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## *Innovating School Practice – Ways of Improvement<sup>2</sup>*

### Extended summary

Though the necessity of introducing changes in the field of education has become indisputable, the question remains what kind of changes should be made and how they can be sustained in the future. Experts point out that motivation is one of the most important factors influencing the implementation, sustainability and expansion of innovations over a longer period. The theory of self-determination suggests that basic human needs need to be addressed in the process of innovating school practice, as well as that certain incentives develop internal motivation and/or autonomous forms of motivation. In educational practice, fostering autonomous motivation implies that teachers should feel that they are acknowledged in terms of: respecting their individual characteristics; fostering their initiatives and ideas; encouraging them make choices and decisions; enabling them to participate in challenging activities pertaining to professional learning and in cooperation with other colleagues; encouraging the atmosphere of mutual respect, care and closeness in the process of introducing and sustaining innovations (Assor, 2009; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2016; Korthagen, 2008; Noordewier et al., 2009).

The researchers' evaluation of different forms of support to teachers and researchers in the process of innovating school practice is the topic of this paper. The aim of the case study was to identify the key incentives for developing and maintaining motivation and improving the knowledge and skills of teachers and researchers in the process of innovating school practice. The data were collected by using a structured interview with sixteen researchers who previously, during one school year, had participated in the innovating practice in an experimental school. An induc-

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2 The article results from the work on the project „Од подстицања иницијативе, сарадње и стваралаштва у образовању до нових улога и идентитета у друштву” [From encouraging initiative, cooperation and creativity to new roles and identities in the society] No. 179034 (2010–2017) financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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tive-thematic approach was used in coding and analyzing the data and the findings were interpreted in the context of the theory of self-determination.

Three topics are predominant in the participants' narratives: (1) implementation of external and individual incentives in the course of innovation projects; (2) focusing on the preparation and realisation of innovation projects; (3) educational actors' development and professional learning in the course of the project realisation. Three types of answers were included in the first topic: (1) evaluation of the researchers' participation in innovative projects, (2) material and non-material incentives, (3) acknowledging individual needs and characteristics. The following categories of answers were included in the second topic: (1) facilitation and professional support to teachers; (2) better and longer preparation of the researchers; (3) greater participation of teachers and researchers. Finally, the third topic describes the following categories of answers: (1) training of researchers for the school practice innovation; (2) teacher training for the school practice innovation; (3) learning through cooperation and exchange of ideas with others.

The qualitative study indicated primarily the significance of studying the researchers' perspectives on the motivation of all actors (teachers and researchers in this study) in the preparation and realisation of innovations in the real school context. The research has shown that, from the perspective of researchers, the educational actors' needs for more autonomy, competence and cooperation and connectedness with others in the process of innovating school practice have to be addressed, and that the motivation for introducing and sustaining innovations, as well as developing and improving one's knowledge and skills, should be developed and encouraged by implementing various procedures. As far as the need for more autonomy is concerned, our respondents have suggested that it is important for the actors to choose what they consider to be relevant and useful, to be asked for their opinion and to negotiate with others about the content and methods used in their work, that their individual perspectives, needs and affinities should be acknowledged, and that they should be able to make decisions related to school projects (e.g. the categories "Acknowledging individual needs and characteristics" and "Greater participation of teachers and researchers"). The respondents have also stressed the importance of individual encouragement regarding their needs, affinities and interests, as well as external incentives in terms of promotion, acknowledgement, and different forms of rewarding that the system should take into account and implement. In addition, the respondents consider providing useful feedback to all actors on the implementation of innovations to be an incentive in terms of strengthening the perception of their own competence. Finally, the study confirms the assumption that encouraging cooperation, mutual trust, and offering support to teachers enhances their commitment to innovations. The gains of innovating school practice are greater if the process implies a professional exchange of ideas with teachers in schools and/or among themselves, which all studies on the professional development of the school staff recommend.

As a result of the qualitative research, the paper offers several suggestions for the preparation and realisation of the innovation projects, as well as for sustaining the innovations in the school practice. First, in the process of developing and undertaking the projects of innovation, both external and internal incentives exerting a positive influence on the autonomous motivation of the actors in charge of introducing and sustaining innovations should be regulated within the system. Second, the researchers and teachers in experimental schools should be offered professional support and facilitation for implementing and sustaining the changes. Third, the cooperation between the schools and the scientific community in the preparation and implementation of practical research and in-

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novative programmes should be planned and carried out with more care and attention. Therefore, when developing innovative projects, the project structure and plan should be based on the acknowledgement and encouragement of teachers' needs for autonomy, competence and interconnectedness, as well as on the development of their autonomous motivation through the process of internalisation (Assor, 2009) of the common interests of all actors involved in the project.

**Keywords:** theory of self-determination, innovating school practice, key incentives, researchers, teachers, school.

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