Planning at the School Level for Creativity, Originality and Problem Solving to Optimize Goal Attainment

Okogbaa, Veronica Emem, PhD
Department of Educational Management,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni,
Port Harcourt,
Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract
The paper focuses on planning at the micro level of the school. It offers explanations about the concepts of creativity, originality and problem solving and how important these are in making school plans that are forward looking. The paper describes how the three terms creativity, originality and problem solving are intertwined and crucial in this century's educational endeavours. It explains how national and school goals are linked and how planning at the school level can be done to match and align with national goals that meet societal needs. This century is in dire need of ingenious problem solvers and creative thinkers to tackle the persistent challenging issues that face the world. The paper takes the position that functional educational plans are dynamic not static and they evolve with changes in the society, therefore citizens ought to be prepared and adequately developed through planned educational programmes to become critical thinkers, innovators and inventors who can handle just about any situation in the society. The writer then suggested among other things that teaching and learning activities that encourage creativity, originality and problem solving among learners should be preferred above those that promote learning by rote.

Keywords: Planning, Creativity; Originality; Problem-solving; Goal Attainment

Introduction

Creativity has been explained to mean the use of imagination and original ideas to create something. It has to do with inventiveness. Creativity is described by Sternberg (2001), as a cluster of skills that are needed to produce ideas that are both original and valuable. It is also defined by Torronez (2018), as the act of experimenting and learning about what works and what may not. Thus creativity is the ability to create new knowledge that had not existed earlier. A creative person is able to synthesize information already acquired and combine the ideas into more complex forms. This is one of the reasons people who are creative are good problem solvers.

Originality refers to the quality of being novel; which means being of a kind that has not been seen before. The Corona virus 19 (Covid-19 virus) has been described as novel because it has not existed before now in this form. Being original with regards to documentations about facts and understandings means that one can draw arguments from other people's perspectives but not copy them. Thus, originality describes the nature of something not copied or reproduced from another person. A person who demonstrates originality in his/her work has the ability to think independently and creatively even where he/she borrows from other people's ideas.

Problem solving on the other hand has been described as the process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues. Problem solving gives the mechanism for identifying things that are going wrong or out of order. It means figuring out why the things are not working, are worn out or broken down and determining a course of action to (put them together properly)

fix them. In real life, things wear out after they have been in use for some time, for example, machines breakdown, children's toys break up etc. Problem solving is the ability to figure out what the problem is and proffering a solution. People who are problem solvers are persistent, juggling ideas between alternatives until they come up with the best option to solve the problem, which often times are novel.

Relationship between Creativity, Originality, Problem-solving and the Concept of Education
A close analysis of the meaning of these three concepts show that they are interrelated. They actually appear intertwined. People who are **creative** usually demonstrate **originality** because they always come up with novel ideas and those with novel ideas are usually great **problem solvers**. Thus, creativity produces originality in thought patterns and the resulting ideas from those thoughts are applied to solve problems. It is safe to say that originality and problem solving are aspects of creativity. Therefore, when educational planning aims at developing creativity in its recipients, it should be seen as also targeting development of originality and problem solving skills. This means that separate programmes may not be necessarily developed to target originality and problem solving in a programme that is already targeting creativity.

Incorporating creativity in educational plans will produce citizens that are ingenious problem solvers and creative thinkers. Meredith (2014) explained that teaching is not just rote learning, drills and giving instructions to learners because learners are neither Pavlov's dogs, nor computers. Learners are living beings who can think and reason and are usually expected to react to what they have been taught. When they are able to apply what they have learnt in other ways other than simply regurgitating or calling what teachers give to them, then they are said to be creative. It is therefore a desirable outcome for educators to expect the products of the educational industry to be creative original problem solvers who will add value to themselves and the society of their time.

Importance of Creativity
Developing creativity in individuals is important in everyday life and for the growth of any society for the following reasons:
1. There is never a dull moment with people who are creative because they perceive the world in new ways, find hidden patterns, make connections and generate new solutions. Life is therefore infinitely captivating, adventurous and fulfilling.
2. It is a way of life that embraces originality and makes unique connections between seemingly differing ideas and phenomenon. Thus creativity unlocks the problem solving skills and makes thinking in such manner a way of life.
3. Creative people easily navigate their ways around obstacles because they do not see obstacles as roadblocks; they see them rather as opportunities (Roe, 2012).
4. Creative people perceive things differently; they deal with uncertainties and adapt their thoughts to all areas of work and life.

