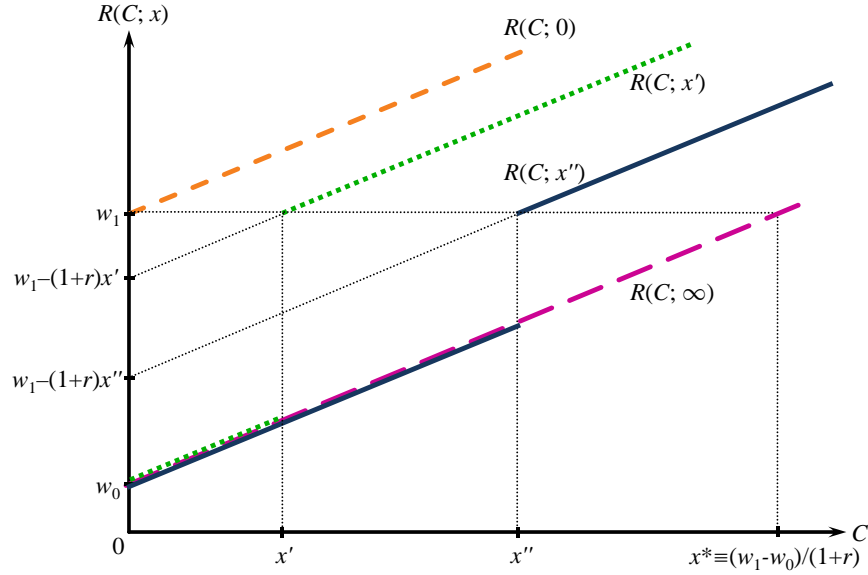


Figure 4: Child wealth as function of total investment expenditure  $C$ , given cost  $x$

Let us further simplify to the case of two occupations, skilled and unskilled, where the education cost of the former is denoted  $x$  and the latter equals zero. And suppose that parental altruism is paternalistic, where a parent with lifetime wealth  $W$  and education cost  $x$  chooses financial bequest  $b \geq 0$  and education investment  $I \in \{0, 1\}$  to maximize  $u(W - b - Ix) + \delta Y(W')$  where  $Y$  is a strictly increasing and strictly concave function of the child's future wealth  $W' = (1 + r)b + Iw_1 + (1 - I)w_0$ .

This problem can be reformulated as follows. Let  $C \equiv b + Ix$  denote the total parental investment expenditure on his child. An efficient way to allocate  $C$  across financial bequest and educational expenses is the following:  $I = 0$  if either  $C < x$ , or  $C \geq x$  and the rate of return on education is dominated by the return on financial assets:  $\frac{w_1 - w_0}{x} < 1 + r$ . Conversely, if the rate of return on education exceeds  $r$  and  $C \geq x$ , then  $I = 1$ , and  $b = C - x$ . Then the child ends up with wealth  $W' \equiv R(C; x)$  given by

$$R(C; x) = \begin{cases} (1 + r)C + w_0 & \text{if } C < x, \text{ or } C \geq x \text{ and } \frac{w_1 - w_0}{x} \leq 1 + r, \\ (1 + r)C + w_1 - (1 + r)x & \text{if } C > x \text{ and } \frac{w_1 - w_0}{x} > 1 + r. \end{cases} \quad (15)$$

It is illustrated in Figure 4.

Define the *BT (Becker-Tomes) bequest* as the optimal bequest of a parent in the absence of any opportunity to invest in education, with a given flow earning  $w$  of the child when the parent leaves a zero bequest. This is the problem of choosing  $C \geq 0$  to maximize

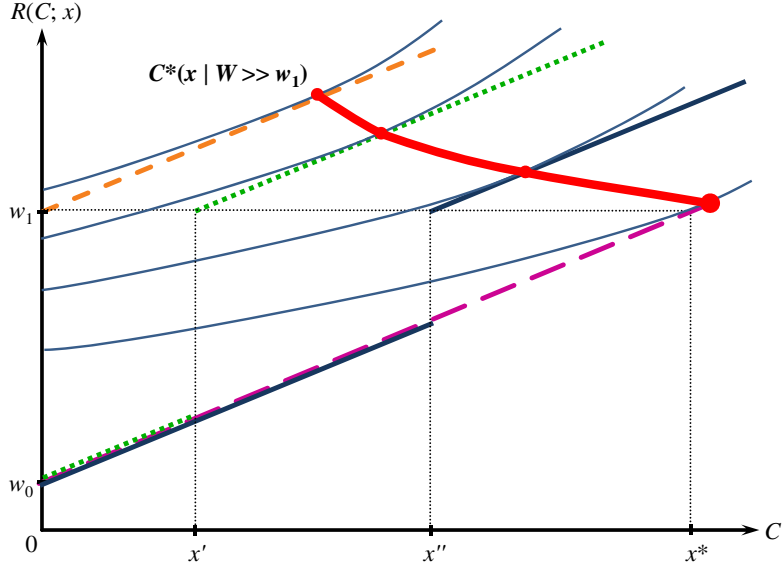


Figure 5: Investment expenditures of sufficiently wealthy parents (case A)

$u(W - C) + \delta Y((1 + r)C + w)$ . Denote the BT bequest by  $C^{BT}(W; w)$ . It is easily checked that this is increasing in parental wealth  $W$  and decreasing in  $w$ .

Recall that a parent will invest in education only if the child has enough ability to ensure that  $x \leq x^* \equiv \frac{w_1 - w_0}{1 + r}$ . Whenever  $x > x^*$ , there will be no investment in education, and the optimal bequest equals the BT bequest  $C^{BT}(W; w_0)$ . When  $x < x^*$ , the optimization problem entails a nonconvexity and the solution is more complicated. The dotted and solid lines in Figure 4, for instance, respectively represent the nonconvex sets of feasible  $(C, W')$ -combinations for parents with children whose education costs  $x'$  and  $x''$  lie below  $x^*$ .

Nevertheless we can illustrate the solution for some extreme cases, corresponding to different parental wealths.

Case A. *W sufficiently large:* Suppose  $W$  is large enough that  $C^{BT}(W; w_1 - (1 + r)x) > x$  for all  $x \leq x^*$ .<sup>7</sup> In words, irrespective of where  $x$  lies below  $x^*$ , the parent will always supplement education investments with a financial bequest. See Figure 5.

Case B. *W sufficiently small:* Suppose  $W = w_0$ ,  $\delta(1 + r) \leq 1$  and  $Y \equiv u$ . Then the BT bequest  $C^{BT}(w_0; w) = 0$  for all  $w \geq w_0$ , and the parent will never make a financial bequest. If however the child learning cost  $x$  is sufficiently small, the parent will invest

<sup>7</sup>A sufficient condition for this is  $C^{BT}(W; w_1) > x^*$ .

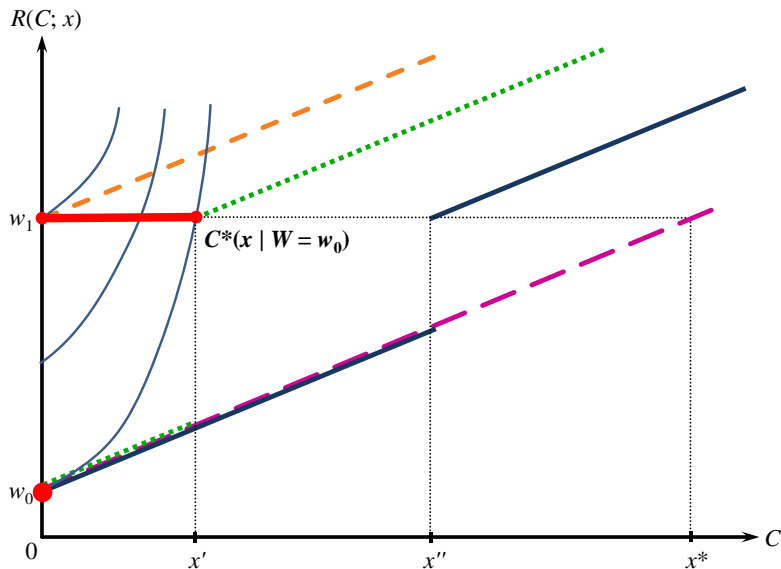


Figure 6: Investment expenditures of poor parents (case B)

in education. The optimal choice of expenditure  $C^*$  is illustrated in Figure 6, where the low parental wealth is reflected by steep indifference curves.

