

A Close Reading of Britzman's Perspective on Teacher Education

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Deborah P. Britzman's (2006) article, "Teacher Education as Uneven Development: Toward a Psychology of Uncertainty," which explores the significance of uncertainty in teacher education. Britzman (2006) argues that embracing uncertainty fosters critical thinking, creativity, and resilience, essential for effective teaching. Through a close reading of Britzman's text, this analysis supports the argument that experiential learning, which naturally involves uncertainty, is the most effective way to promote understanding and retention (Korthagen, 2010). Britzman's (2006) use of metaphor and personification to depict uncertainty underscores the emotional challenges educators encounter, emphasizing the need for adaptability. These ideas are especially relevant in today's world, where rapid technological advancements, socio-political instability, and economic precarity create an educational landscape marked by uncertainty. The findings suggest that teacher education programs should integrate uncertainty as a core component to better prepare educators for the dynamic nature of their profession. Additionally, this paper examines counterarguments to the role of uncertainty and acknowledges its challenges, offering practical recommendations for teacher training programs to balance structure with the benefits of ambiguity.

Keywords: *teacher education, experiential learning, uncertainty, adaptability, resilience, critical thinking*

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Introduction: The Role of Uncertainty in Learning

Deborah P. Britzman's article, "Teacher Education as Uneven Development: Toward a Psychology of Uncertainty," explores the complexities and uncertainties inherent in teacher education. Published in 2006 in the *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, Britzman's work underscores the necessity of embracing uncertainty as a fundamental component of teaching and learning. In an era where education is rapidly evolving due to technological advancements, socio-political instability, and shifting pedagogical paradigms, this concept is more relevant than ever.

Britzman argues that uncertainty is not a hindrance but a valuable resource that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and resilience among educators. This paper builds on her argument by advocating for experiential learning as the most effective method for teacher development. When educators are immersed in real-world challenges without clear-cut solutions, they develop problem-solving skills and adaptability (Korthagen, 2010). The passage analyzed in this paper reinforces the idea that uncertainty should be viewed as a productive force in teacher education, shaping educators who can navigate the complexities of modern classrooms with confidence and flexibility.

Methodology

This study employs a literary analysis approach to examine Deborah P. Britzman's (2006) work, *Teacher Education as Uneven Development: Toward a Psychology of Uncertainty*. Literary analysis is particularly suited to this inquiry because it allows for a close reading of Britzman's text, focusing on the rhetorical and conceptual strategies she uses to frame uncertainty as an essential aspect of teacher education. Rather than treating uncertainty as a limitation, Britzman

presents it as a resource for intellectual and emotional growth. This study explores her use of metaphor, personification, and thematic construction to argue that embracing uncertainty fosters critical thinking, creativity, and resilience in educators.

Deborah P. Britzman is a prominent scholar in education and psychoanalysis, known for her contributions to critical pedagogy and teacher identity formation. Her work bridges educational theory with psychoanalytic concepts, particularly how emotional conflicts and uncertainties shape teaching and learning experiences. In *Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach* (1991), Britzman examines how preservice teachers navigate the social and emotional challenges of becoming educators. Additionally, in *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (1998), she delves into the unconscious dimensions of education. These works provide a crucial foundation for understanding her later arguments on uncertainty in teacher education.

To expand the scope of analysis, this paper integrates perspectives from additional scholarly sources. Korthagen (2010) explores how reflection and adaptability contribute to effective teacher development, reinforcing Britzman's argument that uncertainty fosters growth. Similarly, Gert Biesta (2013) critiques the increasing emphasis on control and predictability in education, highlighting the importance of open-ended learning experiences. These sources help situate Britzman's claims within broader educational debates, demonstrating how uncertainty can be a productive force in pedagogical practice.

This analysis moves beyond summarizing Britzman's text by interpreting its significance through the lens of personal teaching experiences. Drawing on first-person reflections, I examine how uncertainty has shaped my own professional development, illustrating how Britzman's

theoretical insights resonate with practical teaching realities. By reducing direct quotations and offering a deeper, personalized engagement with Britzman's ideas, this study aims to provide a nuanced exploration of how uncertainty functions as both a challenge and a pedagogical tool in teacher education.

Overview of the Passage

Britzman (2006) argues that teacher education should acknowledge and embrace uncertainty. She believes this recognition is crucial for helping educators develop critical thinking and the ability to adapt while dealing with the complexities of their profession. By valuing uncertainty as a resource, Britzman suggests that teacher education can better prepare educators to face the challenges they encounter in their work. The passage I will analyze states:

My position is that there is no such thing as teacher education without us creating the conditions to tolerate and value the uncertainty of development as a strange and even alienating resource for understanding the great conflicts our field absorbs, creates, and lives within. And, we should recall that there has always been great debate on the status of uncertainty in the helping professions. (Britzman, 2006, p. 2)

This excerpt is located in the middle of Britzman's article, where she discusses the integral role of uncertainty in the development of teacher education. Britzman argues that acknowledging and embracing uncertainty is crucial for effective teacher education. She proposes that uncertainty is not merely a challenge to be overcome but a valuable resource that can help educators navigate the challenges that are fundamental to their profession. Britzman stresses that teacher education should acknowledge uncertainty because it helps educators become more thoughtful and adaptable. For the overall paper, this passage underscores the central theme of my argument

regarding experiential learning. It connects to the idea that learning through challenging experiences, where uncertainty is present, can lead to deeper understanding and retention. Britzman's insights reinforce the notion that embracing uncertainty can enhance educators' critical thinking, creativity, and resilience.