Creativity in education is currently being approached with a lot of enthusiasm by scholars and educators. It has come to be regarded as an essential aspect of teaching and learning because research findings indicate that there is a high positive correlation between creativity and ability to function successfully in the real world. Thus, the concept of creativity is influencing worldwide educational policies and teacher practices. Creative education is assuming prominence in today's educational planning processes because it is seen as being capable of enabling learners to use imagination and critical thinking skills to create new and meaningful ideas. It also helps them to develop ideas on the basis of which they can have independence of thought, risk-taking and flexibility. In this respect, teachers are said to be creative when

they use imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, exciting and effective (NACCE, 1999). Similarly, students are said to be creative when they develop the ability to apply what they learn to solve their problems. In this sense, they do not only regurgitate or simply recall what they have been taught but they apply them in new settings or ways. Planning for creativity is therefore the way to go for education that has a futuristic outlook.

Educational Planning with the Society of the Future in View

Modern societies make educational plans to cope with the dynamic changes in the world to match contemporary needs of its citizens. The 21st century is dynamic; an information age where better understanding informs life practices. The World Wide Web (www) in information dissemination and other technological advancements this century has made the world one global village. National borders are becoming less visible and almost irrelevant with each passing day. Virtual teaching/learning, e-commerce enhanced by free trade zones regulations, outsourcing of human/material resources has increased the speed of doing business and made it complex, challenging and more rewarding.

The 21st century is also faced with a number of challenges and the citizens need to be prepared and developed to tackle them. Functional educational plans are dynamic and should evolve with changes in the society. Today's children of school age will grow up to join the workforce which at that time may even be more complex than present day and they may be required to operate in more complicated global settings and across different cultural backgrounds. Thus they must be trained not to be limited to the present developments in their immediate environment but to be forward looking and to adapt easily in new situations. If there has ever been a century that need creative ideas built into its educational plans, it is this century.

To have a global outlook, educational plans should be well conceived to match future expectations. Current skills development and trainings must measure up to offer learners opportunities to attain their fullest potential. Plans for the acquisition of the right skills to function in a global setting as adults and to fulfil their life endeavours must be backed up with age appropriate functional educational programmes. Schools are established for the purpose of such kinds of training/development, thus plans must be made in ways that support the educational focus of the societies.

Schools, Educational Goals and the Nation

Schools do not exist in isolation; they are part of a society. In Nigeria, all schools are located in the States and a collection of States constitute the nation. At the highest levels, all educational goals in the nation are aligned to the national goals/objectives. Even where individual States have specific areas of emphasis due to their peculiar needs, all educational goals in each State are still aligned to the country's educational goals in a relationship shown in Fig. 1.
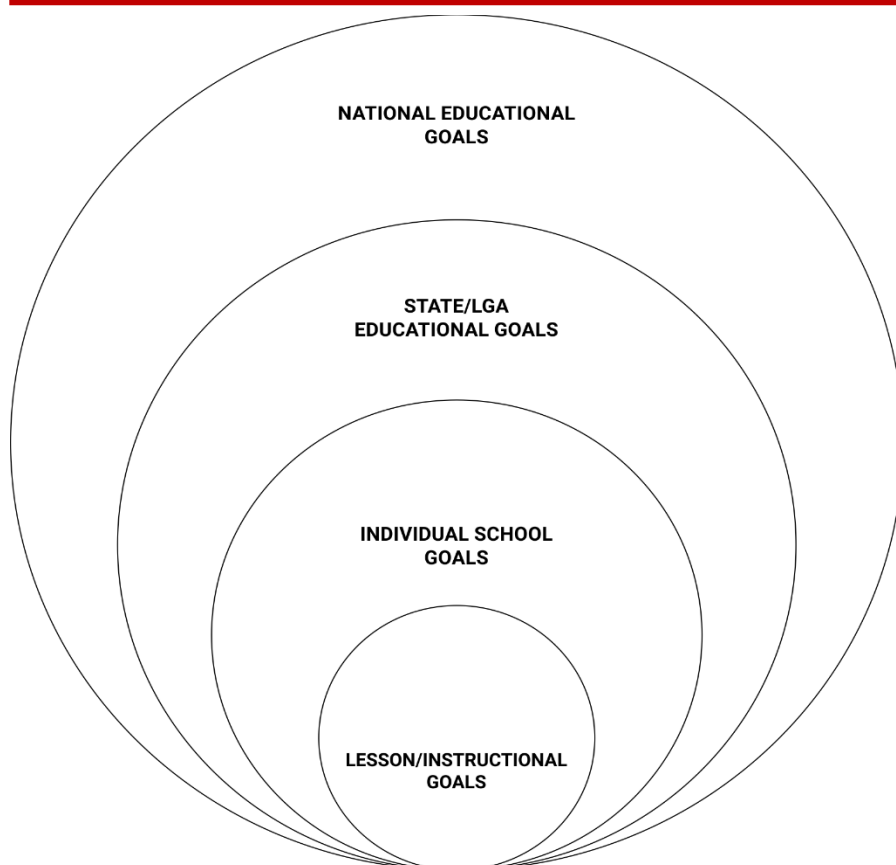
Fig. 1 Levels of Educational Goals

