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Educational Evaluation as Hermes

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, educational evaluation has prominently been interwoven with the concepts of measurement and accountability. The reduction of educational evaluation to technical and instrumental processes, ignoring its underlying normative ethical claims and values, is not only undesirable but also detrimental to pursuing educational endeavors. I attempt at a Kuhnian paradigm shift from the measurement and calculation discourse to reframing educational evaluation as Hermes. Educational evaluation as Hermes attends to the messy ground of teaching with ethical dimensions, dwelling in human relationships. I understand educational evaluation as Hermes with three salient dimensions, namely the content of recognizing the divine messages of sacred and holistic human beings, the purpose of deliberating the values and interrupting and transcending the norms, and the methodology of a circular dialogic structure to highlight the contemplative and relational dimension of educational evaluation.
Since the 1980s, educational evaluation has been largely interwoven with the concepts of measurement and accountability due to the urgent need to justify educational funding for taxpayers, policymakers, and administrators (McCormick & James, 2019). Teachers and schools are held accountable “not only for what they do, but more importantly for whether or not what they do produces student learning outcomes, mainly achievement test scores” (Ni, 2010, p. 518). This was made evident in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act legislated in the United States, which required the testing by the states of all children in third through eighth grades, followed by U.S. President Obama’s 2009 Race to the Top multi-billion competitive grant to spur reforms in state and local district K-12 education. Ni (2010) observes that a feature of educational evaluation in the contemporary world is defined as “a global trend toward outcome-driven or performance-driven educational evaluation” (p. 523). To assess school effectiveness across borders, evaluation agencies are sprouting up around the globe, including the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)’s international evaluations (Ni, 2010). Since 2000, PISA has involved more than 90 countries and economies and around 3,000,000 students worldwide, measuring 15-year-old students’ literacy, math, and science ability (PISA Program for International Student Assessment, 2021).

Evaluation practices are generally influenced by the philanthrocapitalism through which social inequality and poverty are alleviated (Mathison, 2016) and “neoliberal policies [that]… continue to approach schooling in terms of the outcomes it produces – outcomes that are often exclusively valued with reference to the global economy” (Biesta, 2017, p. 182). Evaluation often “adopts ‘market speak’ and measures program success in terms of profit; outcomes are conceptualized in economic terms; the individuals are to blame for failure” (Mathison, 2016, p. 97). Evaluation in educational settings “often (usually) reflects an emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, and short-term measurable outcomes typically reflected in a logic model or theory of change” (Mathison, 2016, p. 97). It unfortunately risks being reduced to a commodity that conforms to the neoliberal capitalist framework, measured in cost-effective ways. In the age of measurement, prevalent with neoliberal discourse, a “culture of competition” (Biesta, 2017, p. 187) is formed among teachers, classes, schools, districts, and countries. Teachers, schools, and students are measured to make the students learn better or the teachers deliver their classes more effectively. Measurement is used to identify who performs satisfactorily or not, based on certain prescribed standards. Let alone the fact that those teachers and schools that perform worse than others are usually held accountable for their “failures.” Intertwined measurement and accountability discourses draw teachers’ attention to technical validity and rationality: how to compete with others and become successful based on what is required and assessed with better tools.

One of the key functions of evaluation is diagnosis: “students are ‘diagnosed’ in order to ‘prescribe’ a ‘treatment’ that is educationally effective” (Eisner, 1985, p. 193). Evaluation is bound to diagnose the malaise in students and teachers and aims to take effective measures accordingly to solve them. Diagnostic evaluation implies identifying and naming a particular condition or issue based on preconceived notions of what is normal and right. Besides diagnosis, Eisner (1985) also observes other functions of evaluation, including curriculum revision, comparisons of programs, identification of educational needs, and determinations if objectives have been achieved. Despite its different functions, evaluation seems to be often applied as a quantitatively objective and impersonal tool measured against predetermined
objectives, lacking in axiological discussions about what is good and worthwhile. Biesta (2010) raises the question of “good education against the background of the remarkable rise of a culture of measurement in educational policy and practice in many countries around the world” (p. 5) and proposes that “measurement of educational ‘outcomes’ can never replace answering the question of purpose in education, although at times it seems as if this is what those who are engaged in measurement seem to do or seem to aspire to” (p. 5).