The implied consumption patterns of sufficiently wealthy and poor households are illustrated in Figure 7. For parents with very small wealth  $W$ , investment decisions are exactly as in our simple model without any financial bequests, and ‘non-investors’ consume more than the ‘investors’. The situation is very different, however, for sufficiently wealthy parents. Their parental consumption (conditional on wealth  $W$ ) is strictly decreasing in  $x$  over  $x \in [0, x^*]$ , and constant thereafter. The ‘non-investors’ (those with  $x > x^*$ ) now consume *less* than the ‘investors’, opposite to the pattern in the model without any financial bequests.

The argument that educational subsidies (financed by income or wealth taxes) lower consumption risk no longer applies to wealthy households falling under case A. They would instead raise risk. *So an opposite result holds here: an educational tax for parents with wealths falling in case A which funded a wealth subsidy (or income tax break) on the same set of households would reduce risk.* Starting with laissez faire, such a policy would be Pareto improving. It would, however, have opposite macroeconomic effects, as educational investments among such parents would fall. The resulting decline in skilled agents implies that the result about superiority of conditional transfers may not apply if the status quo policy is progressive, as this would worsen the government’s fiscal balance.

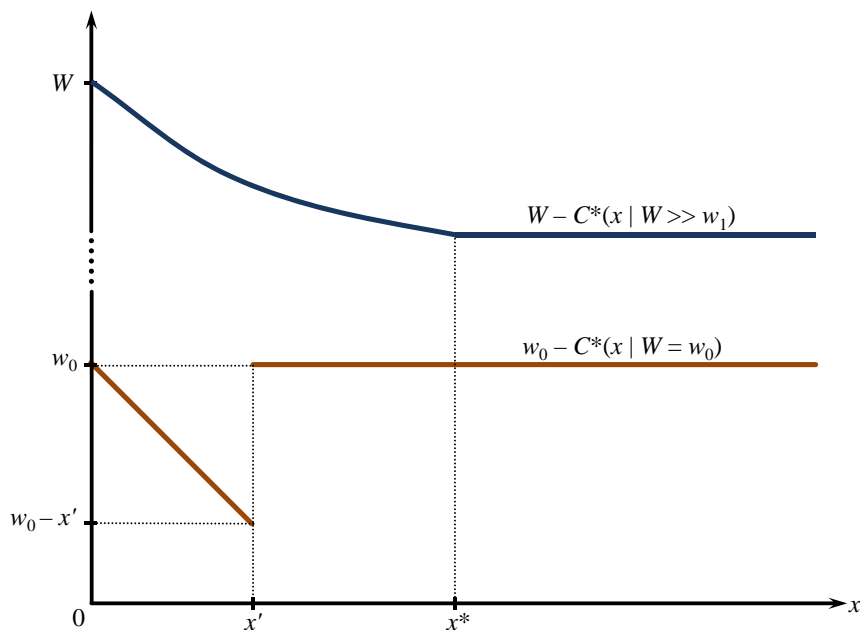


Figure 7: Consumption of sufficiently wealthy and poor parents

On the other hand, our previous arguments would continue to apply for poor households in case B, who never make any financial bequests, and behave exactly as described in previous sections. For such poor households, therefore, our previous results remain unchanged: educational subsidies funded by income taxes would be Pareto improving as well as generate macro improvements.

For other classes of households, whether parents make financial bequests typically depends on the child’s ability: they are made when the child is of sufficiently high ability, as well as when ability is low. For intermediate abilities, they make no financial bequests and make educational investments alone. The comparison of consumptions across ‘investors’ and ‘non-investors’ can go either way depending on the child’s ability.

This suggests that arguments for educational subsidies should be limited to household wealth classes which make little or no financial bequests. The exact range of such households is an empirical matter. In the model of Abbott, Gallipoli, Meghir and Violante (2013) calibrated to fit the NLSY 1997 data, all parents in the bottom quartile of the wealth distribution make inter-vivos transfers (inclusive of imputed value of rent when children lived with parents) to their children (when the latter were between ages of 16–22) which were smaller than what the latter spent on educational tuitions. The same was true for most of the second quartile as well. On the other hand, many parents in the top quartile

transferred more than education tuition costs, and this happened to be true for *all* parents in the top 5%. This suggests case A applies to the top 5% of the US population, while case B applies to the bottom third of the population.

Indeed, our results suggest that it may be optimal for the government to use mixed policies of the following form: educational taxes for the population in case A, and subsidies for those in case B. The effects on educational investments in these two classes could then offset each other, leaving aggregate education investments unaltered. The composition of the educated would however change: since marginal children in case B are likely to be of higher ability than those in case A, there would be a rise in the average returns to education which would augment the efficiency benefits from the risk effects.

The additional heterogeneity among parents that comes with different accumulated wealth (compared to the baseline in which only the occupation varies) diminishes the target group for education subsidies but leaves the key mechanisms for making everyone better off untouched. The same would remain true if we added ex post heterogeneity resulting from other sources to the model, such as earnings uncertainty or iid wealth shocks (cf. fn. 1). In fact, as long as part of total dynastic capital – human, financial, or physical – is indivisible and fully depreciates in one period, extensions along the indicated lines would also permit an entrepreneurial reinterpretation of the model: the dynasties might be risk-averse small businesses that decide on short-term indivisible investments, like planting a high-yield crop, with idiosyncratic variations in returns. The analogous intervention would then consist of investment subsidies financed by a tax on all businesses of comparable size.

## 5 Relation to Literature

Sinn (1995, 1996) and Varian (1980) evaluate incentive and insurance effects of social insurance provided by a progressive fiscal policy in a setting with ex ante representative households and missing credit and/or insurance markets. Typically, ex ante efficiency entails an interventionist fiscal policy which trades off incentive and insurance effects. At the interim or ex post stage, however, unanimous agreement is generally unlikely. Agents with positive income shocks who are required to subsidize others with negative shocks will prefer *laissez faire* to the interventions, with the opposite true for those with negative shocks. In contrast, the cross-subsidization in our context occurs across parents with the same ex post income across different ability realizations of their children, generating agreement at the interim stage (and also ex post, with sufficient altruism). Our paper thus helps explain

the substantially larger consensus typically observed across classes and political parties regarding the desirability of government subsidization of elementary schooling, compared with fiscal policies that redistribute from rich to poor. Moreover, we show that education subsidies can be designed to offset redistributive or adverse incentive effects.

Subsequent literature in public economics has examined implications of redistributive tax distortions for education subsidies.<sup>8</sup> Bovenberg and Jacobs (2005) have argued in a static model without any borrowing constraints or income risk that redistributive taxes and education subsidies are ‘Siamese twins’: the latter are needed to counter the effects of the former in dulling educational incentives. Alternatively, the presence of progressive income taxes implies a ‘fiscal externality’ associated with education which enables agents to earn higher incomes and thereby pay higher taxes. Educational subsidies are needed to ensure that agents internalize this externality. Jacobs, Schindler and Yang (2012) show the same result obtains when the model is extended to a context with uninsurable income risk. Unlike our paper, these arguments for educational subsidies arise from pre-existing income tax distortions, which disappear in the case of a *laissez faire* status quo. None of these models incorporate ability heterogeneity and missing credit markets, which create an efficiency role for educational subsidies in our model, even in the absence of any progressive income taxes.

