

**NANCY S. NIEMI, PhD**  
**Assistant Professor of Education**  
**Nazareth College of Rochester**

### **My Philosophy of Education**

I believe that teaching is an act of social justice and change. So many people denigrate teachers – anyone can teach, they say. We revere physicians because they can save a life or kill it with the stroke of a scalpel, or a prescription, but teachers, too, can save and kill a student, but it may take us longer: a learning disability detected or not, a curious nature that is fed or starved. More just doing no harm, though, I teach because it is a radical act of confidence in the power of people, in a concert of souls coming together in thought and discussion. Teaching may be one of the most direct routes to changing the world.

I don't like schooling, though, as it is currently practiced in most places. I see too much regimentation, too much having to play by the rules, and not enough questioning of those rules in the first place. I see students lining up like the little factory workers they were designed to be; I see kids worrying about the difference between an 89 and a 90 on their biology tests; I see children's bodies cajoled into patterns that leave no room for differentiation. I see rooms where somehow, someone has created a difference between the thing that we call mathematics and the thing we call English, and then I see "new" strategies about integrating the two, as if they were born separate in the first place.

I believe teaching is the art of calling people to see that which is invisible to them: the interconnections between people and earth, heaven and hell. No matter what I teach, it is my responsibility, my calling, to use the opportunity to help us be more than we are by ourselves, to know that we are not alone, that we can change what we see. It is not the children we teach who are our future; saying that makes me feel as though we have already given up on ourselves. It is we who are our own futures, and each teaching moment, a chance to make that future present.