Analysis of Literary Devices

The phrase "The uncertainty of development as a strange and even alienating resource" presents uncertainty not just as a challenge but as a valuable tool that can feel both unfamiliar and isolating (Britzman, 2006, p. 2). It suggests that uncertainty can foster both personal growth and feelings of unease. This metaphor resonates with me because, during my first year of teaching, I was assigned a mentor to support me through moments of uncertainty. They emphasized that there isn't a manual for teaching and reminded me that students will not remember the perfect lesson but will always recall how I made them feel.

Throughout that year, I experienced significant personal growth and recognized the importance of building relationships with my students. I learned that taking things one day at a time is crucial in navigating the challenges of teaching, and having someone to check in with made all the difference in helping me find my way. The metaphor "strange and even alienating resource" implies that uncertainty in teaching is both a challenge and valuable tool for growth. This idea highlights the importance of embracing uncertainty as a key element in teacher education, showing that it can lead to discomfort but also to valuable learning opportunities (Britzman, 2006). The metaphor also shows that teachers are not just professionals following tasks but individuals facing complex emotions and challenges, highlighting the need for resilience and adaptability in their work (Britzman, 2006).

The personification in the statement indicates that uncertainty can feel both “strange” and “alienating,” giving it human-like traits. This highlights the emotional and relational dimensions of confronting uncertainty in professional environments. I resonate with this idea because teaching often requires navigating numerous gray areas and unique experiences that may not be easily understood by every educator. As a result, these situations can sometimes feel quite isolating.

By giving human traits to uncertainty, the personification highlights the emotional burden teachers face when dealing with unknown situations. Describing uncertainty as “alienating” emphasizes the feeling of isolation and vulnerability that educators may feel, making the text more relatable to readers who have experienced similar challenges in their careers. Personifying uncertainty means that teachers see it as if it were a character in their jobs. This shows that uncertainty is always with educators, affecting every aspect of their job. It highlights the importance of emotional and social connections in teaching, suggesting these relationships are essential for understanding education. Both the metaphor and personification in the article support the idea that uncertainty is essential in teacher education. By viewing uncertainty as a helpful resource instead of a problem, the text encourages teachers to change how they think about it.

These literary devices do more than enrich Britzman’s prose; they model how emotional experience can be treated as pedagogical data, reinforcing the argument that teacher education must address affective uncertainty alongside technical competence.

Thematic Exploration

Major themes that emerge from Britzman’s article include the role of uncertainty in education, the importance of adaptability, and experiential learning. Britzman emphasizes that uncertainty is not a challenge to avoid but a valuable resource professional and intellectual growth in teacher education (Britzman, 2006). These themes are especially relevant today, as students

increasingly seek certainty and avoid taking risks (Biesta, 2013). In an era increasingly shaped by algorithmic learning, AI-driven decision making, and standardized testing, students are often conditioned to prioritize correct answers over critical thinking (Biesta, 2013). As a teacher, I have observed how many students resist open-ended tasks, fearing failure. Britzman's (2006) argument reinforces the need to cultivate adaptability and resilience, preparing students to function in a world where uncertainty is inevitable.

In teacher education contexts, uncertainty can be intentionally embedded into practicum seminars and coursework as a central component of professional learning rather than treated as a weakness to be corrected. This involves creating structured opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on unexpected classroom situations, discuss instructional challenges with peers and consider different responses instead of searching for a single correct approach. Preservice teachers may be encouraged to document moments when lessons do not unfold as planned, reflect on these experiences collectively, and consider how uncertainty shapes their instructional judgments and classroom relationships. Coursework can further support this process by emphasizing lesson design that allows for multiple possible directions, prompting teacher candidates to remain responsive to students' needs and interpretations instead of adhering rigidly to predestined outcomes.

These themes connect to broader societal issues and resonate with today's generation of students, many of whom are dealing with anxiety and are afraid to take risks or make mistakes. In my teaching experience, I have noticed that students often crave certainty, avoiding situations where they might fail and rely on guidance rather than attempting 'trial and error' or independently engaging in problem solving. This makes Britzman's (2006) argument about the pedagogical value of uncertainty especially relevant. This underscores the importance of adaptability in today's

rapidly changing world. Encouraging students to embrace uncertainty helps them develop resilience, critical thinking, and the confidence to learn through experience, ultimately preparing them to face life's complexities.

Conclusion

Uncertainty is not a barrier to effective teaching but a powerful catalyst for growth, creativity, and resilience. This analysis of Britzman's work reinforces the idea that embracing uncertainty through experiential learning can better prepare educators for the realities of the classroom. By fostering adaptability and critical thinking, uncertainty equips both teachers and students with the skills needed to navigate an ever-changing world.

To translate these insights into practice, educators should integrate open-ended discussions, inquiry-based learning, and reflective teaching practices that encourage students to engage with ambiguity rather than fear it. Teacher education programs must move beyond rigid instructional models and instead prepare future educators to handle unpredictability with confidence. Policymakers should support professional development initiatives that train teachers to see uncertainty as a pedagogical strength rather than a weakness.

Ultimately, embracing uncertainty is a collective responsibility. Teachers, administrators, and educational leaders must shift their mindset and recognize that learning thrives in spaces where not all answers are predetermined. As educators, we must challenge ourselves to create classrooms where students feel empowered to question, explore, and think independently, because true learning begins where certainty ends.

Future research could build on these ideas by examining how teacher education programs intentionally incorporate uncertainty into curriculum design, practicum seminars, and mentoring

structures. Longitudinal studies would be especially valuable in exploring whether early and sustained exposure to uncertainty influences teachers' professional resilience, instructional creativity, and long-term commitment to the profession. Further investigation is also needed into how students experience uncertainty-based pedagogies across different cultural, institutional, and socio-economic contexts. Together, such research would help clarify not only whether uncertainty supports teacher development, but how it can be implemented ethically and effectively within diverse educational settings.

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