

## Breaking Through: Special Needs Student Shines With Buncee



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**“Do I really need to explain? Panoramic pictures, it has a HUGE, I mean GODZILLA HUGE public relation to create new stickers and animations like “The Dab,” plus videos, audio, and so much more.”**

Perhaps, hearing feedback from a student survey I issued on the effective use of Buncee in my classroom was all it took to really make me step back and realize what a powerful tool I had at my fingertips.

Two years ago at the annual FETC conference, a friend of mine recommended that I check out this new “up-and-coming” online company called Buncee, as it sounded right up my alley. After checking out the website, I decided to dig a little deeper. At the time, not many had heard of this company with the strange name; therefore, it was hard to find much input. I was put into contact with a member of the Buncee team after reaching out on Twitter. I was astonished at their willingness to do a Google Hangout with little old me.

I wasn't anyone important and I wasn't a big name in education. I was just a teacher trying to find the best tools available for my students in their learning journey.

Amazingly enough, this is exactly the audience that Buncee is geared towards. After hearing about all the amazing features included in the program, I was immediately captivated. That first night that I signed up for an account and I was like a kid in a candy shop. I made birthday greetings, party invites, and of course, started to figure out how to best use this dynamic new tool into my daily classroom function.

At the time, my students were learning about the Philippines. I decided to take a chance on this new tool and let my students in grades 1-5 create a digital storybook to teach younger students how to count in Tagalog. The immediate response of the students was consistent across all grades. "This is awesome!" were the battle cries as they set off to make the most creative Buncees to teach this new language. Buncee was that tool that I had been searching for that allowed my students a creative outlet that didn't require any difficult graphic design history. Students were able to create professional looking presentations that embedded their interests into a current topic of study. Buncee lent my students a powerful platform to finally have their voice shared in a big way and easily share their presentations with a global audience with just a toggle of a switch.

I will be the first to admit that I landed the dream job. As a college graduate, I never even fathomed the opportunities that I have today. I spend my days with students in grades kindergarten through seventh grade teaching about our amazing world. I am proud to be part of an amazing charter school that focuses on multiculturalism and global diversity. My students are exposed to twenty-four different countries/cultures throughout their studies in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. We learn about the food, language, dance, art, music, traditional costumes, etiquette, family units, and so much more for each of the countries that we travel to virtually.

Working in a Title 1 school in the southeastern part of the United States, I have many students that face serious financial struggles. As a result, many of my students have

not had an opportunity to travel much beyond the county in which they attend school. When offered the teaching position of Global Studies, I thought, “Wow, what an amazing opportunity to be the change for these kids!” Since my students weren’t able to experience the world for themselves, I wanted to bring as much of it to them as possible. It was a huge responsibility, as I might end up being their only frame of reference when it comes to certain cultures. Admittedly, I was nervous, but it was exactly the job I had always wanted. I was finally making a difference, and not just for my students, but also for the families from which they came to me each and every day. I lead my life by the example of the compassionate Mahatma Gandhi’s teaching, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Buncee opened an entire new window to the world that I had not even imagined possible. Thanks to the awesome “Buncee Buddies” program, my students were able to make real and meaningful connections with ACTUAL students living in some of the countries we were learning about in class. In return, we were able to teach them a little bit about our school and culture here in central Florida.

Perhaps my strongest emotions tied to Buncee come from the fact that they truly are a company that reaches out in a sincere effort to make learning more meaningful as well as fun. They are constantly striving to keep their content up-to-date and relevant for today’s learners. This year, my students were thrilled to see the addition of the “dab,” water bottle flip challenge, and of course, my little Buncee character. Buncee has made a profound impact on many of students; however, one story stands high above the rest.

Around the beginning of January, I was asked if I minded adding another student into my already packed sixth grade digital media class (DMC). Of course, I was concerned about the number of students and how effective another body would be. Something in my head told me to suck it up and say, “Of course, the more, the merrier.”

