

# Radical Hermeneutics in Transformation of Modern Educational Thoughts

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**Abstract:** This article examines how radical hermeneutics, as articulated by John D. Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, and Richard Rorty, can transform educational thought. Caputo's notion of hermeneutics as a practice of radical openness, Vattimo's "weak thought" and emphasis on interpretive pluralism, and Rorty's pragmatist call to abandon metaphysical foundations collectively challenge education's traditional reliance on stable truths and universal frameworks. Through qualitative method, from this perspective, knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogy are reconceived not as vehicles for transmitting certainty but as dialogical processes of ongoing interpretation. Embracing contingency and interpretive multiplicity, radical hermeneutics fosters educational spaces where uncertainty becomes a resource for creativity, ethical responsibility, and democratic engagement. In conclusion, by situating learning within a horizon of interpretive freedom and solidarity, this approach transforms education into a participatory project that resists closure and prepares learners to navigate the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary life

**Keywords:** Education, Gianni Vattimo, John D. Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, Richard Rorty.

## Introduction

Hermeneutics is the study of how people interpret and understand texts, language, and symbols. It began with interpreting religious writings but later grew to include philosophy, literature, and law. The main idea is that meaning depends on both the text itself and the reader's viewpoint. Thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer helped develop these ideas by focusing on history, language, and human experience (George, 2022; Mielityinen-Pachmann & Uljens, 2023; Wijayanto et al., 2025). In simple terms, hermeneutics looks at how people find meaning and understanding through interpretation, connecting the thoughts of the past with those of the present.

The idea of hermeneutics involves the steep tension between intention and interpretation. Intention is the desires of the authors shown in the writings. Interpretation is more stated in the sense of the readers who are freely understand any text.

The intention is more conceptual and rigid, while interpretation is more flexible and contextual (George, 2022; Mielityinen-Pachmann & Uljens, 2023; Wijayanto et al., 2025). Therefore, hermeneutics is never at peace at all. It always get included in whether such interpretation is intended or how such intention is necessarily interpreted.

The development of hermeneutics comes into what is known as radical hermeneutics. Radical hermeneutics is a way of thinking about understanding and interpretation that was developed by philosopher John D. Caputo. It builds on earlier ideas from thinkers like Heidegger, Gadamer, and Derrida but takes them a step further. Later, people like Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty also take place the similar stream as good as Caputo's. Instead of believing there is one final or absolute meaning in a text or idea, radical hermeneutics says that meaning is always changing (Carney & Madsen, 2021; de la Herrán Gascón & Herrero, 2024; Saputro et al., 2025). People's understanding depends on their experiences,

culture, and the time they live in. This approach sees interpretation as something ongoing and never complete. It reminds everyone that humans could never fully escape their own perspectives or biases. In simple terms, radical hermeneutics encourages people to stay open-minded, to question what everyone thinks they know, and to accept that meaning is often uncertain and evolving. It invites a humble attitude toward truth and understanding, recognizing that interpretation is a lifelong, shared journey.

Indeed, such radical hermeneutics is also intersected with education. Radical hermeneutics relates to education because both focus on learning and understanding as ongoing processes. In the classroom, teachers and students are always interpreting and reinterpreting ideas rather than finding one final answer. This view encourages open discussion and reflection instead of just memorizing facts (Carney & Madsen, 2021; de la Herrán Gascón & Herrero, 2024; Saputro et al., 2025). It reminds people that what they learn depends on their background, experiences, and the time they live in.

In this way, radical hermeneutics helps make education more thoughtful and flexible. It teaches that understanding grows through dialogue and that everyone's perspective has value. This approach invites both teachers and students to stay curious, to listen to others, and to see learning as a shared journey of discovery. This approach also reminds human beings that education is not just about gaining information but about forming meaning and developing empathy toward others' viewpoints (Carney & Madsen, 2021; de la Herrán Gascón & Herrero, 2024; Saputro et al., 2025). By accepting uncertainty and openness, radical hermeneutics makes education a more human and reflective process that values curiosity over certainty.

### Materials and Methods

By using qualitative methods, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through description in explorative approach, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between radical

hermeneutics' ideas and its transformation of modern educational thoughts in the sense of cultural studies. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters. The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists. The research data comes from radical hermeneutics' ideas and its transformation of modern educational discourses. Each of them is read then broken down into its every particular element. More elaborations related to deepened analysis are also provided in addition furthermore.