Dynamic models of investment in physical and/or human capital which incorporate missing credit and insurance markets and agent heterogeneity have been studied in the literature on macroeconomics and fiscal policy (Loury (1981), Aiyagari (1994), Aiyagari, Greenwood and Sheshadri (2002), Bénabou (1996, 2002)). Loury (1981) provided a pioneering analysis of human capital investments by altruistic parents in an environment with ability shocks and no financial markets. Most of his analysis concerned the characterization of dynamic properties of competitive equilibria. He showed that redistributive policies could raise aggregate output and welfare, but did not explore the efficiency properties of

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<sup>8</sup>A large part of the recent dynamic public finance literature (e.g., Golosov, Tsyvinski and Werning (2006), or Golosov, Troshkin and Tsyvinski (2016)) is unrelated insofar as it abstracts from human capital investments and assumes that skills follow an exogenous Markov process. Its focus is to extend the Mirrlees (1971) optimal income tax model to a dynamic setting and examine consequences for optimal taxation of labor and savings. Other strands of literature on public education address its political economy. For instance, Glomm and Ravikumar (1992) study an endogenous growth model and compare human capital accumulation under *laissez faire* to public schooling funded by a linear income tax, where the tax rate is determined by a political majority. The focus there is on macroeconomic implications (per capita income, inequality and resulting tradeoffs), rather than the scope for efficiency enhancing interventions.

laissez faire equilibria. Aiyagari, Greenwood and Sheshadri (2002) study a model of human capital investment where education entails fixed and variable resource costs, besides child care. Education takes the form of increasing efficiency units of homogenous labor acquired by the child, as a function of the child's ability realization, parental resource and child care expenses. Apart from incorporating child care, the model is more general than Bénabou's or ours by incorporating physical capital and financial bequests. But the main focus of their paper is different: to characterize first-best Pareto efficient allocations which can be decentralized with complete markets, and contrast these to laissez faire allocations that result when there are no credit or insurance markets. They do not consider the effects of fiscal policy.<sup>9</sup>

Efficiency properties of competitive equilibria with endogenous human capital and missing financial markets are studied in Bénabou (1996). His model is more general than ours regarding parental labor supply decisions. On the other hand, attention is restricted to particular functional forms for utility and production, and specific distributions are assumed for ability and productivity shocks. These are realized after investment choices are made, which removes the key heterogeneity in our model: all agents with a given income level take identical investment decisions and have identical consumptions. In this case there is no point in redistributing within the same income/occupational class. However, given that incomes follow an ergodic process in equilibrium, individual investments are complements in production and utility is strictly concave in consumption, every dynasty prefers a positive amount of inter-occupational redistribution from a long-term perspective. In the short run, tax-funded education subsidies reduce consumption for rich dynasties but the greater the discount factor, the more agents find that the long-term gains dominate. So analogous to our result concerning ex post Pareto improving policies that redistribute within occupations, Bénabou finds that collective financing of education becomes a Pareto improvement in a sufficiently patient society.<sup>10</sup> The main contrast with our paper is that we focus on

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<sup>9</sup>By contrast, Phelan (2006) or Farhi and Werning (2007) assume a fiscal planner who fully controls agents' savings and designs a dynamic mechanism to provide insurance against time-varying taste shocks. They study implications of divergence between planner and household discount rates for long run inequality in ex ante efficient allocations.

<sup>10</sup>Bénabou (2002) specializes the production side of his earlier model while considering aggregate efficiency properties of a richer set of redistribution schemes. In both models, the income distribution is log-normal in any period, i.e., it has unbounded support. Proposition 4 in Bénabou (1996) hence establishes a Pareto improvement asymptotically (for  $\delta \rightarrow 1$ ), while sufficient patience could be identified with  $\delta \geq \bar{\delta}$  for some  $\bar{\delta} < 1$  in models with bounded incomes like ours.



redistribution among parents in the same occupation who have children with different abilities, which achieves interim Pareto improvements without any constraints on intensity of parental altruism.

Versions of these models have been calibrated to fit data of real economies in order to evaluate the welfare and macroeconomic effects of various fiscal policies in numerical simulations (Heathcote (2005), Bohacek and Kapicka (2008), Cespedes (2014), Berriel and Zilberman (2011), Abbott, Gallipoli, Meghir and Violante (2013), Findeisen and Sachs (2016, 2017), Peruffo and Ferreira (2017)). These studies rely on specific functional forms for technology and preferences, and focus on aggregate measures of welfare. Apart from the need to understand the source of these welfare effects (e.g., evaluating attendant insurance effects), these papers leave open the question whether there may exist other policies which could have resulted in a Pareto improvement, or what the effects might be in economies with different preferences and technology. Our paper complements this literature by providing purely qualitative results concerning efficient fiscal policies which apply irrespective of the specific welfare function, technology or preferences.

Our model is related to those studied in the literature on occupational choice and development (Banerjee and Newman (1993), Galor and Zeira (1993), Ljungqvist (1993), Freeman (1996), Aghion and Bolton (1997), Bandopadhyay (1997), Maoz and Moav (1999), Lloyd-Ellis and Bernhardt (2000), Matsuyama (2000, 2006), Ghatak and Jiang (2002), Mookherjee and Ray (2002, 2003, 2008, 2010), Mookherjee and Napel (2007)). With few exceptions, this literature focuses on macroeconomic outcomes rather than normative consequences. Mookherjee and Ray (2003) examine efficiency of steady states in an OLG model which abstracts from ability heterogeneity, and show the existence of laissez faire steady state allocations that are Pareto efficient. Our paper therefore shows that this result is not robust to the presence of ability heterogeneity. It complements Mookherjee and Napel (2007), which investigate positive properties of equilibria (uniqueness and stability) in the model with paternalistic altruism (see Section 4.2) and identify similarly dramatic effects of ability heterogeneity as we establish here for Pareto efficiency.

D'Amato and Mookherjee (2013) investigate efficiency properties of equilibria in a closely related model with ability heterogeneity, where the labor market is additionally characterized by signaling (i.e., productivity depends on ability in addition to education). They examine effects of educational loans provided by the government, funded by bonds released to the public. They obtain a result similar to our first result, viz. competitive equilibria are Pareto dominated by such a loan program. This intervention works differently

from ours by changing the composition of the educated in favor of children from low-income families who have higher abilities than children from high income families. Per capita education and output in the economy are unchanged. Such interventions require parents to take loans on behalf of their children, unlike the interventions studied in the current paper.

Our paper also contributes to debates concerning the design of anti-poverty programs (e.g., Mookherjee (2006), Mookherjee and Ray (2008), Ghatak (2015)): whether transfers to poor households should be uniform/cash/unconditional rather than in kind/conditional on investments in human capital of children. While there are general arguments based on the Pareto criterion in favor of the former in static contexts – as in the Mirrlees (1971) or Atkinson-Stiglitz (1976) models – this no longer applies in dynamic settings when effects on investments need to be incorporated. Our results provide a general argument for superiority of conditional transfers in such settings.

## 6 Concluding Observations

We have provided theoretical arguments for Pareto-superiority of fiscal policies involving educational subsidies funded by income taxes imposed on the same income/occupational class. These dominate laissez faire outcomes, as well as policies where transfers are not conditioned on education decisions. The results apply quite generally, provided parents do not supplement education investments with financial bequests. In the presence of financial bequests, laissez faire outcomes continue to be Pareto dominated by similar policies applied only to poor households that do not leave financial bequests. For wealthy household classes that always leave financial bequests, Pareto optimality requires an opposite policy involving educational taxes or fees which fund unconditional transfers within the same class.

The main contribution of the paper is to establish results on the inefficiency of laissez faire equilibria in economies with incomplete financial markets and idiosyncratic abilities that depend little on detailed assumptions concerning preferences or technology, or on the nature of social preferences for redistribution. They provide suggestions for policies based only on the Pareto criterion, that would generate no distributional conflict and create rather than destroy incentives to invest. The analysis helps provide a better understanding of the source of estimated welfare effects of educational subsidy policies in calibrated macro models.

The investigated welfare state is a rather minimal one, partly because the model is stark and the policy objective is confined to Pareto improvements. Some cross-occupational

redistribution is involved, but the major component of the proposed intervention operates at an intra-occupational level. The same non-monotonic pattern of consumption utility in a given income/occupational class has been demonstrated to arise in several extensions of the baseline model. Further generalizations are desirable but left for future research. For instance, a child's future wage income and financial inheritance could be subject to random shocks. Analysis of the corresponding extension of the scenario considered in Section 4.4 would be complicated by gains from diversifying the risky payoffs to financial vs. educational investment. For the very poor households who do not leave financial bequests, the identified pattern of parental consumption however should prevail, suggesting that a scheme along the indicated lines could still raise interim welfare.

