

Research Article

Derrida's Postmodern Thought and Religious Education

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Abstract

Today the learners breathe in the atmosphere of postmodern thoughts. In this sense it is meaningful to deal with a postmodern thinker's philosophy more closely. This work contributes to understand the learners' intellectual environment deeply in the current postmodern society. Through this, educators can find the way to enrich learners' epistemological and existential soil and can do this more appropriate way. In particular, Jacques Derrida's thoughts on deconstruction and *différance* offer profound insights for religious education in the postmodern era. In addition, his understanding of gift, forgiveness, and hospitality enriches the content of religious education and invites teachers and learners to a more responsible life, in that, for Derrida, responsibility connotes response ability. In this paper, I explore Derrida's thoughts on deconstruction, *différance*, gift, forgiveness, and hospitality. After investigating Derrida's thoughts, I present a framework for imagination-centered religious education that bridges between Derrida's thoughts and religious education. Here I propose three forms of imagination as the outline of imagination-centered religious education: constructive, empathetic, and visionary imagination. Finally, I revisit Derrida's thoughts from the perspective of the three imaginations and bring them into dialogue with one another. Through this I seek to enrich both Derrida's thoughts and religious education and to elicit helpful implications for religious education. The methods of this paper mostly rely on books and theses around the main issues. I hope that this study contributes to the nurturing of the next generation in the contemporary postmodern, globalizing, fourth industrial, and new normal era.

Keywords

Derrida, Imagination, Religious Education, Deconstruction, *Différance*

1. Introduction

Jacques Derrida was a French Jewish philosopher from Algeria. He was an explorer and a practitioner who sought to investigate the origin of the phenomena overarching literature, philosophy, ethics, and politics. He sought to deconstruct the undesirable elements in the margins of philosophy. In this paper I explore Derrida's thoughts centered on deconstruction, *différance*, gift, forgiveness, and hospitality. His philosophy provides profound insights for religious education. His thoughts on deconstruction demonstrates the mode of unfolding in the teaching-learning process, while *diffé*

rance leads learners to a deeper and broader understanding by experiencing differences. Also, his understanding of gift, forgiveness, and hospitality enriches the content of religious education and invites teachers and learners to the deeper embodiment of knowledge. After I investigate Derrida's philosophy I present the framework of imagination-centered religious education that bridges Derrida's thoughts and religious education. Here I propose three modes of imagination - constructive, empathetic, and visionary imagination as a framework for religious education in the postmodern, glob-

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alizing, fourth industrial, and new normal era. Finally, I put Derrida's thoughts and imagination-centered religious education in conversation. The methods of this paper are to explore Derrida's texts closely and to investigate other books, theses, and materials broadly relating to the issues.

So far, some theses regarding Derrida's thoughts have been published as follows: "Toward the reconciliation between conditional forgiveness and unconditional forgiveness: A study on the theory of forgiveness of Vladimir Jankelevitch, Jacques Derrida, and Paul Ricoeur" [16], "A study on the possibility of theological approach to Derrida's deconstructive thought" [18], "Deconstruction and negative theology" [20], etc. The characteristics of my paper are as follows: First, this paper deals with Derrida's thoughts broadly and elicits some issues that contain rich potentials to apply to religious education. Second, this paper explores the issues such as deconstruction, *différance*, gift, forgiveness, and hospitality deeply. Third, this paper reflects the Derrida's thoughts and issues again from the religious educational perspective, in particular, from the imagination-centered pedagogical viewpoint. By doing this I seek not only to apply Derrida's thoughts to religious education but also to enrich both.

2. Understanding Derrida's Thoughts

2.1. Deconstruction

Religious education pursues the most appropriate application to current educational contexts by interpreting religious traditions. In this perspective Derrida's concept of deconstruction provides valuable insights for religious education because deconstruction seeks deeper meaning through questioning. For Derrida deconstruction is questioning, as well as a unique and responsible response to tradition [9]. It is the act of shaking totality. Deconstruction is located on the border and seeks to find contradictory elements. It is proceeded by double gesture of reversal and re-inscription. It contains very thick intertextuality [8]. In the depth and confusion Derrida looks at the infinite openness that deconstruction emphasizes. Further deconstruction connotes opening to others. For Derrida deconstruction is the act of love and needs perseverance because of its undecidability. From the perspective of religious education, this undecidability implies the positivity as a fluid form that can be transformed into a better form.