### Results and Discussion

#### Characteristics of Radical Hermeneutics

Radical hermeneutics is a branch of interpretive theory that pushes hermeneutics beyond classical rules and methods to confront contingency, difference, and interpretive indeterminacy. It reframes interpretation as an open, ethical, and politically attentive practice rather than a quest for a single correct meaning. This hermeneutics come the latter, showing that interpretation can always be flexible. According to this perspectives, texts, events, and practices resist final closure (Anam, 2025; Rafiuddin et al., 2025; Soeiro, 2023). Consequently, interpretation acknowledges its own historicity and limits since it puts emphasis on difference and alterity. It pays more attention to voices, contexts, and meanings that disrupt received frameworks such as marginalized perspectives, cultural difference, and even incommensurable traditions.

This perspective also rejects seamless continuity in which rupture should always be given room. In this hermeneutics, power is not natural and even *ex nihilo*. It is created and shaped through generative domination. Power is useful if applied and it indeed contains violence. Therefore, reading through this hermeneutics is challenging. It is needed to unbox taboos and myths (Anam, 2025; Rafiuddin et al., 2025; Soeiro, 2023). It is necessary when texts or practices resist straightforward explanation, when power asymmetries demand attention, or when ethical stakes require interpreters to account for

consequences of their readings. It is most useful for critical, emancipatory, and pluralistic interpretive projects where final closure would obscure injustice or silence difference.

John D. Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, and Richard Rorty are three main thinkers of radical hermeneutics. They shape such in line epistemology that explores the uncertainty as an option to grow. Caputo puts more points in radical openness. Vattimo indicates weak thought as interpretive pluralism. Rorty underscores pragmatism in order to resist stable metaphysical condition of modernism. Three of them resist grand narrative of modernism. According to them, self and individual wholeness is a myth consisted to defamiliarize human beings from their own experience (Anam, 2025; Rafiuddin et al., 2025; Soeiro, 2023). Even any kind of neutrality, and also objectivity, of various social and political senses is rejected. Language, social stratification, and even theology is about power in which ideology takes places and tends to be dominative.

Caputo's radical hermeneutics is a way of understanding that challenges the idea that everyone can ever fully grasp the true or final meaning of a text, experience, or even reality itself. He suggests that meaning is always something that unfolds gradually and can never be completely pinned down. For Caputo, interpretation is never finished, and the meaning of a text is always deferred, endlessly open to new understandings. This perspective encourages humility, reminding people that perspectives, assumptions, and contexts influence how human beings interpret things (Caputo, 1988; Harris, 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024). Instead of seeking certainty, radical hermeneutics invites people's awareness to see interpretation as an ongoing, dynamic process that respects the mystery and complexity of what persons are trying to understand. Caputo even emphasizes that truth is never wholly present since it is always in the process of becoming. Later on, that idea is furthermore highlighting that understanding is an open-ended journey rather than a fixed endpoint.

Caputo's approach stresses an ethical attitude toward otherness by highlighting the importance of being open and receptive to the "Other" as someone or something that cannot be fully understood or

contained within own ideas. This means that interpretation is never just about decoding meaning but about responding responsibly and with humility to the presence of something or someone that exceeds anyone's understanding (Caputo, 1988; Harris, 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024). It is like hospitality in welcoming the possibility of transformation through encounters with difference and recognizing that meaningful engagement involves listening and openness rather than control. In this case, being ethical in Caputo's sense is about to be understanding, not to be dominative in its practical and theoretical manners.

Gianni Vattimo's idea of "weak thought" (*pensiero debole*) invites a gentler way of thinking (Bouma-Prediger, 1989; Vattimo, 2019; Warnke, 2003). He proposed something that acknowledges the limits of human understanding and the interpretive nature of all knowledge. His perspective then does not aim to find the foundation of truth, but to recognize the weakening of being itself. This weakening is not a loss but a transformation. It goes to a condition that truth is always historical, contextual, and open to interpretation.