Once I had agreed, I found out a backstory that made my heart ache. One of my school’s high functioning autistic students was about to join my class roster for my DMC

class. I was nervous at first. My mind raced to wondering if I would be able to handle his outbursts and unpredictable behavior. An email arrived shortly after that to confirm my decision to agree to his transfer. This student had been enrolled at my school since he was a kindergartener. For nearly his entire school career, he had been part of a self-contained ESE unit. Near the end of his fifth grade year, this child was mainstreamed into a regular education classroom with the support of his shy best friend, who also suffered from the same diagnosis of high-functioning autism. Both boys were absolutely inseparable. As a result, when they made the move to our new middle school unit, it was decided to keep their schedules exactly the same to provide a support system for both boys.

At some point during the first semester, things started to deteriorate for the dynamic duo. They weren't seeing eye-to-eye anymore and were struggling to even be civil with one another. As a result, it was decided to switch their schedules around to best meet the needs of both students. This is the moment at which I was blessed to be receiving a new student into my classroom-- a student that had just had his best friend, confidant, and safety structure demolished within a matter of days.

This child had always been tech-savvy; therefore, my class seemed like a perfect fit. The first week he was in my classroom, we were just finishing up our video game creations, using the tool Bloxels. I was about to explain how Buncee worked and have the students work to create a short digital story book to teach the alphabet to our kindergarten students. After a quick overview of the platform, I let the students just dive feet first into the awesomeness that is Buncee. It was phenomenal how quickly they were able to absorb the information I had given them and even excel by adding features we hadn't even discussed.

While walking around the room to monitor student success, I found myself gravitating to my new student to make sure he was doing well. Shockingly, I arrived just in time to see him finish up a project was designed to take students a week for completion. This student had wrapped up the task within a matter of minutes. I assumed

the work was incomplete or messy; however, what I saw was far from it. My new student, that I had doubted a bit, had just blown me away and had created a nicer Buncee than even my example I had shared with the class.

I noticed that this student understood the layering concepts quicker than most, and was excited to share with fellow classmates his newfound knowledge. Quickly, he became the Buncee Tour Guide. Word spread on campus and teachers were asking if he could come to “teach” them about this new tool called Buncee. His confidence, which had been sincerely shattered during the class switch, was coming back with an even stronger force. Finally, instead of relying on his former best friend, he was able to stand tall and proud and help others out for a change. I noticed his creativity spiking and his ability to collaborate showing significant signs of improvement. Typically, he was unable to work well with others; however, being a Buncee Tour Guide made him step back and assume a teacher role.

Last week, I was able to provide my amazing student with an opportunity that brought tears to my eyes. After reaching out to the Buncee Team with a few examples of this student’s work, they sent him an official Buncee t- shirt and “Student Ambassador” pin. My heart melted when I presented him with the honor, as he was over the moon excited. You would have thought I had just awarded him one of the new Nintendo Switches.

Sometimes, simple gestures such as a new “title” and a little round metal button are all it takes to prove that you are an amazing company. For this teacher, Buncee has just earned my utmost respect for this random act of kindness. By no stretch of the imagination did I ever expect a company to reach out in a big way to impact the lives of my students. It says so much about your organization when you are able to see past the “customer numbers” and realize there are real lives being impacted on the other side of the screen. On multiple occasions, I have personally experienced the heart of Buncee.

As an ambassador for Buncee myself, I know my student and I will proudly continue to represent a company that means so much to us both. I love reaching out to fellow educators and explaining the multitude of ways in which this tool can be used.

Regarding my new student ambassador, he is living up to his title! Each week his schedule is “booked” by teachers requesting that he visit their classrooms and teach them how to use Buncee. I never thought a random suggestion to check out a company would begin such a beautiful experience for both myself and my students. Thank you to Buncee for helping me to live my goal of being the change in the world through my interactions both digitally as well as in person.

