Managing (In)Equality through Simultaneity: Differentiation and the Rhetoric of Reform and Revolution in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus pandemic has heightened the sense of crisis in higher education, initiating a reconsideration of the conditions under which transformative change actually occurs. For some historians, the radical disruption of a social system occurs under four conditions: mass mobilization warfare, transformative revolution, state failure, and lethal pandemics. However, peace aids the return of inequality and its correlate, differentiation. Differentiation produces equality and inequality in education. Dismantling this simultaneity may be impossible without radical disruption. This study reveals how this conditionality challenges the egalitarian impulse in the rhetoric of reform and revolution espoused by change agents in academe. It marks the limits of these perspectives by surveying the academic models that treat differentiation as a feature rather than an anomaly in education.

For years, critics and scholars have offered us different appreciations of the collected difficulties or *crises* in higher education. For some, the coronavirus pandemic has magnified many of these problems and drawn even more attention to the deficiencies and inequalities that have plagued higher education well into the digital age (Alexander, 2020; Fain, 2020).

Noted scholars have articulated many of these same concerns long before the pandemic. For instance, the considerations made by Bok (2017) and Davidson (2017) clarify many of our perennial criticisms about what ails higher education. They offer thoughtful insights for democratizing and improving the system. In his evaluation, Bok (2017) outlines the various troubles that have compromised the quality of higher education such as the fragmentation of knowledge, dwindling success rates and resources, and irresponsive political and academic leadership. He explains how these elements and others hinder innovation and slow the pace of progress in ways that maintain the status quo. While somewhat skeptical, Bok (2017) calls for *reform* and presents a number of suggestions that can help us to build on many initiatives already in place (pp. 169-182). In her assessment, Davidson (2017) argues that our current academic system is prescriptive and designed for the Industrial Age and not the Digital Age. One of the key architects of the industrial model that Davidson (2017) criticizes is Charles W. Eliot of Harvard University. To transform education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Eliot adapts what he learns studying institutions such as the University of Berlin, established by Wilhelm von Humboldt and inspired by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (also see Taylor, 2010, and Wellmon, 2015). Davidson (2017) contends that it is time for us to develop a new system of higher education and better ways to integrate knowledge and promote collaborative learning. Davidson (2017) claims that higher education needs to be redesigned systemically and systematically in order to prepare students for the complex worlds beyond the academy. Inspired by the equalitarian nature of digital technology, she calls for a *revolutionary* redesign of higher education.

However, one critic suggests that Davidson's appraisal may be untenable and more sustainable as rhetoric than as reality. In "What Does Higher Education Need: Revolution and/or Reform?" Huber (2019) determines that Davidson's vision is infectious and capacious, but it is Bok (2017) who provides us with the "comprehensive and sober-sided analysis" that we need in order to transfigure higher education (p. 27). The problem with Huber's conclusion is that it encourages what Scott (1995) calls *warring opposites* in the discourse on the crises in higher education. When we employ dichotomies to frame calls for academic reconfiguration, we advance binarity as an explanatory tool in a way that oversimplifies *reform* and *revolution* and often reinforces the status quo. Scott (1995) writes, "I think it is most useful to treat the crisis in higher education not in terms of warring opposites, but as a series of paradoxes that have produced further paradoxes" (p. 294). Even Huber (2019) signifies this *series of paradoxes* when she questions the differences between reform and revolution and when she asks if Davidson's revolutionary vision can be accomplished through Bok's "decidedly unrevolutionary process of reform" (p. 29).