Deconstruction connotes the infinite positivity of life [6]. Derrida is concerned about the deconstruction of presence through the deconstruction of consciousness [14]. For Derrida deconstruction is an adventure that moves between necessity and coincidence [8]. Furthermore, it implies systematic unity of a spiral more than mere plurality of modes [12]. In this sense, Derrida's deconstruction provides the mode of extension as the spiral in the teaching-learning process of

religious education.

Derrida seeks the deconstruction of the constituted unity of the word. In his *Letter to a Japanese Friend* Derrida poses the question whether deconstruction can be a methodology for reading and interpretation [14]. Derrida's deconstruction leads learners to a deeper understanding by exploring the profound meaning of language in religious education. Language contains cultures and deconstruction leads to the world of deeper implications of language and culture toward better forms of them.

Further Derrida tries to deconstruct logocentrism that refers to the Western tradition of philosophy. Logocentrism regards language and speech as crucial expressions of reality. Etymologically logos implies "*legein*" that means "spoken." Thus, logocentrism implicates phono-centrism. Derrida claims that prejudice of logocentrism is revealed in putting priority on phone (speech) rather than on gramme (writing). Derrida's grammatology pursues to deconstruct the western metaphysics that is phone-centered and reason-centered. Logos insinuates self-identity as the integrating center of everything. Derrida seeks to deconstruct logocentrism through "*Différance*". He seeks to accept otherness and to liberate the logic of difference by deconstruction.

2.2. Différance

Education is a process toward broader and deeper learning by experiencing differences. In this sense Derrida's concept of *différance* provides profound insights for religious education. Derrida coined the term *différance*, which has the double meaning of differ and defer [17]. *Différance* comes from the Latin *differre*, which means differ, do, and defer [6]. While "differing" implies distinction, separation, and spacing, "deferring" connotes detour, reserve, and temporization. For Derrida the analysis of the *Dasein* implies ontological difference. Deferring implies the active work of difference [14]. *Différance* is always in process and thus defers eternally [19]. It differs from deferring and defers differing. In this sense there is a dialectical interplay between deferring and differing in Derrida's *différance*. From an educational perspective, *différance* as the dialectic of differ and defer invites learners into deeper understanding and epistemological humility.

The teaching-learning process connotes the unfolding of subjects. In this perspective Derrida's *différance* resonates with the teaching-learning process. Derrida claims that *différance* is not a concept nor a word. It is the complex weaving of structure. According to Derrida, *différance* means differentiating origins of differences [12]. It implies the unfolding of the same. It is the epochal and historical unfolding of Being. Also, *différance* implies the movement of this unfolding. Furthermore, *différance* connotes temporization and spacing. According to Derrida, space is in time and the self-relation of time. Derrida finds difference in spacing [14]. Derrida's *différance* invites learners to an existential unfolding as well as an epistemological unfolding in the texture of

time and space.

On the other hand, Derrida's *différance* touches implicit curriculum through the relation of trace. Derrida claims that difference should be thought with trace. There is the trace that names the difference. Derrida refers to the presence-absence of trace [14]. Furthermore, Derrida is concerned with the differences of traces that are embedded in the unconscious [12]. Derrida seeks to dialogue between his *différance* and Freud's theory. He claims that the difference of the reality principle and the pleasure principle is merely *différance* as detour [14]. Thus, Derrida's *différance* embraces the unconscious dimension and implicit curriculum in education.