Some efforts have been detected in the literature to understand evaluation beyond the neoliberal agenda, including but not limited to empowerment, participation, democratization, and transformation discussions. Fetterman (1994) proposes empowerment evaluation as the use of evaluation techniques to foster self-determination, empowering individuals to help themselves. This evaluation approach, according to Fetterman, “focuses on improvement, is collaborative, and requires both qualitative and quantitative methodologies” (Fetterman, 1994, p. 1). The collaborative emphasis of Fetterman echoes the participatory decision-making process highlighted in participatory evaluation (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). House and Howe (2000) build on the collaborative and participatory understandings of evaluation and provide us with a deliberative democratic evaluation checklist incorporating democratic processes, to include inclusion, dialogue and deliberation, within the evaluation process in order to construct valid conclusions where conflicting views exist. Besides, Mertens, in more elaborate ways, points to “the axiological assumption of the transformative paradigm” (2007, p. 87) in evaluation. He proposes the discourse of inclusion in culturally diverse communities and argues that “being firmly rooted in a human rights agenda, ethical implications for evaluation are derived from the conscious inclusion of a broad range of people who are generally excluded from the mainstream in society” (2007, p. 87). Despite these continued conceptual stretchings of evaluation, still, as Scriven (1991) puts it, insufficient attention is paid to, “the process of determining the merit, worth, and value of things” (p. 1). These attempts seem to lack the attention imbedded in the educational evaluation process. My concern is not only to revive evaluation from reducing technical and instrumental procedures, but also to bridge education and evaluation with its underlying normative ethical claims and values in the pursuit of educational endeavors. Educational evaluation should involve the ongoing “educational inquiry” (1985, p. 216), which aims at promoting better human understanding not only empirically and descriptively, but also normatively and ethically. Biesta points out that “technical validity” takes over “normative validity” (2010, p. 13) in understanding evaluation; this is “the question whether we are indeed measuring what we value, or whether we are just measuring what we can easily measure and thus end up valuing what we (can) measure” (Biesta, 2010, p. 13). Biesta compares this practice in the global measurement industry, where we are only valuing what is being measured (rather than asking whether what is measured is educational) to the “tail is wagging the dog” (2017, p. 188). He proposes “value added” measuring in the evaluation process (Biesta, 2020).

This paper hopes to both attend to and challenge Biesta’s question about “whether what is measured in educational” and his proposal of “value added” measuring by focusing on the normative dimension of educational evaluation. Biesta continues to ask: Is there any other concept that better captures educational evaluation than measurement? What is the significance of something that cannot be measured? Since we can only measure what can be measured, how could we reveal a fuller and richer picture of what counts as being educational? I believe the usage of measuring still dwells too safely in the scientific and quasi-scientific paradigm, as a disembodied measure of the observable, calculable and quantifiable world (Scriven, 1991). Instead of adding “value” in front of the measuring discourse, I hope to re-conceptualize
educational evaluation, with the renewed language of Hermes (Allan, 2018; Caputo, 1987; Gadamer, 2013), in order to reclaim its ethical, relational underpinnings. Hermeneutics is etymologically rooted in the Greek God Hermes, a “cunning, and occasionally violent: a trickster, a robber” (Kermode, 1979, p.1) who brings messages of the gods to humans. I humbly attempt a Kuhnian paradigm shift from measurement and calculation discourses to educational evaluation as Hermes. It is not a cumulative process based on the accountability evaluation paradigm, but rather a more radical reconstruction of the evaluation field from renewed concepts and theoretical generalizations embedded in the particularities in practice. Instead of holding up individuals for their failures measured against certain standards, reconceptualizing educational evaluation as Hermes boldly attends to the messy ground of teaching with ethical dimensions, dwelling in human relationships. My appropriation of Hermes in this paper refers heavily to hermeneutic traditions (Caputo, 1987; Gadamer, 2013) rather than its place and functions in Greek culture. Understanding educational evaluation as Hermes provides much-needed normative and ethical layers through which we could perceive the subtleties in particular, in order to discern and make judgments about what is significant in different contexts to conduct educational evaluations.