This turn toward the study of paradox in higher education is consistent with what Scheidel (2017) reveals about the contradictory nature of *change* throughout world history. The author claims that four kinds of disruption have reversed inequalities and provided opportunities to reconfigure established social institutions. They are mass mobilization warfare, transformative revolution, state failure, and lethal pandemics. While these *four levelers* can work to bring about sweeping changes in any society, Scheidel (2017) states that no one in his or her right mind would welcome the fear, violence, and destruction that they entail. What is even more ironic and troubling is that peace and stability aid the return and proliferation of inequality and the ideologies and infrastructure that support it. *Inequality* describes the effect of differences that are often used to thwart democratic policies and practices. Scheidel (2017) claims, "There does not seem to be an easy way to vote, regulate, or teach our way to significantly greater equality" (p. 9). He (2017) also says that advances in economic capacity and state building have favored inequality over equality since the beginning of civilization. Too often, little can be done to reverse this condition once it is put into play. In Scheidel's work, it is important to note that differentiation is identified as one of the techniques that those in positions of authority use to maintain inequality, typically using a system of institutional structures that distribute advantages and disadvantages in society. For him, differentiation signifies as a dividing practice that functions as a bulwark against social, political, and economic equalization.

As a concept, differentiation continues to operate in higher education for many of the same purposes and effects pointed out by Scheidel (2017). As in history, differentiation reproduces the kinds of inequalities in higher education that often mirror those in the larger society (Bastedo, 2016; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Thelin, 2011). More significantly, the concept is at odds with the rhetoric of democracy and meritocracy that is sometimes viewed as synonymous with higher education (Brennan & Magness, 2019; Markovits, 2019). However, we often fail to consider why this contradiction is tolerated in spite of the reoccurring dissonance that it produces for educators and academic leaders (Lemann, 2000; Tough, 2019; Wilkerson, 2020). A few scholars might agree that many countries tend to generate more ambition and aspiration than there are opportunities for them to be realized or satisfied. For some to succeed, others must fail (Dennis, 2019; Robertson, 2012). Therefore, ambition must be managed. Otherwise, the legitimacy of the academic system itself is jeopardized. According to Brint and Karabel (1989), "there was something potentially threatening to the established order about organizing the educational system so as to arouse high hopes, only to shatter them later" (p. 11).

Academic leaders and advocates for reform would have to find a way to curb the public's desire for improvement and social mobility using the very academic system that often accepts the fulfillment of such

aspirations as its mission. Brint and Karabel (1989) write, "The ideal of equal education would have to be forsaken, for only differentiated education—education that fit students for their different vocational futures—was truly democratic" (p. 11). In his examination of the impact of differentiation as a policy and practice in higher education, Marks (1980) argues that the concept affirms the social perspectives of dominate groups who tend to view individual differences as innate. Advocates in higher education and elsewhere reason that innate differences necessitate different kinds of training for different kinds of people at different academic institutions. In the name of efficiency, differentiation is a mechanism that is used to fit people into designated positions in the social and economic order (also see Lemann, 2000, and Wilkerson, 2020). The interplay involved in extending opportunities while restricting them through differentiation characterize *simultaneity,* and it is considered a rational way to accommodate the realities and complexities of the social order and the division of labor in many nations (Bastedo, 2016; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Dennis, 2019; Tough, 2019).

In this respect, the legacy of differentiation and its service to the nation state challenges the egalitarian impulse in the rhetoric of reform and revolution signaled by Bok (2017) and Davidson (2017). It also troubles Huber's (2019) suggestion that adequate solutions may fall somewhere between the two appreciations. It appears that all three authors undervalue differentiation as a cross-cultural phenomenon that continues to accelerate in higher education around the world (Reimer & Jacob, 2011; Veiga et al., 2015). As such, professors and administrators will continue to be positioned as both subjects and agents in academic systems that perpetuate (in)equality by bestowing privileges on some and denying them to others (Foucault, 1995; Markovits, 2019; Tough, 2019). The paradoxical character of differentiation and its technicians suggest that calls for reform and revolution in the future might benefit from the kind of historical and philosophical contextualization that makes this logic much more explicit for change agents across the academic disciplines and in the public sector.