2.3. Gift

Derrida's notion of gift has deep implications for religious education: gift connotes diverse meanings. Gift implies God, life, love, death, sacrifice, the given, and call. For Derrida everything is a gift from God [3]. In this sense, gift implies grace (*gratia*) and faith. God is the name of the giving, and the God's reign (*basileia*) is constituted by the gift. In the kingdom life is a gift, and the energy of the kingdom is love [2]. For Derrida the movement of the gift connotes the movement of infinite love [7]. Thus, Derrida's gift invites learners to facilitate the reign of God through love.

Derrida's gift challenges teachers and learners to go deeper through responsibility, sacrifice, and death. Derrida refers to the gift of death or the gift that death gives. With Patoka Derrida claims that the dialectical notion of death generates responsibility and freedom [2]. Furthermore, Derrida claims that the discourse on the gift is or is not a discourse on dying for the other and sacrifice. For Derrida the gift of death connotes putting oneself to death, which means taking responsibility and sacrificing oneself for the other like Christ and Socrates [7]. Decision, act and praxis are modes of the activation of responsibility. Derrida mentions the relation between responsibility and responding. Furthermore, Derrida refers to responsible freedom or free responsibility. He claims that religion is responsibility. Death is the name of a secret because it represents the irreplaceable singularity [7]. Derrida considers God as secret, a secret giving of God [13]. Derrida's notion of the gift of death implies death as an offering. He regards the sacrifice of Christ as the sacrifice of sacrifice [7]. Jesus makes himself a gift, an infinite present [4]. According to Derrida the gift implies calling [13]. Derrida's gift invites teachers and learners to live with response-ability, that is, responsibility in the world to live as a gift like Jesus.

Derrida considers teaching and learning as giving. The verb form of "gift" is "give." In this sense, gift connotes giving. Derrida also refers to the donation of the gift or the act of giving. He finds the sense of giving in putting to death. Furthermore, the time of conversion implies the gift of death [7]. The gift is experienced through the trace and, further, the

gift is a trace [13]. In this sense, Derrida's gift resonates with *différance* as a trace. He claims that history is connected to the gift, faith, and responsibility [7]. On the other hand, the gift implies absolute forgetfulness and impossibility [7]. With Heidegger Derrida regards the possibility of death as the possibility of an impossibility. He claims that practicing death is a way toward the new immortality [7]. Citing Heidegger, Derrida claims that death is the possibility of an impossibility for *Dasein*. According to Derrida, death implies *Dasein's* most proper possibility. Derrida sees both border and non-border in death. Derrida's notion of gift as death offers profound insights for religious education in that teaching-learning can be the process of experiencing death as a way toward a new form of integration.

Derrida weights the gift of life as much as the gift of death [7]. He claims that death is the purity of life [14]. Life infinitely defers self-identity in the deep intermingling with death through the difference of the other [10]. He claims that eternal life is born from the event of seeing death in the face. According to Derrida, the psyche as breath of life and pneuma emerge from the anticipation of dying [7]. For Derrida a gift is the excess of *Gegebenheit* [2]. The life of surviving is overflowing life [10]. In this sense, the gift of death can be an impetus for the gift of life toward overflowing learning and life in religious education.

2.4. Forgiveness

Derrida's understanding of forgiveness facilitates the content of religious education. For Derrida true forgiveness is to forgive the unforgivable [5, 8]. He asks, how can we forgive the unforgivable? But what can we forgive except it? [9]. Derrida claims that the place in which forgiveness ends should be the place in which forgiveness begins [6]. He claims that there is a madness in the forgiving of the forgivable [5]. Derrida analyses the concept of forgiveness centered on Vladimir Jankelevitch's reflection on forgiveness. Forgiveness is *pardon* in French. Etymologically, *don* implies give, provide, yield, give up and so on. *Vergebung* in German means forgiveness and donation [8]. In this sense, forgiveness has resonance with gift. *Vergebung* connotes that forgiveness contains the meaning of gift. Derrida's notion of forgiveness invites learners to go deeper in Christian praxis, meaning doing the impossible possibility, which is forgiveness.