Re-understanding Educational Evaluation as Hermes

Hermes is a fascinating god who seems to deny a uniform or clear definition (Allan, 2018). Hermes is “a precocious, divine child, born of secrecy, companion to dark night; a stealthy thief, a playful prankster, and mischief-maker, yet called by Homer 'the friendliest of gods to men' or, alternately translated, 'the one who most enjoys the company of men'” (Allan, 2018, p. 1).

There is no unifying feature to be found in Hermes. Parker points out that the closest we can come to identifying any “core” to Hermes is to group his activities into a triad associated with “transition/communication/exchange” (2005, p. 391). Hermes’ activities are diversified and they arise “not on the basis of the internal logic of a central core” but rather from the principle of “one thing leads to another” (Allan, 2018, p. 4). I hope to conceptualize educational evaluation as Hermes in the very diversified, in flux, and not unifying understandings of Hermes. As Greene (1973) suggests, “no single schema or category can be sufficient for organizing the flux of reality” (p. 9). Caputo (1993) also emphasizes “the ability to cope with, to judge among, competing and incommensurable schemata” when one “undergoes a … merciless exposure to events” (p. 102). One is pushed close up “against the face of ethics” (Caputo, 1993, p. 103) to be genuinely ethical, with the potential of transforming the singular notion of goodness in the teleological pursuit.

I understand educational evaluation as Hermes with three salient dimensions, namely the content, the purpose, and the methods of educational evaluation:

1. Educational evaluation as Hermes is to recognize, perceive, and interpret the divine messages of sacred and holistic human beings in complicated and multiple ways for better understanding.

2. Educational evaluation as Hermes perceives reality in subtle, creative, and imaginative ways beyond what logic and rationality may define. It deliberates the values and norms, interrupts, and transcends them.

3. Educational evaluation as Hermes attends to relationships between the evaluator and who or what is evaluated in a particular context and follows circular dialogic practices in order to attend to the contemplative factors in relationships.
Reading the “Sacred Message” in Human Beings: The Content

Each human being is a sacred and holistic being, with a soul or “inner space” (Pinar, p. 279 & p. 379) difficult to be fully understood, with interconnected, dynamic physical, mental, and spiritual life energies sharing time and space with other human and non-human beings. The sacredness of human beings is grounded in the belief that each human has inherent dignity and worth, suggesting a spiritual and transcendent significance, worthy of reverence and compassion. The sacred soul always in connection with the body and mind requires Hermes’ both godly and mundane eyes to perceive, sharp ears to listen, and mouth to translate, interpret, and communicate. Hermes’ eyes complicate the evaluation process, offering humbleness with a touch of uncertainty and imagination with room for incomprehension. Educational evaluation, in light of Hermes’ unique transforming character, needs to perceive, listen to, translate, interpret, and communicate the sacredness in our holistic being and the subtleness of the particular context to shed “godly” light on our seemingly mundane life.

Eisner proposes that “educational evaluation requires a sophisticated interpretative map to … understand the meaning of what has been seen” (1985, p. 214). However, I hope to suggest educational evaluation not only requires the interpretative map to understand what has been detected, but also a sacred and dedicated eye to look carefully for and at what has not been seen, a sacred ear to listen to what has not been heard, something hidden, something not behaviorally observable, quantifiable or measurable, something beyond the constraints of language. It is the immeasurable that can save us from the damaging mono diet of the measurable. Incorporating the immeasurable as a component of educational evaluation invites and encourages teachers to be more attuned to the immediate, unfolding experience in the classroom, where each student is a unique human being with their own emotions, wonderings, confusions, and challenges. It opens up avenues for recognizing and celebrating our humanity with all its passions, creativity, imagination, emotions, and aspirations that may not be easily captured by traditional qualifiable metrics.