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion is to survey the perspectives and discourse in three models of reform for higher education that offer the historical and philosophical contexts that change agents need in order to more clearly recognize the powerful ways in which differentiation thwarts change and reproduces (in)equality in academe and society. As a dividing practice, differentiation treats crises and conflict as features rather than anomalies in higher education. In this sense, the rhetoric of reform and revolution must compete against the operationalization of differentiation and its powerful progenitors and advocates. Sadly, opportunities for successful changes to differentiation and its paradoxical ethos are limited. Throughout

the history of academic reform, differentiation is repeatedly evoked and legitimized as a deliberate practice for managing complexity in higher education.

To illustrate this point, I will identify the properties of differentiation using a conceptual framework inspired by the work of Clark (1983, 2008), a leading voice in the study of higher education systems around the world. Using this paradigm, I appraise the academic plan of Immanuel Kant, the California Master Plan for Higher Education made famous by academic leaders such as Clark Kerr, and the plan for The New American University imagined by Michael Crow and William Dabars. The significance in juxtaposing these models of academic reform and their periodization is that it allows educators to more clearly see the connection between the discourse that supports differentiation and the persistence of crises and (in)equality in education despite the repeated calls for reform and revolution by scholars such as Bok (2017) and Davidson (2017). The value in signaling differentiation as a form of simultaneity is that it encourages more realistic discussions about what kinds of changes are possible in higher education and society without unleashing the horror, violence, and unimaginable destruction that Scheidel (2017) associates with the *four levelers*. Hopefully, this (re)view will recalibrate the way that we conceptualize and discuss *change* in higher education in the future.

Conceptual Framework

According to Burke (1969), rhetoric is more than just the various conceptualizations of communication and discourse that help us to interact and achieve goals. He claims that rhetoric is also a form of *identification*. Identification is achieved when we relate the patterns or properties of one idea or object to another. According to Burke's thinking, we might imagine rhetoric as a body of identifications that owe their persuasiveness to the similarities and connections that are evident across space and time. Clark (1983, 2008) supports this consideration of rhetoric for framing and evaluating the paradoxical nature of change and the structural fragmentation that resists it in higher education. For example, he claims that "structure grants and withholds voice, not only in determining who sets agendas and tells others what to do—decision making—but also in restricting the scope of what will be decided—non-decision making" (1983, pp.107-108). When we value structure as a form of rhetoric, we can more clearly recognize the ways in which it frames and conditions the relations of various speech acts that further the cause of certain groups while subordinating others. For Clark (1983), the exercise of power or the ability to influence or coerce is indispensable to all discussions of structure in higher education. Structure is simply one of the ways in which power is translated and operationalized. In fact, structure arranges authority in ways that allow policies and their originators to remain largely invisible and impervious to those who demand

change (see more on structure as a form of rhetoric and power in Hirst, 1993, and Foucault, 1995).

Change is the term that is variously used to refer to "alterations that vary from simple reproduction to radical transformation" (Clark, 1983, p. 182). It occurs in ways that are incremental, opaque, paradoxical, and controversial. For clarity, change and its coextensions might be conceptualized as points on a continuum. Though reform and revolution are correlated, they excite different responses in the public imagination. *Reform* suggests a gradual transformation within established boundaries that are acceptable to dominate authorities or groups who benefit from the status quo. *Revolution* excites caution and fear. The term is often interpreted as a complete reorientation of worldviews. It is a reconfiguration of the status quo and its supporting institutional structures and ideologies. It is imagined to be more disruptive and even apocalyptic by some alarmists (Buller, 2015).

Any analysis of change in higher education should begin with an awareness of the presuppositions associated with these representations of change, especially as they relate to academic systems. Clark (1983) defines a system of higher education as an institution that advances knowledge and disseminates the intellectual heritage of the world. One of its more definitive characteristics is that its structures and supporting ideologies tend to remain in place. Clark (1983) claims that we need to examine how change is influenced by the ways in which structures operate over long periods of time. One of the reasons academic structures are so resilient is political and economic interests that incentivize changes in one area often become sources of rigidity in others. This may explain why academic systems can foster innovative changes in some contexts while remaining deeply resistant to them in another.