Derrida deepens the understanding of forgiveness by exploring Jews' Auschwitz experience. Jankelevitch proclaims that forgiveness died at the death camp [6]. He claims that the Jewish experience of persecution indicates that Jews are rejected for their very existence. In this context forgiveness is not easy because the evil perpetrated is strong like the forgiveness. According to Jankelevitch, Jewish existence itself is a mistake in the Auschwitz era. Derrida expands the Jewish experience to the whole humankind. Human existence requires forgiveness merely because of being itself. Human

beings can last their lives when they assume forgiveness. Sometimes the perpetrator asks forgiveness of God because the victim is not there [8]. Derrida's extension of forgiveness from the Jewish experience to humanity's existential state leads learners to consider human beings' sinfulness more deeply in religious education.

2.5. Hospitality

Like forgiveness, hospitality is a crucial theme in religious education. Derrida deeply reflects on Levinas' concept of hospitality. Levinas claims that the essence of language is hospitality and friendship. Through dialogue, we are open to others and receive others' expressions. Hospitality makes us to open to others' infinity. Hospitality implies welcoming, face, and directionality [9]. Furthermore, unconditional hospitality is not lawful or political but is the condition of the politics and law [1]. Hospitality is an existentiality beyond existentiality. In this perspective hospitality can be a condition in the teaching-learning process by facilitating openness to others' infinity.

Thus, Derrida's hospitality invites learners to self-extension beyond the border of acquaintance and non-acquaintance. Hospitality implies the right that is not to be treated with hostility when a person visits others' territory [1]. Sometimes strangers bring problems and ask questions. Hospitality assumes border between family and non-family, foreigner and non-foreigner, citizen and non-citizen, and so on. Further Hospitality is the extension of oneself. Derrida suggests that we need to have hospitality to animals, plants, and even to God. Also, we should broaden our hospitality to death [9]. On the other hand, Derrida prefers hospitality to tolerance. He claims that tolerance is conditioned hospitality [1]. For Derrida, hospitality is more flexible than tolerance. Derrida even claims that he does not know hospitality. For him, hospitality is always beyond definition. From the educational perspective, hospitality implies the mode of the

teaching-learning process as the extension from non-acquaintance to acquaintance.

3. The Frame of the Imagination-Centered Religious Education

In this chapter I present the framework of religious education centered on imagination so as to link Derrida's thought with religious education. In the current era of postmodernism, globalization, the fourth industrial revolution, and new normal imagination and creativity become more and more significant. The key word of the fourth industrial revolution is convergence or unity. I claim that imagination operates powerfully on the unifying moment. Kant defines imagination as *Einbildungskraft*: the power of integrating and unifying. Kierkegaard's existential leap also connotes the unifying moment. In addition, Kierkegaard claims that human being is the integration of the finite and the infinite, necessity and possibility, the flesh and the spirit [17]. I propose that three forms of imagination work on the unifying moment: the constructive, empathetic, and visionary imagination. I pursue holistic religious education by bringing out the intellectual, affectional, and volitional dimensions of the three forms of imagination. While the intellectual, affectional, and volitional dimensions operate on the individual dimension, the three imaginations embrace communal and spiritual dimensions. Thus, the scheme of imagination-centered religious education is more comprehensive and deeper than the merely intellectual, affectional, and volitional dimensions found in general education.

The frame of religious education centered on imagination is as follows [17].

Table 1. The Frame of Religious Education Centered on Imagination.