Aoki (2004b/1991) distinguishes the “metron” of “geometry” from the disembodied measure of the calculable world as we usually understand it. Aoki (2004b/1991) states:

The “metron” of “geometry” is “measure.” But this measure is of the sonorous world… it is the sound of the beat and rhythm of the earth; it is the sound of Gaia’s pulsation—the inspired, embodied beat of life; it is Gaia’s gift of life. (p. 374)

Plato’s Phaedrus reminds us that all writing is merely a ”reminder”; the real activity of teaching and learning goes not on the page but in the holistic souls of people (Nussbaum, 2001). Educational evaluation should not read the “pages” but the “souls” of people.

Educational evaluation does not measure a person, a class, or a school against certain rules and principles prescribed in “pages,” but attends to the spirited sacredness of each particular human being in the lived curriculum (Aoki, 2004a/1993). The lived curriculum allows room for confusion, puzzles, wonderings, and curiosities compared with curriculum-as-plan. Hermes, as a trickster, playfully embraces these jarring moments that emerge from the space in between. Hermes’ playfulness is permeated with creativity in perceiving and imagination in interpreting. I would not perceive my student Kai’s reading a novel in the math class as disobeying the teacher’s instruction, nor interpret the behavior of Kai as an absentminded student, or interpret Kai’s math teacher as being incapable of arousing the student’s interest. Hermes may invite me to ask different questions. I may ask why Kai loves that book so much, what touches and intrigues him. I may be very curious to learn what is in Kai’s mind and heart and why Kai is
not interested in what the teacher talks about. *Hermes* allows a humble glimpse into the sacred-spirited soul of Kai with imagination and hence invites something hidden from and behind the story of “reading a novel in the math class” to surface, reveal, and unpack itself. The content of the educational evaluation, in *Hermes’* eyes and ears, is not constrained or contained in what is prescribed in the evaluation form, but in one’s lived experience, spirited, rich, and inexhaustible. It requires hard and humble looks to even notice something subtle, messy, and previously veiled under the observable act of “reading a novel in the math class” rather than only to finish a clear and clean checklist.

With *Hermes*’ creativity and imagination, the sacredness that resides in the person might reveal itself to us in a multiplicity of ways, however fleeting or subtle it might be. On this particular note, it is fair to suggest educational evaluation as *Hermes* is more of a process of revelation than of calculation. Its sacred revelation could be compared with Heideggerian Dasein and being-in-the-world as its basic state (Heidegger, 1962). Dasein defies input and output logic and scientific rationality and “remains ontologically inaccessible, yet is experienced ontically as a ‘relationship’ between one entity (the world) and another (the soul)” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 85). Educational evaluation as *Hermes* would be built on such a relationship between the world and one’s holistic soul, revealing the soul’s richness and interconnectivity in what is experienced in the dynamics with/in the world.

**Deliberating the Values and Transcending the Norms: The Purpose**

Educational evaluation as *Hermes* perceives the reality in subtle, embodied, and imaginative ways and reveals something significant beyond what instrumental rationality, a mode of thinking when individuals choose means that are calculated to achieve specific ends or goals efficiently, may contain. Educational evaluation as *Hermes* goes beyond calculative thinking and has the potential of redefining the content of educational evaluation: from something measurable and quantifiable to something hidden and even sacred in people’s inner space. Based on its content, I will now focus on the discussion of the purpose(s) of educational evaluation. I believe educational evaluation as *Hermes* bears important two-fold purposes: one is to guide with the deliberation of values; another is to disturb and transcend the existing, taken-for-granted norms with judgment. It echoes with *Hermes*’ major purposes. One is to convey messages from the god to the mundane people to guide them to become good. The other purpose of *Hermes*, as a mischievous messenger, brings playfulness, twists, and turns in this process to profane the unprofanable “by detaching [the messages] from their immediate ends” (Agamben, 2007, p. 91).

**To Guide with the Deliberation of Values**

As an integrative part of education, educational evaluation is a pathway towards and a constant quest about education. Compared with the role of *Hermes*, which is to convey godly messages to enlighten mortals, educational evaluation is always and ultimately normative and about helping each particular human being to lead a good and worthwhile life. Zhang (2006) puts it succinctly: Educational evaluation should not be an instrument to control the mental status and behavioral performances of the evaluated, but needs to become a pathway to explore their lived experiences, such as their confusion, questions, ideas, and satisfaction and help them become better human beings. Educational evaluation demands value deliberation rather than unreflective application (House & Howe, 2000).