One question we did not address is the underlying source of missing markets for credit or insurance. Couldn't members of, say, the unskilled occupation – or profit-maximizing companies – organize a similar kind of scheme as does the government in our model? Why is public intervention needed? Mutual aid and benefit societies, fraternal lodges, trade unions and guilds have historically provided many private insurance services that have been taken over – and to some extent crowded out – by the welfare state (see Beito (2000)). Such societies usually have better social monitoring and enforcement possibilities than commercial companies. Still, collective education financing at more than a very localized scale seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. One can only speculate what the underlying reasons may have been — adverse selection (associated with opportunistic non-participation of parents who do not expect to benefit from it ex post), or the general equilibrium effects of such schemes (which lower the profitability of private insurance firms and households owing to the induced changes in the skill premium in the labor market) that are neutralized by the government in our construction.

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## Appendix: Proofs

*Proof of Lemma 1:* Part (i) follows from the fact that  $w_{1t} > w_{0t}$  if and only if  $\lambda_t < \bar{\lambda}$ , and  $V_t(1, x) > V_t(0, x)$  for any  $x$  if and only if  $w_{1t} > w_{0t}$ . If (ii) is false and  $\lambda_t \geq \bar{\lambda}$  at some date, we have  $V_t(1, x) = V_t(0, x)$  for all  $x$ , implying that no parent with a child with  $x > 0$  will want to invest in education at  $t - 1$ , so  $\lambda_t = 0 < \bar{\lambda}$  – a contradiction.

For (iii) note that (3) follows straightforwardly from the optimization problem faced by parents. And  $x_{0t} < x_{1t}$  follows from (i) and (ii) above. To show the next claim in (iv), suppose it is not true. Then we can find a subsequence  $\{x_{c,t_n}\}_{n=1,2,\dots}$  along which  $x_{c,t_n}$  for some occupation  $c$  either tends to 0 or  $\infty$ . In the former case, (3) implies  $[W_{1,t_n+1} - W_{0,t_n+1}]$  must converge to 0, which in turn requires  $\lambda_{t_n+1}$  to converge to  $\bar{\lambda}$ . Then  $x_{d,t_n}$  must tend to 0 for *both* occupations  $d = 0, 1$ , and (2) implies  $\lambda_{t_n+1}$  converges to 0 – a contradiction. In the latter case  $[W_{1,t_n+1} - W_{0,t_n+1}]$  must converge to  $\infty$ , implying  $x_{d,t_n}$  must tend to  $\infty$  for both occupations  $d = 0, 1$  by virtue of (3). Equation (2) then implies  $\lambda_{t_n+1}$  approaches 1. This contradicts (ii) above. Since  $\lambda_t \geq F(x_{0t})$  (owing to (2) and  $x_{1t} > x_{0t}$ ), it follows that  $\lambda_t$  is uniformly bounded away from 0. Moreover, the argument which ruled out that sequence  $\{x_{ct}\}_{t=1,2,\dots}$  has a cluster point at 0 also ensures  $\lambda_t$  is bounded away from  $\bar{\lambda}$ . The bounds on consumption follow from the bounds on wages and on investment thresholds. ■

### Proof of Theorem 2:

A useful preliminary result shows that any government budget surplus can be disposed of in an ex post Pareto improving manner while leaving investment incentives unchanged.

**Lemma 2** *Given any sequence of non-negative budgetary surpluses  $\{R_t\}_{t=0,1,\dots}$  resulting from a fiscal policy  $\{\tau_{ct}, e_{ct}\}_{c;t}$  and an associated DCE  $\{\lambda_t, w_{ct}, x_{ct}, \mathcal{U}_{ct}\}_{c;t}$ , suppose that the surplus is strictly positive at some date. Then there exists another fiscal policy  $\{\tau'_{ct}, e'_{ct}\}_{c;t}$  with  $\tau'_{ct} > \tau_{ct}, e'_{ct} > e_{ct}$  for all  $c = 0, 1$  and  $t = 0, 1, \dots$  with an associated DCE with the same skill ratios, wages and thresholds  $\{\lambda_t, w_{ct}, x_{ct}\}_{c;t}$  which ex post Pareto dominates the original DCE, i.e., with  $\mathcal{U}'_{ct} > \mathcal{U}_{ct}$  for all  $c, t$ .*

*Proof of Lemma 2:* Let the original DCE involve wages  $\{w_{ct}\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  and investment thresholds  $\{x_{ct}\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  in occupation  $c$ . For any period  $t$  and positive budgetary amount  $R_{ct} \leq R_t$  to be disposed of to households in occupation  $c$  in  $t$ , select  $\Delta\tau_{ct}(R_{ct}) \geq 0, \Delta e_{ct}(R_{ct}) \geq 0$  as

defined by the unique solution to:

$$\begin{aligned}
R_{ct} &= \alpha_{ct}[\Delta\tau_{ct} + F(x_{ct})\Delta e_{ct}] \\
u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct}) - u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + e_{ct} - x_{ct}) &= u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + \Delta\tau_{ct}) \\
&\quad - u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + \Delta\tau_{ct} + e_{ct} + \Delta e_{ct} - x_{ct})
\end{aligned} \tag{16}$$

where  $\alpha_{ct}$  equals  $\lambda_t$  if  $c = 1$  and  $1 - \lambda_t$  otherwise. This results in a change in interim consumption utility of a household in occupation  $c$  in period  $t$  by

$$\begin{aligned}
\Delta\mathcal{U}_{ct}(R_{ct}) &= [u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + \Delta\tau_{ct}) - u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct})](1 - F(x_{ct})) \\
&\quad + \int_0^{x_{ct}} \{u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + \Delta\tau_{ct} + e_{ct} + \Delta e_{ct} - x) - u(w_{ct} + \tau_{ct} + e_{ct} - x)\}dF(x)
\end{aligned}$$

provided the investment threshold remains  $x_{ct}$ .

$\Delta\tau_{ct}(R_{ct})$ ,  $\Delta e_{ct}(R_{ct})$  and  $\Delta\mathcal{U}_{ct}(R_{ct})$  are continuous, strictly increasing functions, taking the value 0 at  $R_{ct} = 0$ . By the Intermediate Value Theorem, for any  $R_t > 0$  there exist  $R_{0t}$  and  $R_{1t}$  such that  $R_{0t} + R_{1t} = R_t$  and  $\Delta\mathcal{U}_{1t}(R_{1t}) = \Delta\mathcal{U}_{0t}(R_{0t})$ . This ensures that  $\mathcal{U}_{1t} - \mathcal{U}_{0t}$  is unchanged.

Because the definition of  $\Delta\tau_{ct}$  and  $\Delta e_{ct}$  in (16) keeps investment sacrifices constant for threshold types  $x_{1t}$ ,  $x_{0t}$ , the same investment strategies remain optimal for households in period  $t$  if they expect an unchanged welfare difference  $W_{1,t+1} - W_{0,t+1}$ . The sequence  $\{W_{1t} - W_{0t}\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  remains unchanged given that there is no change to the sequence of consumption utility differences  $\{\mathcal{U}_{1t} - \mathcal{U}_{0t}\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$ . The policy is constructed precisely to assure this, where preservation of the original investment thresholds also preserves skill ratios  $\{\lambda_t\}_{t=1,2,\dots}$  and associated pre-tax wages  $\{w_{1t}, w_{0t}\}_{t=1,2,\dots}$ . The government budget is then balanced, while transfers to all households have increased. ■

The proof of Theorem 2 proceeds in five steps.

*Step 1:* Conditions (a)–(d) imply the status quo fiscal policy and DCE satisfy the following properties:

- (i)  $\lambda_t$  is uniformly bounded away from 0 and 1;
- (ii)  $x_{ct}$  is uniformly bounded above, and uniformly bounded away from zero;
- (iii) consumptions of all agents are uniformly bounded.

To see this note that the bounds on income transfers and on marginal products  $g_c$  over  $[0, 1]$  imply that post-tax incomes are uniformly bounded. These imply existence of: a uniform upper bound on consumption (since consumption is bounded above by post-tax income); a uniform upper bound on  $W_{ct}$  (given the upper bound on consumption); a uniform lower



bound on  $W_{ct}$  (from the option of always consuming all post-tax income); and, consequently, a uniform upper bound on  $\Delta W_t = W_{1t} - W_{0t}$ .