Vattimo contrasts this with what he calls "strong thought," the traditional metaphysical project that seeks eternal, objective foundations for knowledge and morality. Strong thought, in his view, often leads to dogmatism and exclusion because it assumes one correct way of understanding reality. Weak thought, on the other hand, resists that rigidity. It encourages a more pluralistic and dialogical attitude that allows different interpretations to coexist without any single one claiming supremacy (Bouma-Prediger, 1989; Vattimo, 2019; Warnke, 2003). Once these absolutes collapse, what remains is not despair but a renewed sense of freedom and responsibility. Truth becomes something lived and shared, not dictated from above. This shift opens space for multiple voices and traditions to enter the philosophical conversation, each bringing its own perspective and meaning. Then, this view leads to what might be called interpretive pluralism. It is a recognition that meaning emerges through conversation and that dialogue, not certainty, sustains human thought.

Meanwhile, despite its name, weak thought does not surrender to relativism. Vattimo argues that even without absolute foundations, humans remain responsible for their interpretations. Thought becomes “weak” precisely to make it more humane and at once more aware of its limits and its dependence on others (Bouma-Prediger, 1989; Vattimo, 2019; Warnke, 2003). Truth, in this light, is not a final answer but an ongoing dialogue. By embracing interpretive pluralism, it encourages an attitude of humility toward truth and compassion toward difference. Weak thought reminds philosophy of its human dimension without the illusion of certainty.

Richard Rorty’s idea of pragmatism offers a more down-to-earth way of understanding philosophy. Instead of seeing philosophy as a search for absolute truth, Rorty treats it as an ongoing conversation about how people make sense of the world together (Bethari et al., 2023; Kalyani, 2024; Maratovna, 2023). He combines practical thinking with hermeneutics as meaning and truth are not fixed or discovered once and for all. Consequently, meanings grow out of dialogue, language, and shared human experience.

For Rorty, there is no perfect, objective way to represent the world. Instead, knowledge is something people create and use to navigate life in pragmatic understandings. Philosophy, then, should not be about finding eternal foundations of truth, but about understanding how different ways of speaking and thinking help people live better together. Truth depends on shared agreement within a community, not on some hidden reality outside of human reach (Bethari et al., 2023; Kalyani, 2024; Maratovna, 2023). Therefore, hermeneutics focuses on interpretation rather than certainty. Rorty encourages people to see philosophy as a form of shared conversation that brings different perspectives together rather than a competition to prove who is right. By stating so, it replaces the search for eternal truths with a focus on dialogue, understanding, and the creative ways people build meaning together (George, 2022; Rafiuddin et al., 2025; Vattimo, 2014).

### **Opportunities to Transform Stable Educational Thoughts**

In an age marked by rapid change, complexity, and ambiguity, uncertainty has become a defining condition of human experience. Traditionally, education has sought to minimize uncertainty by emphasizing mastery, control, and the acquisition of definite knowledge. Yet, in a world where information evolves continuously and global challenges defy simple solutions, uncertainty can no longer be treated merely as a problem to eliminate (Hasana et al., 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024; Stan, 2023). Rather, it can be understood as a vital resource for creativity, ethical responsibility, and democratic engagement. When embraced thoughtfully within education, uncertainty becomes not an obstacle to learning but the very ground upon which deeper understanding and more humane societies can be built.

Uncertainty nurtures creativity by inviting exploration beyond established boundaries of knowledge. Creativity arises when individuals confront situations that lack predetermined answers. In educational contexts, this means encouraging learners to engage with open-ended questions, diverse perspectives, and complex problems. When students are allowed to dwell in uncertainty, then they develop curiosity, imagination, and the ability to generate new ideas (Hasana et al., 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024; Stan, 2023). Art, science, and philosophy alike thrive on this creative tension between what is known and what remains unknown. By learning to tolerate and even value ambiguity, students cultivate intellectual flexibility and resilience, essential qualities for innovation in any field.

The ideas behind uncertainty also forms the foundation of ethical responsibility. Ethical decisions rarely present themselves with absolute clarity; they involve conflicting values, incomplete information, and unpredictable consequences. Education that acknowledges uncertainty enables learners to confront this moral complexity with empathy and reflection rather than with rigid dogmatism (Bouma-Prediger, 1989; Vattimo, 2019; Warnke, 2003). In such environments, uncertainty becomes a moral teacher, reminding students that their knowledge and perspectives are always limited, and that humility and dialogue are

indispensable to ethical living. Through this process, individuals learn to respond thoughtfully to others' needs, to question their own assumptions, and to recognize the moral weight of their choices in an interconnected world.

