



**Finnish Cultural
Foundation**

A Survey of User Experiences of the Dig It! Initiative model

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SUMMARY/ABSTRACT

A commissioned research analysing the user experiences of the Dig It! Initiative model of the Finnish Cultural Foundation investigated experiences of students and effects focused on them among student participants to the Dig It! Initiative during 2018-20. The study included student groups from both primary and lower secondary schools, archaeological excavations and investments, highly pedagogical and scientifically centred, community-engaging initiatives in which new operating models were tried out.

Considering the aims of the initiative model, the following questions were posed to the data set: How did the students feel about participating in the Dig It! Initiative? To what extent was the project successful in attracting interest in history, the local heritage of students, as well as in archaeology and scientific methods? How was phenomenon-based learning and other pedagogical working methods utilised and what did the participants think of these methods? In what way did different project implementations affect the experiences of the students?

The secondary background data was comprised of applications, reports, announcements, and other publications. The other part of the data was collected by interviewing student and teacher participants of the initiatives and with an online survey for teachers. In order to delineate the sample, a thematic division was created under the two main themes of pedagogical versus archaeological and scientific emphasis. Archaeological educational materials and grasp of community archaeology were designated as subsidiary themes. The total sampling of the study included 12 projects targeted at comprehensive schools, the teachers of which were asked to answer an online survey. A more in-depth sampling included six Dig It! initiatives, the student and teacher participants of which took part in structured interviews.

Disregarding thematic emphases, it can be stated that some form of pedagogical planning and work took place in all of the initiatives. The initiative activities made use of archaeological learning environments, phenomenon-based learning and investigative method of working. At its most intensive, the pedagogical aspect could be observed in different workshops and exercises, in guiding the students in a goal-oriented manner, in developing new operating models and in the archaeological materials produced in the initiatives. At their most superficial, the activities could be categorised as introductory presentations to archaeology and the research subject and as relatively free fieldwork. The pedagogical depth of the initiatives was seen to have an effect on the students' experiences. The most detailed descriptions of the Dig It! activities and the emotions they stirred were obtained through close-up interviews from students who participated in the initiatives under the thematic headings of pedagogical emphasis and archaeo-pedagogical

learning materials. This indicates that the deeper, the more carefully-planned, and the more goal-oriented the pedagogical activities are, the better they facilitate learning and further ingrain the memory. This is also supported by the prevailing theories and models of learning in educational science.

The students' experiences of the initiatives were mainly positive, regardless of thematic emphasis. Differences could be observed in the answers of primary and lower secondary school students, instead of thematic emphasis. Younger students were more receptive than older students. This kind of age-group specific tendencies emerged also in the teacher interviews. The active nature of the Dig It!, its deviation from other schoolwork and the finding and seeking associated with archaeology were regarded in positive light in the student interviews. Other peripheral activities that took place in school, such as group work and projects, were also seen positive in the interviews. The teachers' survey answers and interviews supported those of the students. Especially an active, participatory, and learning-by-doing programme garnered praise from the participants. In addition, the manner in which Dig It! connected the abstract and distant-seeming past to the present day was seen to work well. Bad weather during fieldwork, heavy workload, or a lack of interest toward the activity and research subject in question were seen as negative by the students.

In their answers, the teachers focused on e.g. the pedagogical resources of the projects: the communication between the archaeologists and the students, the methodicalness of the activities, and acknowledging student needs. Methodical activities bound the students to work more equally, whereas lesser guidance could result in idling and coming apart of the group. The comments also focused on the amount of work due to the projects, which could especially be seen in pedagogically emphasised projects.

The students' basic knowledge of archaeology and scientific methods varied somewhat by age group, which also tied in with students' own interests. The teachers felt Dig It! offered new information of the discipline, with which it was possible to clear up misconceptions about archaeology and science. In their interviews, the students themselves were able to put into words the changes in their interest in archaeology. Especially the interviews of the younger students showed that the projects had exceeded expectations and the activities had proven more pleasant and fascinating than imagined. The lower secondary school students' answers evaluated the change more moderately. A part of the students indicated having known beforehand about archaeology, which is why they didn't experience the activities as particularly impressive.

The online survey answers especially reveal that teachers were able to notice that the participation of the students in the Dig It! Initiative had resulted in a positive change in regard to the students' knowledge of and interest in history and their own local heritage. In the interviews, however, verbalising these kinds of before and after effects seemed beyond the grasp of the students themselves. The students felt the past was made interesting by its mystique and comparing it to present day in both large and on a more local scale. The students viewed their local area from a broader perspective and the knowledge of their own surroundings increased with the initiatives. History was also mainly seen as a meaningful subject.