The latter also is a uniform upper bound on the utility sacrifice of investing parents. Combined with the uniform bounds on post-tax incomes, we infer that investment thresholds  $x_{ct}$  are uniformly bounded above, which in turn implies equilibrium consumption is uniformly bounded from below. So (iii) holds. Condition (b) implies post-tax income differences between the skilled and unskilled occupation are bounded away from zero. Hence  $\Delta W_t$  is uniformly bounded away from zero, implying the same for investment thresholds. This establishes (ii).

The first part of (ii) implies that  $\lambda_t$  is uniformly bounded away from 1 because the distribution of education costs has full support on  $\mathbb{R}_+$ . Moreover, full support and uniform positive lower bound on investment thresholds ensure that  $\lambda_t$  is uniformly bounded away from 0. So (i) holds.

*Step 2:* For arbitrary  $\epsilon > 0$ , construct the following policy change. Denote the status quo DCE by a \* superscript. Choose any occupation  $c$  and select alternative fiscal policy  $\tau'_{ct}(\epsilon) = \tau_{ct} - \epsilon F(x_{ct}^*)$ ,  $e'_{ct}(\epsilon) = \epsilon(1 - \mu_t)$  for this occupation, while leaving that for the other occupation  $d \neq c$  unchanged, where

$$\mu_t \equiv (1 - F(x_{ct}^*)) \left[ 1 - \frac{F(x_{ct}^*) u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct})}{\int_0^{x_{ct}^*} u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct} - x) dF(x)} \right] \quad (17)$$

independently of  $\epsilon$ . It is evident that  $\mu_t \in (0, 1)$  for all  $t$ . By Step 1 and the concavity of  $u$ , it is uniformly bounded away from 0 and 1 respectively.

For either occupation  $i \in \{c, d\}$ , define post-reform post-tax wages:  $w_{it}^\epsilon = w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct} - \epsilon F(x_{ct}^*)$  if  $i = c$ , and  $w_{dt}^* + \tau_{dt}$  otherwise, and education subsidies:  $e_{it}^\epsilon = \epsilon(1 - \mu_t)$  if  $i = c$  and 0 otherwise. Let the corresponding investment thresholds be denoted  $x_{it}^\epsilon$  and dynastic utilities be denoted  $W_{it}^\epsilon$ . In the following we refer to the effect of a policy reform where the value of  $\epsilon$  is raised slightly above 0.

*Claim:* Assuming that the policy change leaves after-tax wages unchanged for each occupation, it generates: (i) a positive first order increase in investment thresholds for parents in occupation  $c$  at every  $t$ ; (ii) a zero first order effect on thresholds for parents in occupation  $d$  at every  $t \geq 1$ , and (iii) a zero first order effect on the dynastic utilities at every  $t = 0, 1, 2, \dots$ . Specifically,  $\frac{\partial x_{ct}^\epsilon(0)}{\partial \epsilon}$  is positive and uniformly (with respect to  $t$ ) bounded away from zero, while  $\frac{\partial x_{dt}^\epsilon(\epsilon)}{\partial \epsilon}$  and  $\frac{\partial W_{it}^\epsilon(\epsilon)}{\partial \epsilon}$ ,  $i = c, d$  converge uniformly (with respect to  $t$ ) to zero as  $\epsilon \downarrow 0$ .

To prove this, we proceed as follows. For arbitrary thresholds  $x_{it}, i \in \{c, d\}$  define the  $C^2$  function

$$\mathcal{U}_{it}(x_{it}, \epsilon) \equiv u(w_{it}^\epsilon)[1 - F(x_{it})] + \int_0^{x_{it}} u(w_{it}^\epsilon + e_{it}^\epsilon - x) dF(x). \quad (18)$$

And define for  $i \in \{c, d\}$ :

$$W_{it}^\epsilon = \mathbb{E}_x V_t^\epsilon(i, x) \quad (19)$$

where

$$V_t^\epsilon(i, x) \equiv \max_{I \in \{0,1\}} \left[ u(w_{it}^\epsilon + I\{e_{it}^\epsilon - x\}) + \delta \mathbb{E}_x V_{t+1}^\epsilon(I, x) \right]. \quad (20)$$

We restrict  $\epsilon \leq \bar{\epsilon}$  for some bound  $\bar{\epsilon} < \infty$ . Given any such bound, it is evident that  $w_{it}^\epsilon, e_{it}^\epsilon$  and therefore consumptions are uniformly bounded above (i.e., for all  $i \in \{c, d\}$ , all  $t$  and all  $\epsilon \leq \bar{\epsilon}$ ). (In what follows, statements concerning uniform bounds will be taken to mean this.) Hence  $W_{it}^\epsilon$  is also uniformly bounded above.

Next, note that  $W_{it}^\epsilon$  is also uniformly bounded below, since a parent at any  $t$  and in any occupation  $i$  always has the option of not investing in education for its child and consuming its (uniformly bounded) post-tax income. So (given the intertemporal consistency of dynastic utility) the present value dynastic payoff associated with the parent as well as all subsequent descendants never investing forms a lower bound to  $W_{it}^\epsilon$ .

Define  $\Delta W_t^\epsilon \equiv W_{1t}^\epsilon - W_{0t}^\epsilon$ , which constitutes the post-reform return to any dynasty to investing at  $t-1$ . The preceding arguments imply that this return  $\Delta W_t^\epsilon$  is uniformly bounded above. So parents' sacrifices associated with investment must be uniformly bounded above, implying that post-reform consumptions will be uniformly bounded from below.

In what follows, we shall say that a family of real-valued functions  $\{y_t^\epsilon; \epsilon \in [0, \bar{\epsilon}], t \geq 0\}$  satisfies the Cauchy (C) property if given any  $\eta > 0$ , there exists  $\zeta > 0$  such that  $\sup_t |y_t^{\epsilon_1} - y_t^{\epsilon_2}| < \eta$  whenever  $\epsilon_1, \epsilon_2 < \zeta$ .

Since  $|w_{it}^{\epsilon_1} - w_{it}^{\epsilon_2}| \leq (\epsilon_1 + \epsilon_2)F(x_{it}^*) \leq 2\bar{\epsilon}$ , it follows that  $w_{it}^\epsilon$  satisfies the C-property. By a similar argument,  $e_{it}^\epsilon$  also satisfies the C-property.

We claim that  $W_{it}^\epsilon$  satisfies the C-property. To prove this, let us define consumptions conditional on investment  $I$  and ability draw  $x$  as follows:  $c_{it}^\epsilon(I, x) \equiv w_{it}^\epsilon + I[e_{it}^\epsilon - x]$ . Then  $|c_{it}^{\epsilon_1}(I, x) - c_{it}^{\epsilon_2}(I, x)| = |w_{it}^{\epsilon_1} - w_{it}^{\epsilon_2} + I[e_{it}^{\epsilon_1} - e_{it}^{\epsilon_2}]| < 2\eta$  for all  $i, t$  if  $\epsilon_1, \epsilon_2 < \zeta$ . Since consumptions are uniformly bounded, marginal utility is uniformly bounded above and away from zero. Hence for any given  $\eta^*$ , there exists  $\bar{\epsilon}$  such that  $|u(c_{it}^{\epsilon_1}(I, x)) - u(c_{it}^{\epsilon_2}(I, x))| < \eta^*$  for all  $I, t, x, i$  if  $\epsilon_1, \epsilon_2 < \bar{\epsilon}$ . This implies that  $|V_{it}^{\epsilon_1}(i, x) - V_{it}^{\epsilon_2}(i, x)| < \frac{\eta^*}{1-\delta}$  if  $\epsilon_1, \epsilon_2 < \bar{\epsilon}$  for all  $i, x$ . Hence  $W_{it}^\epsilon$  satisfies the C-property.

Next, we claim for suitable choice of  $\bar{\epsilon}$ ,  $\Delta W_t^\epsilon$  is uniformly bounded away from zero. The argument used in Step 1 established existence of  $b > 0$  such that  $\Delta W_t^0 > b$  for all  $t$ . The claim in the previous paragraph implies that  $\Delta W_t^\epsilon$  satisfies the C-property. Hence there exists  $\zeta > 0$  such that  $|\Delta W_t^\epsilon - \Delta W_t^0| < \frac{b}{2}$  for all  $t$  if  $\epsilon < \zeta$ . This implies  $\Delta W_t^\epsilon > \frac{b}{2}$  for all  $t$  if  $\epsilon < \zeta$ .