	Constructive Imagination (CI)	Empathetic Imagination (EI)	Visionary Imagination (VI)
Feature	Awakening Moment	Feeling other's feeling	* Recovering "God's image" (<i>imago dei</i>) (Personal Dimension) * Persuing "The Kingdom of God" (Communal Dimension)
Human Capacity of Awareness	Intellectual Dimension	Affectional Dimension	Volitional Dimension
Image (3H)	Head	Heart	Hand
Focus of Formation	Knowing	Being or Becoming	Doing
Focus of Time	Past-Present	Present-Present	Present-Future
Biblical Base	John 8: 32	Matthew 7: 12	Matthew 6: 10
	Then you will know the truth, and	So in everything, do to others what	Your kingdom come, your will be

	Constructive Imagination (CI)	Empathetic Imagination (EI)	Visionary Imagination (VI)
	the truth will set you free	you would have them to you	done, on earth as it is in heaven
	The Meaning of Knowing		
	- ידע ("know" in Hebrew)		
Theological Base	- γνωσκειν ("know" in Greek)	Incarnation	New Creation
	- ἀλήθεια ("truth" in Greek)		God's reign

*Abbreviation : CI - Constructive Imagination, EI - Empathetic Imagination, VI - Visionary Imagination, 3H - Head, Heart, Hand

I distinguish the three imaginations technically, but they overlap one another. Thus, it is hard to divide the three imaginations clearly. The three imaginations - constructive, empathetic, and visionary imaginations influence one another and form existence (being or becoming) through the praxis of knowing and doing.

4. Derrida and Imagination-Centered Religious Education

As I explore above, imagination works powerfully on the unifying moment. Derrida refers to the infinite unity. He mentions the unity of unity and separation. There is a unity between identity and difference. Also, Derrida refers to the synthesis of existence and meaning. Furthermore, he mentions the unity of body and language, thought and tool, and gesture and speech [14]. I claim that imagination operates strongly in this unification. Derrida differentiates three types of imagination: allegorizing, symbolizing, and poeticizing imagination [12].

I also explore imagination from the perspective of time. I present constructive imagination as past-present, empathetic imagination as present-present, and visionary imagination as present-future. Derrida also refers to a past now and a future now. For Derrida the past is regarded as past presents while the future is determined as future presents. This view supports my formulation of imagination as past-present, present-present, and future-present from the perspective of time. For Derrida eternity implies the presence of the present [12]. Thus, people can experience eternity in the dense moment of time through empathetic imagination.

4.1. Constructive Imagination

Derrida's concept of deconstruction offers profound insights for constructive imagination. Deconstruction demonstrates the mode of extension of knowing and living. It implies the dissolution for the new formulation. It raises questions and seeks unique and responsible answers. Further deconstruction seeks to find contradictory elements on the border. It connotes infinite openness. Thus, Derrida's concept of deconstruction challenges constructive imagination to discern the contradictory elements and to transform them toward a better way with flexibility.

On the other hand, Derrida's understanding of language has significant implications for constructive imagination. He refers to the identity and unity of a language. For Derrida language is the ideal existence of consciousness [14]. Also, Derrida claims that language integrates life and ideal [5]. It seems that language constructs the ideal and is a tool through which the ideal is fulfilled in life. Derrida claims that the language already reveals deep vibration [8]. From a psycho-educational perspective, language is a medium that moves the vibration of implicit dimension to the explicit level. According to Derrida, language begins from me and it is estranged from me. Something unfamiliar or different can cause fear, but new familiarity comes after the fear [9]. From the epistemological sense, this explains the mode of extension.

Derrida is also concerned with Saussure's concepts of the signifier and the signified; While the signified is a meaning, the signifier is a trace in modern linguistics. While the signified connotes a concept, the signifier implies a sensory perception or image, as Saussure called it [7]. The sign unites the signified and the signifier. According to Derrida, difference implies the condition for signification, which influences the sign. Imagination creates signs. The image is the product of productive imagination. Derrida is concerned with the link between productive imagination and time. The transcendental imaginative movement is the movement of temporalization. For Derrida the transcendental imagination is the origin of sensible intuition and time as pure intuition arises from the transcendental imagination. The creation of imagination connotes the matter of intuition [12]. Derrida also claims that contradiction and unity are the same in the *Aufhebung* (revocation), which is not only the contradiction of contradiction and of non-contradiction but also the unity of this contradiction [14].