To understand this paradox, Clark (1983, 2008) has determined that we need a paradigm that will improve the way we investigate the structures and imperatives that work against change in higher education. He writes, "There is so much observable inertia that we need a theory of nonchange" (1983, p. 182). Without an adequate framework, perennial conversations about reform and revolution remain ineffective and pointless if they are not grounded in an understanding of how structures in higher education resist change. Consequently, Clark (1983) would agree that the rhetoric of reform and revolution posited by Bok (2017), Davidson (2017), and Huber (2019) cannot be divorced from the study of the relationship among the key features of academic systems and the historical and philosophical perspectives that underpin them (p. 237).

To help us to move in this direction, Clark (2008) presents differentiation and its properties as the kind of conceptualization that illustrates the significance of the abovementioned relationship. Differentiation and its tenets construct the lens through which one can map

and contemplate a wide range of problems and divisions that are evident throughout the history and philosophy of higher education. In the parlance of higher education, differentiation is essentially a synonym for academic fragmentation. It describes the vertical and horizontal tiers, levels, compartments, and hierarchies that appear in varying combinations across the various academic landscapes that form the complex system of higher education found throughout the world. With that said, systems of higher education are generally differentiated by two crisscrossing modes. One is by disciplines and the other is by institutions. More importantly, these elemental formulations of differentiation flow across national and international borders. As such, they allow power to protect certain interests and incentives at the expense of others, thus reproducing equality and inequality under the cloak of meritocracy. Unsurprisingly, the simultaneity that is produced by differentiation is inseparable from the contradictory values found in the larger society. In many ways, it aids their legitimation. Ultimately, the cumulative effect of differentiation thwarts transformative change and sets the stage for many of the social, political, and economic problems that underwrite the crises in higher education (Clark, 1983, 2008). These descriptive features constitute the conceptual lens that will be used to review the ways in which differentiation reemerges as a rhetorical stance and management strategy in three influential models of reform in higher education: The Kantian Plan, The California Master Plan, and The New American University Plan.

The Kantian Plan

   In his assessment of higher education, Taylor (2010) determines that "the lack of historical perspective is one of the most important factors blocking reforms that are so desperately needed" (p. 49). Like Bok (2017) and Davidson (2017), he would agree that it is important to examine the reform efforts of innovative leaders such as Charles W. Eliot. However, Taylor (2010) indicates that the key academic reforms that anticipate Eliot's efforts and those of many others really begin with Immanuel Kant. Derrida (2004) concurs that Kant's contributions to education are largely overlooked or ignored by educators outside of philosophy. When we revisit Kant's work, Derrida (2004) writes, "we find a kind of dictionary and grammar (structural, generative, and dialectal) for the most contradictory discourses we might develop about—and, up to a point, within—the university" (p. 90).

   Kant meditates on higher education in general and the university, specifically. His view of education is rooted in Enlightenment thought. Kant (1784/2013) describes e*nlightenment* as the employment of reason for intellectual maturity. Kant (1784/2013) concludes that human nature is fallible and he wants people to be educated to order their lives according to *reason* or disciplined thought. One's use of reason has to be restricted or censored for the greater good of the community and the nation state. As a

consequence, some situations will require that humans comply and obey so that through "artificial unanimity" the government can guide them toward peace and public good. According to some scholars, Kant prefers that the enlightenment that he associates with education be initiated by reform and not by revolution. Revolution is far too costly. It destabilizes the state and supporting institutions such as the academic system (Derrida, 2004; Reiss, 1956).