Now investment threshold  $x_{it}^\epsilon$  solves:

$$u(w_{it}^\epsilon) - u(w_{it}^\epsilon + e_{it}^\epsilon - x_{it}^\epsilon) = \delta \Delta W_{t+1}^\epsilon \quad (21)$$

which is a well-defined positive real number owing to the Implicit Function Theorem. Next, observe that  $x_{it}^\epsilon$  satisfies the C-property, since  $w_{it}^\epsilon, e_{it}^\epsilon, \Delta W_t^\epsilon$  all satisfy the C-property, and since marginal utility is uniformly bounded away from zero (since consumption is uniformly bounded above). Since  $x_{it}^0$  is uniformly bounded away from zero, the same must be true for  $x_{it}^\epsilon$ .

The preceding results imply that  $x_{it}^\epsilon, \Delta W_t^\epsilon, w_{it}^\epsilon, e_{it}^\epsilon$  converge uniformly to  $x_{it}^*, \Delta W_t^0, w_{it}^*, e_{it}^*$  respectively as  $\epsilon$  goes to zero. Hence  $\mathcal{U}_{it}(x_{it}^\epsilon, \epsilon)$  converges uniformly to  $\mathcal{U}_{it}(x_{it}^*, 0)$ , i.e., for every  $\eta > 0$  there exists a  $\zeta > 0$  such that  $|\mathcal{U}_{it}(x_{it}^\epsilon, \epsilon) - \mathcal{U}_{it}(x_{it}^*, 0)| < \eta$  if  $\epsilon < \zeta$ .

Next, note that for any  $y$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{U}_{ct}(y, 0)}{\partial \epsilon} = -[1 - F(y)]u'(w_{ct}^\epsilon)F(x_{ct}^*) + [1 - \mu_t - F(x_{ct}^*)] \int_0^y u'(w_{it}^\epsilon + e_{it}^\epsilon - x) dF(x) \quad (22)$$

while  $\frac{\partial \mathcal{U}_{ct}(y, 0)}{\partial \epsilon} = 0$ . So the preceding results and the definition of  $\mu_t$  imply that  $\frac{\partial \mathcal{U}_{it}(x_{it}^\epsilon, \epsilon)}{\partial \epsilon}$  converges uniformly to 0.

Moreover

$$\Delta W_t^\epsilon \equiv \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \nu_k^\epsilon \left[ \mathcal{U}_{1,t+k}(x_{1,t+k}^\epsilon, \epsilon) - \mathcal{U}_{0,t+k}(x_{0,t+k}^\epsilon, \epsilon) \right] \quad (23)$$

where  $\nu_0^\epsilon \equiv 1$  and  $\nu_k^\epsilon \equiv \delta^k \prod_{l=0}^{k-1} [F(x_{1,t+l}^\epsilon) - F(x_{0,t+l}^\epsilon)]$ . Since  $\nu_k^\epsilon \leq \delta^k < \delta < 1$ , the preceding results allow the order of summation and differentiation operators to be interchanged in the following expression:

$$\frac{\partial \Delta W_t^\epsilon}{\partial \epsilon} = \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \nu_k^\epsilon \left[ \frac{\partial \mathcal{U}_{1,t+k}(x_{1,t+k}^\epsilon, \epsilon)}{\partial \epsilon} - \frac{\partial \mathcal{U}_{0,t+k}(x_{0,t+k}^\epsilon, \epsilon)}{\partial \epsilon} \right] \quad (24)$$

where we use the Envelope Theorem to ignore the effects of changes in  $\epsilon$  on the optimally chosen (interior) investment thresholds. It follows that  $\frac{\partial \Delta W_t^\epsilon}{\partial \epsilon}$  converges uniformly to 0 as  $\epsilon$  goes to 0. Moreover, by a similar argument, since  $\frac{\partial \mathcal{U}_{it}(x_{it}^\epsilon, \epsilon)}{\partial \epsilon}$  converges uniformly to 0, the same is true of  $\frac{\partial \mathcal{W}_{it}^\epsilon}{\partial \epsilon}$ .

As we vary  $\epsilon$  from 0, we claim that the threshold  $x_{ct}$  undergoes a first order increase, while the first order change in  $x_{dt}$  is zero. To see this, differentiating (21) for  $i = d$  yields  $\frac{\partial x_{dt}^\epsilon(0)}{\partial \epsilon} = 0$  because  $\frac{\partial \Delta W_t^\epsilon(0)}{\partial \epsilon} = 0$ . Moreover, from the uniform convergence of  $\frac{\partial \Delta W_t^\epsilon}{\partial \epsilon}$ , we can conclude that  $\frac{\partial x_{dt}^\epsilon(\epsilon)}{\partial \epsilon}$  converges uniformly to 0 as  $\epsilon$  goes to 0. In contrast, for  $i = c$  we obtain

$$\frac{\partial x_{ct}^\epsilon(0)}{\partial \epsilon} = F(x_{ct}^*) \frac{u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct})}{u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct} - x_{ct}^*)} + (1 - \mu_t - F(x_{ct}^*)). \quad (25)$$

The concavity of  $u$  implies

$$\int_0^{x_{ct}^*} u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct} - x) dF(x) < F(x_{ct}^*) u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct} - x_{ct}^*). \quad (26)$$

Hence recalling the definition (17) of  $\mu_t$ ,

$$\mu_t < (1 - F(x_{ct}^*)) \left[ 1 - \frac{u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct})}{u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct} - x_{ct}^*)} \right], \quad (27)$$

and substituting this into (25) we obtain

$$\frac{\partial x_{ct}^\epsilon(0)}{\partial \epsilon} > \frac{u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct})}{u'(w_{ct}^* + \tau_{ct} - x_{ct}^*)} \quad (28)$$

which is uniformly bounded away from 0. This concludes the proof of the Claim.

*Step 3:* In order to ensure that after-tax wages remain at their original levels, we introduce a wage neutralization policy at each  $t$ . First, for any  $\epsilon \geq 0$  and  $t \geq 0$ , recursively define the skill ratio that would be induced in period  $t + 1$  by the investment thresholds  $x_{ct}^\epsilon(\epsilon), x_{dt}^\epsilon(\epsilon)$

$$\lambda_{t+1}(\epsilon) = F(x_{1t}^\epsilon(\epsilon)) \lambda_t(\epsilon) + F(x_{0t}^\epsilon(\epsilon)) (1 - \lambda_t(\epsilon)) \quad (29)$$

with  $\lambda_0(\epsilon) = \lambda_0$  given. Note that (28) combined with  $x_{1t}^\epsilon(\epsilon) > x_{0t}^\epsilon(\epsilon)$  at all  $t$  implies that  $\lambda'_{t+1}(0)$  is positive (and uniformly bounded away from 0).

Now switch to the following modified policy  $(\tilde{\tau}_{ct}(\epsilon), \tilde{\tau}_{dt}(\epsilon), \tilde{e}_{ct}(\epsilon), \tilde{e}_{dt}(\epsilon))$  for each period  $t \geq 1$

$$\tilde{\tau}_{ct}(\epsilon) = w_{ct}^* - w_{ct}(\epsilon) + \tau'_{ct}(\epsilon) \equiv w_{ct}^* - w_{ct}(\epsilon) + \tau_{ct} - \epsilon F_{ct}^* \quad (30)$$

$$\tilde{e}_{ct}(\epsilon) = e'_{ct}(\epsilon) \equiv \epsilon(1 - \mu_t) \quad (31)$$

$$\tilde{\tau}_{dt}(\epsilon) = w_{dt}^* - w_{dt}(\epsilon) + \tau'_{dt} \equiv w_{dt}^* - w_{dt}(\epsilon) + \tau_{dt} \quad (32)$$

$$\tilde{e}_{dt}(\epsilon) = e'_{dt}(\epsilon) \equiv 0 \quad (33)$$

where  $w_{ot}(\epsilon) = g_o(\lambda_t(\epsilon))$ ,  $o = c, d$ .