Moreover, uncertainty is central to democratic engagement rather than nodding to any stable educational thought. Democracy depends on the recognition that no single viewpoint or authority can claim absolute truth. It gives purposes on dialogue, dissent, and the willingness to negotiate differences in pursuit of the common good (Hasana et al., 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024; Saputro et al., 2025; Stan, 2023). When education fosters comfort with uncertainty, it prepares learners to participate in democratic life with openness and respect. They learn to listen to opposing perspectives, to deliberate collectively, and to accept that disagreement is not a failure but a sign of civic vitality. In this way, uncertainty strengthens democratic culture by transforming anxiety about difference into an appreciation for diversity.

Rather than treating education as the transmission of fixed truths, it should be understood as a dynamic, participatory process. It should be a space where learners and teachers alike confront the unknown together. When uncertainty is approached as a shared resource rather than a threat, it fosters creativity, deepens ethical awareness, and sustains the democratic spirit of inquiry (Hasana et al., 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024; Saputro et al., 2025; Stan, 2023). Uncertainty should be appreciated in its possibility to shape further solutions. It should not and even must not be fixed since openness is the soul of any opportunity. By going toward openness in uncertainty, flexibility can be attained that indeed is always useful to clear minds from any obstacle of being stable in society.

### **Radical Hermeneutics' Roles in Transforming Modern Educational Thoughts**

Hermeneutics has been a study to understand the meanings of this world. It also includes education as an idea for learners to build better perspectives of current issues. Meanwhile, modernism tends to show that education is so capitalistic yet positive. It is capitalistic since in higher education, for example, students are shaped to be workers where

any indication of life is only meant to produce workers who will work 9 to 5 (Hasana et al., 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024; Saputro et al., 2025; Stan, 2023). Later, such education is also becoming more expensive to recent day, making access to education is getting minimal or at least declining in its quality. It is also positive since learners are told to be predictable, measurable, and definitive. Those three are characteristics of modernity that shape understanding of things outside learners' mind rather than what they really need.

Radical hermeneutics can shift perspective of interpretation into further flexible matters of understanding. In education, such hermeneutic is useful to broaden ideas of interpretations but not by totally nodding to intentions. Interpretations then is getting its freedom, making learners push themselves to experience the living world they inhabit (Caputo, 1988; Harris, 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024). Its radical points can shape better view points regarding these shifts; from certainty to openness, from transmission to event, from control to hospitality, and from fixed meanings to perpetual interpretation.

First, the shift from certainty to openness in education, as suggested by radical hermeneutics, encourages a more humble and human approach to learning. In traditional settings, education is built around the idea that knowledge is fixed and that the teacher's task is to pass this knowledge on to students (George, 2022; Rafiuddin et al., 2025; Vattimo, 2014). Lessons are planned, outcomes are measured, and success is often judged by how closely a student's understanding matches what is already known. While this approach brings structure and clarity, it can also leave little room for curiosity, uncertainty, or genuine dialogue.

Radical hermeneutics offers a gentler and more open vision. It sees learning as an interpretive journey of something unpredictable and shared, rather than a process of mastering absolute truths. Interpretation is understood as a form of risk, because to interpret is to face what one does not fully know (Hasana et al., 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024; Stan, 2023). It requires openness to new meanings and the willingness to let go of the comfort of certainty. From this perspective, education is not about reaching final answers but about taking part

in an ongoing conversation with ideas, experiences, and one another.

When applied to the classroom, this view reshapes the roles of teachers and students. Instead of standing above their students, teachers become companions in the search for understanding. Students, in turn, are not passive receivers but active participants who bring their own experiences and interpretations into the discussion (Bethari et al., 2023; Kalyani, 2024; Maratovna, 2023). The classroom becomes a living dialogue where questions are as valuable as answers, and where disagreement can lead to growth rather than division. In such a space, learning feels more personal and alive. By valuing openness over certainty, education becomes less about control and more about connection of togetherness.

Second, the movement from transmission to event in education invites a more open and relational way of understanding teaching and learning. In many classrooms, education is often seen as the transmission of information. It is known in how teachers deliver lessons, students receive them, and success is measured by how well the information is remembered or applied (Bethari et al., 2023; Kalyani, 2024; Maratovna, 2023). This model treats learning as a one-way process, where knowledge flows from the expert to the learner. While it can be efficient, it tends to overlook the deeper, more personal experiences that happen when people truly engage with ideas.