In *The Conflict of the Faculties,* Kant creates a blueprint for avoiding disruption and managing many of the problems that he found in higher education, particularly among faculty. He claims to use *reason* to resolve the tensions between the higher faculty and the lower faculty in his academic plan for higher education. Preoccupied by censorship and challenges to academic freedom, Kant (1798/1979) develops a rationale and an organizational scheme to correct academic misalliances. He fragments the faculty, differentiates their functions, and limits their domains of knowledge and authority. In Kant's *architectonic* or system of higher education, the higher ranks are composed of the professional fields of theology, law, and medicine. The lower rank consists of two departments: one for faculty concerned with historical knowledge and the other for those concerned with pure rational knowledge. Today, these departments make up the human sciences, social sciences, and natural sciences. Kant refers to the faculty who teach in the lower rank as the *philosophy faculty*. According to Kant (1798/1979), the lower faculty must be given the freedom and power to judge autonomously in order to discover truth through the sciences. Ironically, the lower faculty members play important roles as both regulators and functionaries for the higher faculty. They are subject only to the laws of reason and peer review. As a trade-off, the faculty in the lower rank are largely free from disturbances by government officials; however, "the higher faculties (themselves better instructed) will lead these officials more and more onto the way of truth" (p. 47).

In Kant's plan, the higher faculty in theology, law, and medicine form a special class of the intelligentsia. The higher faculty are privileged because they attend to the eternal well-being, civil well-being, and physical well-being of the people. They provide the services that placate and reassure the public. In a moment of candor, Kant (1798/1979) says, "The people want to be led, that is (as demagogues say), they want to be duped." They want to be led not by scholars but by "businessmen of the faculties— clergymen, legal officials, and doctors—who understand a botched job (savoir faire) and have the people's confidence" (p. 51). Because the higher faculty will have a more direct and lasting influence on the public, Kant (1798/1979) refers to them as the *tools of the government*. According to Kantian logic, this plan accords with reason and the order of cognition. The higher faculty must serve the needs and interests of reason as well as government. Kant (1798/1979) says that "the government is interested

primarily in the means for securing the strongest and most lasting influence on the people, and the subjects which the higher faculties teach are just such means" (p. 27). To avoid conflicts in these roles and purposes, Kant claims that faculty must remain differentiated and not enter into a misalliance.

In many ways, Kant's model serves as a tool that is designed to unify a series of academic compromises under a philosophy of reason. Kant (1803/1904) remarks that the art of government and that of education present us with our greatest problems (also see Jefferson, 1785/1999). To solve these complicated difficulties, Kant (1803/1904) develops a theory of academic reform that functions as a state pedagogy and a social policy (pp. 114-115). Eventually, his philosophical principles and organizational structure for higher education influence the conceptualization of the University of Berlin under the leadership of Wilhelm von Humboldt (Derrida, 2004; Wellmon, 2015). The Humboldtian university or *German model* then inspires the transformation of institutions such as The Johns Hopkins University. After two centuries, Taylor (2010) claims that this legacy is still alive in academic institutions around the world, particularly those in the United States of America.

The California Master Plan

After World War II, Aronowitz (2000) indicates that key academic reformers in the United States of America ignore some of Germany's ideas for achieving academic reform and extend others. This negotiation is largely in response to the labor needs of a growing postwar economy and the politics of the Cold War amid a demand for higher education by an increasingly diverse student population. In Aronowitz's work, Clark Kerr (2001) is noted as one of the more prominent advocates for academic reform. As a labor economist, the first Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, and later the president of the University of California, Kerr (2001) is interested in reconfiguring higher education and promoting his vision of academe as a *knowledge industry* and *multiversity*. The multiversity is Kerr's conception of higher education as a complex community of interacting academic institutions with different missions, functions, and constituencies that ultimately work in the service of the economic and social growth of the nation.