This modified policy induces a DCE with skill ratios  $\{\lambda_t(\epsilon)\}_{t=1,2,\dots}$ , investment thresholds  $\{x_{ct}^\epsilon(\epsilon), x_{dt}^\epsilon(\epsilon)\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  and the interim utilities  $\{\mathcal{U}_{ct}(x_{ct}^\epsilon(\epsilon), \epsilon), \mathcal{U}_{dt}(x_{dt}^\epsilon(\epsilon), \epsilon)\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  which were constructed in Step 2 under the assumption of unchanged after-tax wages

in each occupation at each date. Given investment thresholds  $x_{ct}^\epsilon(\epsilon), x_{dt}^\epsilon(\epsilon)$  the resulting skill ratio is  $\lambda_{t+1}(\epsilon)$  and hence pre-tax wages are  $g_c(\lambda_{t+1}(\epsilon)), g_d(\lambda_{t+1}(\epsilon))$ . The transfers defined by (30)–(33), therefore, ensure that the household's optimization problem in each period corresponds to the one under original wages  $\{w_{1t}^*, w_{0t}^*\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$  and the policy  $\{\tau_c'(\epsilon), \tau_d'(\epsilon), e_c'(\epsilon), e_d'(\epsilon)\}_{t=0,1,2,\dots}$ .

*Step 4:* We next check that there is a first order improvement in government revenues at every  $t$ . Supposing that  $c = 1, d = 0$  (an analogous argument works for the opposite case), the budget surplus for  $t \geq 0$  is

$$B_t(\epsilon) = w_{0t} - w_{0t}^* - \tau_{0t} + \lambda_t [(\tau_{0t} - \tau_{1t}) + (w_{0t}^* - w_{0t}) - (w_{1t}^* - w_{1t}) - \epsilon \{F_{1t}(1 - \mu) - F_{1t}^*\}] \quad (34)$$

where we abbreviate  $F(x_{it}^\epsilon)$  and  $w_{it}^\epsilon$  by  $F_{it}$  and  $w_{it}$ , respectively. Indicating the corresponding derivatives w.r.t.  $\epsilon$  by  $F_{it}'$  and  $w_{it}'$ , we then have

$$B_t'(\epsilon) = w_{0t}' + \lambda_t' [(\tau_{0t} - \tau_{1t}) + (w_{0t}^* - w_{0t}) - (w_{1t}^* - w_{1t}) - \epsilon \{F_{1t}(1 - \mu_t) - F_{1t}^*\}] - \lambda_t [w_{0t}' - w_{1t}' + \{F_{1t}(1 - \mu_t) - F_{1t}^*\} + \epsilon F_{1t}'(1 - \mu_t)]. \quad (35)$$

We can use Euler's theorem to obtain  $\lambda_t w_{1t}' + (1 - \lambda_t) w_{0t}' \equiv 0$ , i.e., the corresponding terms in (35) cancel. The progressivity assumption  $\tau_{0t} \geq \tau_{1t}$  in condition (a) and  $\lambda_t' \geq 0$  for all  $\epsilon$  sufficiently close to zero imply we may drop the corresponding term to bound (35) from below:

$$B_t'(\epsilon) \geq \lambda_t F_{1t} \mu_t + \lambda_t' [(w_{0t}^* - w_{0t}) - (w_{1t}^* - w_{1t}) - \epsilon \{F_{1t} - F_{1t}^*\} + \epsilon F_{1t} \mu_t] - \lambda_t [\{F_{1t} - F_{1t}^*\} + \epsilon F_{1t}'(1 - \mu_t)]. \quad (36)$$

The first term,  $\lambda_t F_{1t} \mu_t$ , is positive and uniformly bounded away from zero. We want to show that the rest of the RHS can be brought arbitrarily close to zero by choosing  $\underline{\epsilon} > 0$  sufficiently small, whence we could conclude that  $B_t'(\epsilon) > 0$  for all  $t$  and all  $\epsilon \in [0, \underline{\epsilon}]$ .

We claim that  $\lambda_t'$  is uniformly bounded. Apply  $\lambda_{t+1}' = F_{1t}' \lambda_t + F_{0t}'(1 - \lambda_t) + (F_{1t} - F_{0t}) \lambda_t'$  recursively to obtain

$$\lambda_{t+1}' = F_{1t}' \lambda_t + F_{0t}'(1 - \lambda_t) + \sum_{k=1}^t (F_{1t} - F_{0t}) \cdots (F_{1,t-k+1} - F_{0,t-k+1}) [F_{1,t-k}' \lambda_{t-k} + F_{0,t-k}'(1 - \lambda_{t-k})]. \quad (37)$$

Now  $F_{1t}'$  and  $F_{0t}'$  are uniformly bounded since the density of the ability distribution is bounded, and preceding arguments imply that  $\frac{\partial x_{it}^\epsilon}{\partial \epsilon}$  is uniformly bounded. Hence any convex combination of  $F_{1t}'$  and  $F_{0t}'$  is uniformly bounded. So there exists  $m > 0$  such that

$[F'_{1,t-k}\lambda_{t-k} + F'_{0,t-k}(1 - \lambda_{t-k})] < m$  for all  $t \geq k$  if  $\epsilon \in [0, \underline{\epsilon}]$ . There also exists  $\alpha \in (0, 1)$  such that  $(F_{1,t-k+1} - F_{0,t-k+1}) < \alpha$  for all  $t \geq k$  and all  $\epsilon \in [0, \bar{\epsilon}]$ . Hence  $\lambda'_{t+1} < \frac{m}{1-\alpha}$ , i.e., is uniformly bounded.

Choosing  $\underline{\epsilon} > 0$  small enough therefore allows to make  $\lambda'_t[(w_{0t}^* - w_{0t}) - (w_{1t}^* - w_{1t})]$  arbitrarily small: the skill change  $\lambda_t^* - \lambda_t(\epsilon)$  can be made arbitrarily small; this extends to wage changes.

Given that  $\lambda'_t F_{1t} \mu_t$  and  $F'_{1t}(1 - \mu_t)$  are uniformly bounded, products of  $\epsilon$  and these terms in (36) can be made arbitrarily small for  $\epsilon \in [0, \underline{\epsilon}]$  through an appropriate choice of  $\underline{\epsilon} > 0$ . Because  $\lambda_t F_{1t} \mu_t$  is uniformly bounded away from zero, this in summary means we can find  $\underline{\epsilon} > 0$  such that

$$B'_t(\epsilon) \geq \frac{1}{2} \cdot \lambda_t F_{1t} \mu_t \quad (38)$$

for all  $t$  and  $\epsilon \in [0, \underline{\epsilon}]$ . As  $\lambda_t F_{1t} \mu_t$  is uniformly bounded away from zero, a small policy reform starting from  $\epsilon = 0$  therefore generates a strictly positive budget surplus.

*Step 5:* Finally, apply Lemma 2 in order to dispose of the resulting budget surplus in an interim Pareto-improving way.  $\square$

### Proof of Theorem 3

We denote the respective investment thresholds, skill ratios, wages, etc. in the DCELF associated with a given discount factor  $\delta$  by  $x_{ct}^\delta$ ,  $\lambda_t^\delta$ ,  $w_{ct}^\delta$ , etc. Recall that the induced skill ratio  $\lambda_t^\delta$  must be strictly smaller than  $\bar{\lambda}$  for every  $\delta$  and  $t$  (cf. Lemma 1). From this follows that if we fix an arbitrary  $\delta' > 0$  there exist  $\underline{x}$  and  $\bar{x}$  such that  $0 < \underline{x} \leq x_{0t}^\delta \leq x_{1t}^\delta \leq \bar{x} < \infty$  for all  $t$  and all  $\delta \in (\delta', 1)$ . To see this, suppose otherwise, i.e., that there exists a sequence  $\{t_n, \delta_n\}_{n=1,2,\dots}$  such that (i)  $x_{c,t_n}^{\delta_n} \rightarrow 0$  or (ii)  $x_{c,t_n}^{\delta_n} \rightarrow \infty$ . In case (i), vanishing investment by occupation  $c$  in period  $t_n$  requires that the benefit of having a skilled child in  $t_n + 1$  vanishes. Then no parent in occupation  $d \neq c$  would have an incentive to invest in  $t_n$  either, implying  $\lambda_{t_n+1} \approx 0$ . The consequent gap between skilled and unskilled equilibrium wages in period  $t_n + 1$  and  $\delta_n > \delta' > 0$  would then, however, induce a non-vanishing benefit of one's child to be skilled in  $t_n + 1$  – a contradiction. In case (ii), benefits of having a skilled child in  $t_n + 1$  would need to grow without bound. This implies that parents in occupation  $d \neq c$  will also find it optimal to invest in  $t_n$  for arbitrarily large  $x$ . But  $x_{0,t_n}^\delta, x_{1,t_n}^\delta \rightarrow \infty$  implies  $\lambda_{t_n+1}^\delta \rightarrow 1$ , in contradiction to  $\lambda_t^\delta < \bar{\lambda}$  for all  $t$ .