Radical hermeneutics offers a different view. It suggests that education should be seen not as a transfer of content but as a series of interpretive events. Classrooms should always generate moments of genuine encounter between teacher, student, and subject matter. These events are unpredictable as they cannot be fully planned or controlled, but full of opportunities (Caputo, 2018; Mickiewicz, 2023; Sands, 2022). A single question even can open unexpected paths of thought and feeling to prolong an ongoing process of discovery rather than the repetition of established truths.

In such a classroom, the teacher's role also changes. Instead of serving mainly as a transmitter of knowledge, the teacher becomes a facilitator who helps create the conditions where these meaningful events can take place. The teacher's task is to invite curiosity, to listen deeply, and to respond

thoughtfully when new insights arise. In other words, even teachers should always learn updates from their students (Caputo, 2018; Mickiewicz, 2023; Sands, 2022). This approach recognizes that learning cannot always be predicted or measured, but it can be deeply transformative as consecutive fellow learners in a process of making meaning.

Third, the idea of the change from control to hospitality in education underscores a gentler and more welcoming way of approaching teaching and learning. In many educational systems, control often shapes the classroom environment. It is commonly seen that teachers manage behavior, set boundaries, and follow structured plans to ensure order and progress (Bouma-Prediger, 1989; Vattimo, 2019; Warnke, 2003). While some control is necessary for learning to happen, too much of it can limit the openness and curiosity that make education meaningful. It can create a setting where difference feels like disruption rather than an opportunity to grow.

Radical hermeneutics' idea of hospitality is otherwise. It calls for an attitude of openness, such a willingness to welcome what is unfamiliar, unexpected, or challenging. In education, this means creating space for multiple perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing. Hospitality encourages teachers and learners to listen to one another with patience and respect. It is about being ready to meet "the other" without fear or judgment. By doing so, inclusion and diversity are no longer treated as tasks or requirements. It should invite central values where all voices can be heard and where differences are seen as resources rather than problems (Bouma-Prediger, 1989; Vattimo, 2019; Warnke, 2003). Education should be built above the foundation of humility and curiosity where understanding grows through dialogue and openness. Therefore, moving from control to hospitality may transform education into a more humane and compassionate practical space of everyday life.

Fourth, such shift from fixed meaning to perpetual interpretation in education reflects a more open and thoughtful way of engaging with knowledge and the world. In many traditional classrooms, learning is often guided by the idea that meanings are stable. It is commonly taught that books and theories have one correct interpretation

to be learned and remembered. This view can give students a sense of certainty, but it can also limit their ability to think critically and creatively (Bethari et al., 2023; Kalyani, 2024; Maratovna, 2023). Radical hermeneutics challenges this by suggesting that meaning is never final. Every text, idea, or experience can be seen in new ways depending on other perspectives. Interpretation is an ongoing process. It also shows how goals should not be to fix meaning but to keep it alive, to keep asking questions and allowing new insights to emerge.

When this approach shapes the classroom, the curriculum becomes less about what to think and more about how to interpret. Students learn to read deeply, to question respectfully, and to see multiple sides of an issue. Teachers should always guide students in developing the patience and humility needed to live with uncertainty. This kind of learning fosters empathy and responsibility, as students come to see that their interpretations affect how they understand and treat others (Caputo, 2018; Mickiewicz, 2023; Sands, 2022). By embracing perpetual interpretation, education becomes a shared search for meaning. It is a space of goodwill as an ongoing dialogue that encourages openness, curiosity, and ethical awareness.

### Conclusions

Radical hermeneutics provokes awareness that education is not only about certainty or control but also about openness, dialogue, and shared understanding. Through the ideas of Caputo, Vattimo, and Rorty, this approach invites a new way of seeing learning as a living process rather than a fixed system. Education should walk in line with meanings that are never final, but growing and changing through conversation, reflection, and experience. Caputo's radical openness encourages learners and teachers to approach knowledge with humility, knowing that no one holds the whole truth. Vattimo's idea of "weak thought" softens rigid ways of thinking and opens space for many perspectives to coexist. Rorty's pragmatism reminds education to stay grounded in dialogue and practical understanding rather than abstract ideals. Its radical points of hermeneutics can shape better

viewpoints regarding these shifts; from certainty to openness, from transmission to event, from control to hospitality, and from fixed meanings to perpetual interpretation that helps education return to its human roots. It values curiosity over certainty, listening over instruction, and participation over domination. Interpretation is an ongoing act of openness that nurtures empathy, dialogue, and respect for difference within a world that is always changing.

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