Educational evaluation as *Hermes* helps us listen to the “godly” message in each of us, release
our imaginations in thinking otherwise, and have conversations about what is good. In contrast with the neoliberal discourses prevalent in today’s schools, educational evaluation as Hermes focuses on the ethical and moral endeavors to make schools more educational. Fifty years ago, Greene (1978) observed that in schools “facts have been easily separated off from values; decisions have been made on grounds independent of moral propriety” (p. 60). This continued neglect of the ethical is especially ironic since teaching is a profession that is doubly ethical: All teaching involves complex relationships with (often very vulnerable) other people and teaching in schools includes the responsibility to help the young to become ethical people themselves. Educational evaluation is part of the ethical quest of teaching and has moral implications. Fenstermacher (1990) explains that

Nearly everything that a teacher does while in contact with students carries moral weight. Every response to a question, every assignment handed out, every discussion on issues, every resolution of a dispute, every grade given to a student, carries with it the moral [judgment] of the teacher. (p. 134)

In reference to Habermas’ discourse ethics, Coulter (2002) further distinguishes the emphases of the moral and ethical discourses. He explains that ethical discourse is when ends (or the very idea of ends) become problematic, partners may choose to engage in discussion that is centrally concerned with issues of self-understanding and identity in a particular lifeworld or community, while the moral discourse involves the central question about how to choose between competing communities with different values and norms, distinct ideas about what is right and good. The never-ending quest of what is conveyed in the godly message is the Hermes’ task, while the never-ending quest of what counts as good and educational – when ends become problematic or/and when there are competing values and norms – needs to be the primary concerns of educational evaluation. Educational evaluation as Hermes aims to evaluate what is worth evaluating and bring sacred light to the evaluated and the evaluator, as what Hermes does for us mortals.

To Disturb and Transcend the Taken-for-granted Norms

Hermes’ interruption counts. Hermes, as a trickster, is not only full of wittiness and energy, but also filled with courage and creativity. Hermes, as the messenger of Mt. Olympus, dares to play tricks on the godly message; he is neither faithful to Olympian gods nor the humans in his mischievous deeds as a massager. But he is a faithful boundary crosser. He profanes what is prescribed for a faithful messenger who used to be expected to deliver messages accurately and precisely without messing them up. Hermes always tries to cross boundaries and build bridges in multiple ways. To some extent, Hermes transcends the norms of what is expected of a faithful messenger. He transforms the understanding of faithfulness from accurately repeating the godly words to faithfully crossing the boundaries and building bridges in more creative and bolder ways.

Hermes embodies the courage to transcend norms. Educational evaluation as Hermes needs to embody Hermes’ courage to think beyond the norms and pre-given universals. Educational evaluation challenges rather than conforms; questions rather than answers; and transcends rather than reproduces. It is no longer obsessed with accurate tools to measure and calculate so as to compete with neoliberal agendas, but as border crossing or even trespassing to others’ realms which challenge, profane, and disdain rules and regulations and allow for new imaginations and alternatives. Creativity and courage are where educational evaluation could be anchored.
Hermes’ act of translation should not be merely understood as “relating some pre-given universals to the particular situation” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 333). Hermes’ translation is embedded in a particular context with a particular person with the possibility to transcend the pre-givens. Hermes’ translation is not faithfully top-down, god to human, theory to practice application. Rather, it builds creative connections between the god and the human beings in concretization. It requires Hermes’ own judgment. According to Gadamer, judgment is “necessary in order to make a correct evaluation of the concrete instance” (2013, p. 36). Gadamer further elaborates, “judgment is always something more than the correct application of general principles ... The judge not only applies the law in concreto, but contributes through his very judgment to developing the law” (2013, p. 36). Hermes’ acts, then, consist in “concretizing the law” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 36). Concretizing the godly message is not similar to one-sided, top-down delivering the godly message to human beings. The concretizing process dwells in the creative dynamic tension between the god and the human, among what was, what is, and what could possibly be in a particular context with the transcendent possibility of “judge-made law” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 36). For example, if we concretize the act of evaluating a student failing an exam, we have to know the student Sam in his particularity so that we may transcend the blind labeling and rigid categorization. We would not straightforwardly fail Sam based on his multiple-choice question answers. Instead, we would ask “Why did Sam fail in that particular test?” “What difficulties did Sam encounter?” “Was he too proud to fail the exam?” “Was the system failing Sam?” “Would the test be able to be revised to help Sam more?” “Would the test count as legitimate at all?” Hermes bears a character of “complication, multiplicity, lies, jokes, irreverence, indirection, and disdain for rules; however, he is the master of creativity and invention. He has the capacity to see things anew and his power is change, prediction, and the solving of puzzles” (Moules, 2002, p. 2). What needs to be noted is that in the creative and courageous Hermes’ border-crossing and transcending the norms, the language the evaluator uses, the context of the evaluation, the impact on the subject being evaluated, and the impact on the evaluator all need to be taken in account in the judgment of what is good. To judge what is good requires both aesthetic and historical sense:

