



My Respiratory Care Journey: Justin Rearick, MSOL, RRT, RRT-NPS, RRT-ACCS, AE-C, C-NPT, C-ELBW, CPHQ

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*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*
- Robert Frost

Robert Frost's words from 1915 are something that I think about often as I look at my winding career path as a respiratory therapist, because they are so appropriate in the context of how I became an educator.

Like many of us, I began my career as a staff therapist working in pediatrics. I loved what I did, and was very proud of my work. One evening, a PICU nurse asked me if I could go speak to some parents that were very upset because their daughter was on non-invasive ventilation (NIV), and they were unhappy with the explanation that they were given by the attending physician.

As I entered the room and began to speak with them, I realized quite quickly that their unhappiness wasn't directed at the care team at all. They simply didn't understand what NIV was. I took 20 minutes, and sat down and answered all of their questions. The next day I received an email from my manager, and in that message the mother said "Justin explained things in a way that immediately gave us a level of comfort that eased our minds, and we knew that she was in good hands." That email changed my life. I wanted to become an educator.

I started small, by doing short education sessions with different colleagues throughout the hospital. No matter what the ask, I would always say yes. I followed these sessions by working for one of our local RT programs as a clinical instructor. I enjoyed working with students, and I enjoyed seeing them become competent respiratory therapists even more. My desire to educate more formally led me to work in the ventilator industry as a clinical specialist. What I learned in that time only fueled me more. Every single day I was teaching, learning, and retaining information at a level that I never knew possible. It even brought me back to the children's hospital that I initially began my career. Following an in-service, the manager of the department asked me if I would be interested in working for her as a department educator. It was the dream opportunity that I was looking for, and the most rewarding position that I've held. I coupled that position with an adjunct position teaching neonatal/pediatric courses for two of our local RT programs, and while I have a full plate, I cannot imagine being happier with what I do.

My teaching philosophy is really quite simple, and follows a constructivist concept. Students, whether in the classroom or at the bedside, need to be engaged. They need to be inspired. If they are, they can essentially construct their own knowledge base. This will fuel their desire to learn more. Education sessions should be a dialogue between the learner and the educator, not a one-way conversation. This type of educating translates to any forum, be it bedside or classroom. It's a style that works for me, but we still need to be cognizant of the fact that students learn in different ways.

Being an educator is challenging, rewarding, and fulfilling. It's not a road that I saw myself taking, but sometimes taking the road less traveled can make all the difference.