We next establish that there exist  $\delta' > 0$  and  $\underline{b}$  such that

$$F(x_{1t}^\delta)\lambda_t^\delta\mu_t^\delta \geq \underline{b} > 0 \text{ for all } t \text{ and } \delta \in (\delta', 1) \quad (39)$$

with

$$\mu_t^\delta \equiv (1 - F(x_{ct}^\delta)) \left[ 1 - \frac{F(x_{ct}^\delta)u'(w_{ct}^\delta)}{\int_0^{x_{ct}^\delta} u'(w_{ct}^\delta - x)dF(x)} \right] \quad (40)$$

for a given  $c \in \{0, 1\}$ . To see (39) note, first, that  $F(x_{1t}^\delta) \geq F(\underline{x}) > 0$  because  $F$  is strictly increasing. Second,  $\lambda_t^\delta < \bar{\lambda}$  implies  $w_{1t}^\delta > w_{0t}^\delta$  and  $x_{1t}^\delta > x_{0t}^\delta$ . From this follows  $\lambda_t^\delta \geq F(x_{0t}^\delta) \geq F(\underline{x}) > 0$ . Finally, note that  $(1 - F(x_{ct}^\delta)) \geq (1 - F(\bar{x})) > 0$  in (40). Now suppose that

$$\frac{u'(w_{ct_n}^{\delta_n})}{\frac{1}{F(x_{ct_n}^{\delta_n})} \int_0^{x_{ct_n}^{\delta_n}} u'(w_{ct_n}^{\delta_n} - x)dF(x)} \rightarrow 1$$

for some sequence  $\{t_n, \delta_n\}_{n=1,2,\dots}$ . This would require  $x_{ct_n}^{\delta_n} \rightarrow 0$ , in contradiction to  $x_{ct}^\delta \geq \underline{x} > 0$  for all  $t$  and  $\delta \in (\delta', 1)$ . Hence  $\mu_t^\delta$  is bounded away from zero.

Equation (39) implies that, by choosing  $\epsilon \in (0, \bar{\epsilon})$  for a small  $\bar{\epsilon} > 0$ , a strictly positive budget surplus  $B_t^\delta(\epsilon)$  is created for all  $t$  and  $\delta \in (\delta', 1)$  in the first steps of the proof of Theorem 2. Since the full policy intervention is budget balancing, it must raise consumption in period  $t$  for at least one occupation  $d \in \{0, 1\}$  by a non-vanishing amount. This must increase the respective interim consumption utility  $\mathcal{U}_{dt}^\delta$  at a rate which is bounded away from zero, recalling that  $g_1(0)$  is an upper bound to consumption in any laissez faire equilibrium and so every agent's marginal utility of consumption is bounded below by  $u'(g_1(0)) > 0$ . The final Step 5 of the proof of the Theorem 2 makes sure that differences between  $\mathcal{U}_{1t}^\delta$  and  $\mathcal{U}_{0t}^\delta$  in the status quo are preserved. Therefore, also interim consumption utility in occupation  $c \neq d$  must locally increase in  $\epsilon$  at a rate that is bounded away from zero. Let  $\underline{\nu} > 0$  denote the corresponding uniform lower bound on marginal improvements in expected utility associated with period  $t$  consumption.

Increases in period  $t$ 's average consumption utility of the skilled and unskilled arise mainly because parents who educated their children already in the laissez-faire benchmark consume their net subsidy. For them, the consumption and the dynastic components of utility go up. The same applies to non-investors in occupation  $d$  if the first steps of the scheme are targeted at only one occupation  $c$  (because of transfers everyone receives in Step 5). However, non-investors in the targeted occupation are net contributors and have to reduce consumption. We will establish that the policy constitutes an ex post Pareto improvement by showing that, for  $\delta$  high enough, their gain in dynastic utility outweighs

the loss in consumption utility. Note here that newly investing parents in the targeted occupation suffer an even bigger drop in consumption – despite being net beneficiaries – than their non-investing peers. But they could have stayed non-investors and reveal to be yet better off by investing.

The key reason why also net contributors to the scheme are better off for high  $\delta$  is that the rate at which  $\epsilon > 0$  decreases these non-investing parents' consumption utility is bounded above. Namely, there exists  $L < \infty$  such that

$$\left. \frac{\partial}{\partial \epsilon} \left[ u(w_{ct}^\delta) - u(w_{ct}^\delta - \epsilon F(x_{ct}^\delta) + S_{ct}^\delta(\epsilon)) \right] \right|_{\epsilon=0} = \left( F(x_{ct}^\delta) - \frac{\partial S_{ct}^\delta(0)}{\partial \epsilon} \right) \cdot u'(w_{ct}^\delta) \quad (41)$$

$$\leq F(\bar{x}) \cdot u'(g_0(0)) < L \quad (42)$$

where  $S_{ct}^\delta(\epsilon)$  denotes the (increasing) budget surplus which is allocated to occupation  $c$  in Step 5 of the proof of Theorem 2.

In contrast, the rate at which  $\epsilon > 0$  increases the non-investing parents' dynastic utility  $\delta W_{0,t+1}^\delta$  is unbounded. Namely, for every  $M < \infty$  there exists  $\underline{\delta} \in (0, 1)$  such that for all  $\delta \in (\underline{\delta}, 1)$ :

$$\left. \frac{\partial}{\partial \epsilon} \left\{ \delta \left[ W_{0,t+1}^\delta(\epsilon) - W_{0,t+1}^\delta \right] \right\} \right|_{\epsilon=0} > M \quad (43)$$

where  $W_{0,t+1}^\delta = W_{0,t+1}^\delta(0)$  refers to interim welfare in the original DCELF. To see this, consider

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial \epsilon} \left[ W_{0,t+1}^\delta(\epsilon) - W_{0,t+1}^\delta \right] = \frac{\partial}{\partial \epsilon} \left[ \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \delta^k \mathcal{U}_{0t}^\delta(\epsilon) + \delta \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \delta^k F(x_{0,t+k}^\delta(\epsilon)) \Delta W_{t+1+k}^\delta(\epsilon) \right] \quad (44)$$

and note that the derivative at  $\epsilon = 0$  of the second summand in the brackets is zero (cf. Step 2 in Proof of Theorem 2). The corresponding derivative of the first summand is

$$\sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \delta^k \left. \frac{\partial \mathcal{U}_{0t}^\delta}{\partial \epsilon} \right|_{\epsilon=0} \geq \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \delta^k \underline{\nu} = \frac{\underline{\nu}}{1 - \delta}, \quad (45)$$

and so the left-hand side of (43) grows without bound as  $\delta \rightarrow 1$ .

Combining (41) and (43), we can conclude that the total welfare change of non-investing parents satisfies

$$\left. \frac{\partial}{\partial \epsilon} \left\{ \left[ u(w_{ct}^\delta - \epsilon F(x_{ct}^\delta) + S_{ct}^\delta(\epsilon)) + \delta W_{0,t+1}^\delta(\epsilon) \right] - \left[ u(w_{ct}^\delta) + \delta W_{0,t+1}^\delta \right] \right\} \right|_{\epsilon=0} \geq \psi \quad (46)$$

for all  $t$  and  $\delta \in (\underline{\delta}, 1)$  for some  $\psi > 0$ . We can therefore choose  $\bar{\epsilon} > 0$  such that each individual's ex post welfare change is positive for any  $\epsilon \in (0, \bar{\epsilon})$  for every  $\delta \in (\underline{\delta}, 1)$ .  $\square$