Someone who has an aesthetic sense knows how to distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly, high and low quality, and whoever has a historical sense knows what is possible for an age and what is not, and has a sense of the otherness of the past in relation to the present. (Gadamer, 2013, p. 16)

Fostering Contemplation in Relationship through Dialogic Practice: The Methods

Relationships matter. Allan (2018) observes Hermes’ friendly relationship with men. Hermes is recognized as “the friendliest of gods to men or, alternately translated, ‘the one who most enjoys the company of men’” (Allan, 2018, p. 1). Educational evaluation as Hermes happens “in the company of men.” Or rather, educational evaluation attends to the relationship between the evaluator and the who or what is evaluated in a particular context. Relationships matter in order to make educational evaluation meaningful to either the evaluator or the evaluated.

Let’s discuss two scenarios. The first scenario involves Ted who monitored an exam in an assigned school. Ted caught a student cheating on the spot and then he dutifully reported this incident to the school office. The school then evaluated the student as “dishonest” in the report card. The second scenario is that Christina has been a head teacher for the class for the past year. She found her student Marie cheating on her history exam. She didn’t report her cheating straightaway to the office because teacher Christina was puzzled why Marie cheated
on the history exam. Teacher Christina was worried that something was bothering Marie recently since she wasn’t smiling as much as before. Christina knew that Marie worked very diligently and she was a very sensitive girl. Christina wondered how she could help Marie to learn a lesson about integrity without sending her to the office. After the exam, Christina talked with Marie in the hallway, and the next week, and the next week, their talk continued. Christina started to learn about Marie’s life and the heavy “baggage” she shouldered; her parents had just divorced and she felt anxious and down all the time. She was not in the mood to study, but she feared letting her parents down if she fell behind in her schoolwork. Christina also learned that Marie loved historical reading but she was not into the exam because she was into remembering historical facts. Christina learned that Marie needed help and love rather than punishment at this fragile moment of her life. Christina also resonated with what Marie shared about the boredom of remembering historical facts versus the excitement of reading historical texts.

Let’s compare the scenarios. In the first scenario, the student is only a nameless and even faceless student who cheated on exams in teacher Ted’s eyes and a dishonest student in need of further discipline according to the school’s evaluative report card. Ted didn’t have a chance to contemplate the situation in relationship with the particular student. Hence, his evaluation could be ignorant and even arrogant; it is far from being educational because to educate means to help the particular person live a good and worthwhile life. In contrast, in the second scenario, teacher Christina knew Marie as her head teacher, and they already formed a relationship in which Christina cares about Marie as a person who is sensitive and thoughtful and may suffer from some troubles. In her continued conversations with Marie, Christina knew Marie even better and formed a more trusting relationship. Instead of punishing Marie, Christina contemplated the situation by asking more questions, listening attentively, and thinking of alternative ways to help Marie, a particular person in that particular moment. The contemplative moments of Christina didn’t happen in isolation (otherwise, it might be reduced to speculation); rather, it is encouraged and informed in a mutually respectful relationship through dialogic practices. The ongoing evaluation that Christina generated during and after her ongoing conversations with Marie could be meaningful and educational to both of them. Through educational evaluation, as Zhang (2006) summarizes, the evaluator and evaluated aim to build a mutually empathetic relationship, striving for what counts as educational in their joint effort.