When all three levels of goals are aligned, the individual school goals become the means through which the national educational goals are achieved. This relationship brings out the importance of individual school goals, therefore the school goals must not be developed thoughtlessly. A great responsibility therefore, rests on the shoulders of principals, to ensure that appropriate and relevant goals are selected in their individual schools. Such goals must be good enough to bring about the development of students in the direction of State and national goals. The starting point in the task of effectively managing schools is to fully understand the State and national educational objectives. This is a first critical step in selecting school visions and missions and for making strategic plans for the implementation and realization of the overall national educational objectives.

School principals have the responsibility of identifying and setting performance goals for their individual schools. To increase school effectiveness, encourage participation and buy-in, it is recommended that such goals be set with the contribution of all stakeholders. Departments within the school and subject teachers at each level should adopt instructional objectives and make lesson plans which must also align with the school's performance goals. Thus, instructional objectives lead to lesson plans, align to school performance goals and school performance goals add up to produce the overall educational objectives of a nation. According to Bailey and Littrell (1981), when all the hierarchy of goals are aligned, the benefits to the educational system are enormous and will include:

- A clear sense of direction which will be visible to administrators, teachers, students, and other people associated with the system.
- Everyone associated with the educational system will be able to sense the common purpose and understand their roles in helping achieve the overall goals.
- It will produce a sense of unity of working together as a group toward a common purpose.

- There will be a greater potential of making decisions based on how well the decisions will assist in accomplishing the goals and objectives.
- It will make the direction for evaluating the curriculum much clearer and exact.

Educational Goals and Creativity

Several authors have advanced different goal options for making educational plans for developing creativity in learners. Meredith (2014) suggested goals that are particularly noteworthy. She believes the following as likely educational goals that could be considered when planning for creativity among learners:

1. **To have the basic skills needed to build upon to accomplish whatever tasks or job is assigned in the future**: - Here the learners need to be given the organized content of various subjects to have the appropriate knowledge/information about phenomenon and skills to carry out tasks.

2. **To be a critical thinker**: - Here the learners need to understand how to analyse information given to them so that they can make informed judgements. For example, in Nigeria, it is common to see drugs being hawked on street corners and in vehicles, individuals need to be taught to exercise judgements not to patronize these kinds of people because they could be quacks. Similarly, the social media is replete with all kinds of information, some of which are fake and misleading, learners should be taught how not to be gullible but discerning.

3. **To be able to troubleshoot and strategize**: - The ability to come up with viable solutions is not natural to everyone. It is a skill that can be learnt over time. Each of us sees the word differently as part of our uniqueness. In real life as people keep trying to figure out what is wrong when things are not working right, some persist and through trial and error eventually get it right, thus learning from the situation. This way, practice makes perfect and the learners horn their skills.

4. **To be a moral person**: - This means knowing what society accepts as correct behaviour. It is not only family and religious communities that are responsible for teaching morals, a classroom is also a good place to practice to learn how to behave and interact with others in an appropriate way.

5. **To be a good citizen**: - Here learners should be taught how to be patriotic, the workings of the government, the constitution of the country that has its laws, other laws, work life, civil disobedience and to understand how actions influence the communities where people live and work in.