In *A Master Plan for Higher Education in California* presented by the California State Board of Education (1960), Kerr's vision of a multiversity becomes a reality and a state statute with the passing of the Donahoe Higher Education Act of 1960. The master plan identifies a range of problems that are to be solved or managed in a new system of higher education in California. One solution is the differentiation of functions in the academic system. The divisions and roles of the various institutions in higher education are locked in place using the force of law instead of reason. In his extensive study of The California Master Plan, Douglass (2000)

describes the logic behind the codification of a tripartite system of higher education in California. First, the plan resolves the conflicts over prestige and funding within academic communities. It limits the ambitions of faculty and the entrepreneurial drive of college administrators and lawmakers. Douglass (2000) claims that this notion that education could play a key role in developing a stable state, a prosperous economy, and a more specialized labor force was reinforced by the German conceptualization of education (pp. 92, 117). To realize this idea in California, a rigid hierarchical structure would be needed to (re)order the various academic institutions in the state and thwart misalignment. In the scheme, the highly selective elite public research universities form the top tier, the semi-selective comprehensive campuses occupy the middle, and open-access community colleges anchor the lower tier. Each segment has a different mission and function, thus decreasing redundancy while encouraging institutional excellence within each particular sphere of influence (Douglass, 2000).

The California Master Plan has gained national and international attention as a model for educational reform. Popular publications have considered the plan "a pinnacle of modernist ideals of rationality and efficiency, championing democracy and inclusion and, ultimately, promising prosperity and culture" (Douglass, 2000, p. 312). As a noted academic leader and advocate for the master plan, Thomas R. McConnell claims that it is not an overstatement to say that the plan's "functions" have been engraved in "tablets of stone" (Douglass, 2000, p. 321). Because politicians and other academic leaders promoted and replicated the California model across the United States of America and the world, Douglass (2000) claims that there are lasting concerns about the ways in which the model has reproduced inequality and legitimated the social construction of differences. "In other words," argues Darknell (1980), "the master plan became an extension of the lower school tracking system" (p. 393). Many students would pass through the California system and would often emerge at the same social class level. One can go to college, but he or she would likely stay in place or move up one square in the socio-economic hierarchy. The inherent fragmentation of knowledge and the bureaucratization of academic degree programs in a tripartite system effectively limit academe as an agent for social equality. Enduring yet under-theorized, this system underwrites the crises in higher education and will likely continue to do so without substantial change. Douglass (2000) writes, "There has been no dire need to rethink a system of education that, seemingly, has served the state so well" (p. 324).

The New American University Plan

In order to initiate a reconceptualization of higher education and enable its transformation, Crow and Dabars (2015, 2020) present The New American University Plan (also known as a Fifth Wave academic

institution). Their plan is both a critique and an extension of models such as the California plan. For the authors, the California system and its iterations represent what they call *the gold standard* in American higher education. According to Crow and Dabars (2015), it has been a successful platform for advancing innovative research and teaching along with American prerogatives at home and abroad. This may explain why there is little incentive to change this system and the influence that it still maintains around the world. However, Crow and Dabars (2015) claim that this model is no longer sufficiently aligned with the needs of contemporary society in the digital age. In many ways, it contributes to the challenges facing higher education in the twenty-first century. Crow and Dabars (2015, 2020) present a new vision for a research university that is inspired by advancements in technology and digitalization. One of the central problems that the authors use their plan to address is the limited access that the majority of students have to elite colleges and top tier research universities.

Unfortunately, many academic institutions define themselves by adhering to practices that are exclusionary and often at odds with the idea of education as a public service. Crow and Dabars (2020) are concerned that too many schools disregard the fact that intelligence is distributed throughout the population and it can be expressed in many different ways. Instead of using elite colleges and top tier research institutions to educate the top 5 percent of high school students and perpetuate their privileges, Crow and Dabars (2020) propose educating the top 25 percent. However, this percentage would only apply to those students who are identified as academically qualified to pursue rigorous coursework at a research institution. If we are to make the nation more competitive in the future, Crow and Dabars (2020) argue that their more inclusive approach is necessary. The New American University is ideal for educating a broader selection of students. As a *new wave* institution, the New American University model is designed to accommodate and train a more diverse student body by providing it with access to cutting-edge technology and more alternative learning opportunities. For Crow and Dabars (2020), the New American University Plan would develop students who can appreciate and practice interdisciplinary learning in a world that is continually changing due to technological innovations. It would also offer the students more options to start and stop their studies in accordance with the changing circumstances of their lives.