What needs to be noted here is that the methodology of educational evaluation does not have the linear structure of Tyler Rationale (Tyler, 1950) which focuses on behavioral objectives and potentially oversimplifies the complex process of education. Nor does educational evaluation as Hermes draw on value-free experimental regimes adopted from cognitive psychology or positive behavioralism. Educational evaluation is always in a hermeneutic circular dialogic structure in relationships. Bai, Chang and Cohen (2016) believe that teachers can integrate the immeasurable in their work through and to-and-fro dialogic and contemplative practices. The methodology of educational evaluation as Hermes is structured with the hermeneutic cycle that is neither downward bound, which involves implementing a universal rule to particulars, nor outward bound, which requires setting the standard to measure and evaluate. Rather, the cycle is inwardly and mutually applied in relationships between self and others, among past, present, and future. The inward application refers to its influence on the re/formation and re/construction of the self. Gadamer (2013) points out: “…the interpreter dealing with a traditional text tries to apply it to himself” (p. 333). This resonates with Aristotle’s comment that “we are not inquiring into what excellence or virtue is
for the sake of knowing it, but for the sake of becoming good” (1984, 1103b28-30). The hermeneutic cycle is a transforming and “double” (Risser, 1997, p. 89) process. I understand that the “double” process refers to the interactive negotiations and mutual influences between understanding and acting; tradition and the traditionally implicated present; the self and the otherness of a text or a person. Most importantly, we “encounter the good in the concrete situations which we find ourselves in” (Risser, 1997, p. 106). In the dialogic practice, it is important for us to contemplate on what is the good and worthwhile in each other’s company. Hermes’ work is based on a nonduality of familiarity and strangeness, but a creative tension in between. It is the dynamic play between strangeness and familiarity, between self and others, between the past, present, and future, that releases our imaginations. The dialogically structured evaluation would be “neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 305). The contemplative interplay, in the multilayered and dynamic in-between relationships, resides the “true locus” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 306) of Hermes.

**Evaluation Toward Better Understanding**

Evaluators should no longer be “technicians … carrying out the tasks associated with managing, administering, and reporting performance data” (Mathison, 2016, p. 98). This paper investigates the content, purposes, and methodology of educational evaluation in the renewed language of Hermes. Education evaluation as Hermes perceives in subtler ways and listens more attentively to the sacred incalculable and nonreducible human message in each particular person and in each particular situation. In playfully and creatively translating and interpreting the spirit of the message, educational evaluation guides and transcends at the same time. It guides one towards a good and worthwhile life in its ethical and moral efforts, while it transcends the prescribed rules and defamiliarizes the familiar, calling us to dwell in the creative tension between what it is and what should be and can be. Methodologically, educational evaluation as Hermes is anchored on mutual relationships, structured dialogically which enables contemplation in relationships. A mutually respectful relationship between the evaluator and the person evaluated enables the evaluator to contemplate more meaningful questions, making the evaluation more educational than procedural. The educational evaluation process is always in relationships, deliberative and contemplative: The evaluator pays attention to the distinct situation and questions what is important in the situation to discern and help the particular person live his or her good life through contemplation. In the meantime, the evaluator concretizes the rules and universals, bearing the risks and potential to change and transform them.

Educational evaluation as Hermes orients itself around a better understanding. A better understanding involves better perceiving, judging, and acting upon each situation. Educational evaluation as Hermes is about crossing the borders, transcending the norms, and even trespassing to the untreaded territory to see what has been veiled and to hear what has been muted. Educational evaluation as Hermes would help educational practitioners to have a different understanding of their practice, in a more holistic, transcending, and contemplative way, and helps them to see and imagine their practice differently (Biesta, 2010) and in dialogic encounters with students. All in all, engaging with the language of Hermes can help teachers and teacher educators re-approach educational evaluation as sacred and holistic revealing, simultaneously guiding, disturbing, and transcending, with contemplative through dialogic endeavors that possibly allow us to reimagine our practice from the prisms of the spirited, the ethical, and the relational.
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