On the other hand, Derrida pursues to deconstruct logocentrism. In the theological and biblical tradition logos has been essential as the source of life and the locus of truth. In particular, according to the gospel of John there was the Word - logos in the beginning and everything comes from it. In the concept of logos the spirituality of Christianity is condensed. Further the logos is the confluent place of Greek philosophy and Christianity. In the Greek philosophy the logos has been the principle of existence and the reason of

the World. The logos embraces the existential dimension as well as the epistemological dimension. Thus, from the perspective of Christianity Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism contains the potentiality to shake the basis of the Christian tradition. Christian educators need to discern these elements in Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism and to apply it carefully in a constructive way.

4.2. Empathetic Imagination

Hospitality contains many implications for empathetic imagination. Derrida's hospitality connotes the invitation. In Hebrew invitation implies to make time [9]. In this sense hospitality means the construction of time. We live surrounded by strangers. That means that I am a stranger. Thus, being hostile to the stranger means to be hostile to myself. Hospitality is the extension to the other. Derrida claims that intersubjectivity implies the openness of the present [14]. For Derrida hospitality is the possibility of the impossibility. According to Derrida hospitality and madness resonate with each other in their essence. In this sense hospitality contains the element of madness. This madness implies the passion toward the truth in Kierrkegaard's sense and coexists with the dense empathetic imagination.

Derrida's concept of gift and forgiveness also provides deep insights for empathetic imagination. Derrida claims that gift and forgiveness are impossible possibilities like hospitality. However, for Derrida true forgiveness is to forgive the impossible. In this sense true forgiveness is beyond human capacity and requires God's grace. Thus, genuine forgiveness is only possible through the gift of God's grace. Empathetic imagination can be cultivated to practice forgiving and to activate the gift in faith.

4.3. Visionary Imagination

Derrida's concept of *différance* bears helpful implications for visionary imagination. *Différance* implies differ and defer. As we investigated above, differ implies distinction while defer connotes detour. *Différance* pursues something different and thus facilitates visionary imagination. *Différance* defers meaning to go deeper. In this sense *différance* provokes visionary imagination to go further toward deeper meaning. Thus, visionary imagination is always on the process like *différance*.

According to Derrida there is the matrix of possibility. Visionary imagination facilitates the matrix (*kohra*) of possibility. This matrix also implies spacing. For Derrida difference connotes spacing that is neither space nor time. It is active and passive simultaneously. Derrida refers to the spacing between desire and fulfillment [14]. There is a gap between wish and accomplishment. Visionary imagination mediates the ravine of desire and fulfillment by creating the vivid image of hope and actualizing it. Further praxis through reflection and practice inspires con-

sciousness-raising, to use Paulo Freire's terminology [11]. For Derrida the power of consciousness is praxis [14]. Further, Derrida combines the dimensions of time and posits the remembrance of the future. Thus, Derrida's understanding of possibility, praxis, and time throws light on visionary imagination.

5. Conclusion

Religious education needs to respond to the demands of the times. In this regard Jacques Derrida's concepts of deconstruction and *différance* provide rich insights for religious education that empower learners to live more faithfully through gift, forgiveness, and hospitality in the contemporary postmodern era. In this paper I have investigated some aspects of Derrida's thoughts that can be applied to religious education namely, deconstruction, *différance*, gift, forgiveness, and hospitality. I then proposed three forms of imagination as a framework for religious education to link Derrida's thoughts with religious education. Finally, I dialogued between Derrida's thoughts and imagination-centered religious education. Through this I have sought to enrich the understanding of imagination and to elicit helpful insights from Derrida's thoughts for religious education. I hope that this paper enriches religious education for the next generation in the postmodern, globalizing, fourth industrial, and new normal era.

Abbreviations

CI	Constructive Imagination
EI	Empathetic Imagination
VI	Visionary Imagination
3H	Head, Heart, Hand

Author Contributions

Eun Young Moon is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



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Research Field

Eun Young Moon: Imagination & Education, Epistemology & Education, New Normal Era & Education, The 4th Industrial era & Education, Postmodern Thought and Education, Religion, Science, & Religious Education, AI and Education.