In many respects, Crow and Dabars (2020) frame the New American University as an alternative vanguard in higher education. They position it as a leader in a network of public and private research universities, liberal arts colleges, corporate industries, and government agencies. Through interaction and transdisciplinary collaborations, the various sectors in this complex system are expected to become increasingly varied and differentiated. Crow and Dabars (2020) indicate that

differentiation may be the most efficient way for these various sectors to function successfully. In fact, they argue that the kind of innovation that their plan initiates calls for more and not less differentiation in higher education. Due to the privileged nature of Crow and Dabars' model, many schools would have to continue to operate as independent but subordinate components in a complex academic system that offers different experiences and opportunities to different students.

For example, Crow and Dabars (2020) explain the important role that online learning platforms will play in serving the learning needs of different populations. The promising growth and capabilities associated with online education will also help institutions to serve more students while driving down costs. In the New American University model, online learning platforms operationalize what Crow and Dabars (2020) call *universal learning frameworks*. Universal learning frameworks help to disseminate teaching and learning nationally and to audiences around the world at low or no costs. Crow and Dabars (2020) characterize universal learning frameworks as pedagogical and programmatic tools that serve as resources for continuing education and retraining for lifelong learners and those students who do not qualify for admission to the New American University. Crow and Dabars (2020) view universal learning frameworks as a way to bring the resources of a major research institution to curricula generally associated with community colleges and technical schools. Regardless of socioeconomic status or life situation, one can use universal learning frameworks for general intellectual development and for gaining the knowledge and skills essential to a particular career pursuit. Ultimately, advanced technology and universal learning frameworks serve as the major elements that allow Crow and Dabars (2015, 2020) to expand the reproduction of differentiation in higher education while also claiming to democratize it and drive down the costs associated with teaching, learning, and research operations at a premiere university.

Discussion and Conclusion

If Crow and Dabars' elaboration is any indication of what educators can expect in the future, then the simultaneity associated with differentiation may very well prove to be the kind of cross-disciplinary concept that we need in order to add explanatory value to future discussions of change in higher education. This study advances this perspective by providing an overview of three reform plans and some of the historical and philosophical underpinnings that condition them. More importantly, it illustrates the ways in which differentiation reemerges as a discourse and management policy in one reform plan after another, thus reproducing equality and inequality and operationalizing simultaneity. Evidencing this relationship, hopefully, signals differentiation as an accepted practice and not an irregularity that can be easily remedied. What we ultimately learn is that differentiation operates

in education to protect power and distribute advantages and disadvantages in ways that reproduce the status quo. The simultaneity that we find in differentiation in education is simply an expression of the paradoxes, tensions, and compromises inherent in academic systems that function as double agents in society.

Identifying the logic of simultaneity and differentiation in higher education ultimately poses a problem for change agents such as Bok (2017) and Davidson (2017). They call for reform and revolution in academic systems that have essentially *locked in* the paradoxes that too often reflect existing social relations and values. When we underappreciate the unique obstacles that this presents, we indirectly aid the reproduction of the status quo and its accompanying problems in education. Brennan and Magness (2019) agree that "once we identify the cause of our problems, we often can't do anything about it" (p. 12). In other words, academic organizations and many of the people who maintain them tend to resist change because they believe that it may cost them too much to participate in an alternative configuration of the system (Roithmayr, 2014; Wilkerson, 2020). Over time, existing conditions reproduce themselves and become insuperable or *locked in* without the kinds of radical disruptions that Scheidel (2017) says we should not welcome. However, the growing threat of the coronavirus and its implications may give us little choice in the matter. Whether the impact of the pandemic on higher education proves to be reformatory, revolutionary, or regrettable is yet to be determined.

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