6. **To have enough interests to keep up a job and be passionate about other important things outside the work life**: - Some individuals are so consumed with work that they have no work-life-balance or other interests. People have to be well-rounded by having a broad range of things that inspire them, that way they remain whole and healthy. Some individuals have no social life and do not know other ways of contributing to the society they live in.

7. **To be happy**: - Here learners should understand that it may not be possible for everyone to be happy all day long. But it is important to learn to find satisfaction and happiness in life. Students should master the ability to calm down, take joy in their accomplishments and learn to live well. It is important that young people be taught that it is a good thing to be happy and that life is meant to be lived happily and not otherwise. Living life being bad tempered should not be encouraged because it breeds negative energy which can be passed to others. Many children have been allowed to live being ill-tempered and they have becoming vengeful people because they believe they are not wanted or loved having lost all human feelings. In that state, they can kill and maim without showing any emotions. This may be a way to curb the current wave

of insurgency, cultism, terrorism, kidnapping and religious/communal intolerance that are rampant in the society.

Espousing these categories of goals in schools could produce a crop of citizens that are much more adapted to life in the 21st century and beyond. Mary Lou Cook in Torronez (2018), has said that "creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun". As the world continues to race towards innovation, faster, cheaper, and quicker are what distinguishes from the crowd in terms of individual creative contribution. Teaching approaches and learning activities presented to students with this outlook in schools and the classrooms could develop their creative abilities and trigger originality and problem solving skills.

Planning at the school level: School Vision, Mission, Goals and Strategic Plans
To make plans at the school level, the school needs a vision, mission and strategic planning.
School Vision: The school vision is where the school hopes to see itself in the future. The vision is the school's goal. The school vision is essential for students' development and effective learning. The reason is that it has tremendous impact on student's achievement because it indicates the priorities and goals that the school makes. Every school must first have a vision of where it wants to see itself in the future before it can create a mission statement.
School Mission: School Mission Statement defines where the school is going. It drives school decisions and lays out the educational goals, community priorities and the purpose of the school. Kampen (2019) drawing an analogy between these concepts explained that the school can be likened to a car, while the mission statement is likened to the engine and the school vision statement to the Global Positioning System (GPS). The GPS usually directs people to various locations. Thus, a mission provides a summary or outline of the steps planned to achieve that future. Comparatively, a vision is concise and easy to recall, while a school mission is lengthier and more explanatory in nature.
School Goals: The goals will be the results that the school aims at achieving. It should describe the school's purpose explicitly. The goals chosen must match the areas the school wants improvements in. A well-articulated plan is always needed to move the school community from the point where it currently is to the new position spelt out in a vision and mission statements. A plan consists of series of steps to be carried out to achieve a purpose. Each of the steps in a plan is a goal to be accomplished. Goals are outcomes or results that the school wants to accomplish. To be effective, goals must be aligned to the vision and mission of the school. Well stated goals are concise, measurable and achievable.

All administrative functions carried out by school principals are focused on implementing one school goal or another. Lunenburg and Irby (2006), have explained that school goals are equivalent to the school vision and mission, with measurable outcomes and a time table for implementation. Schmoker (1996), added that goals are among the most promising game plans or strategies for school improvements so long as they are specific and measurable. Thus it is important for schools to have goals because they provide a focus for all school activities.

Characteristics for Assessing Effective Goals
There are specific characteristics and guidelines that school goals should have to determine that they will be effective in meeting the school needs. According to Murray (1991), the characteristics or criteria for assessing school goals should include:
Being clear and specific: - Educational goals should be very clearly stated and specific. As much as possible principals should express goals in quantifiable terms.
Having a Time Frame: - A time frame is a deadline specifying the date on which the task should have been accomplished. In the case of goals; it is the date on which goal attainment

will be measured or assessed. A goal is not good enough if the time frame within which it should be accomplished is not specified. Depending on the nature of the goals the time frame for attainment could be as long as three years and above or as short as one term. The longer the time frame, the more the need to have numerous dates for part-achievement assessments to follow the progress of goal attainment. It is also not uncommon to have daily, weekly, monthly or yearly goals in individual schools. Having a time frame will keep all involved in the goal attainments focused on working towards the target.

Having Key Areas: - It is not possible to have goals in every aspect of the school life. Key areas should be identified that link to the school vision and mission and which also meet pressing school needs. The principal is the leader in the process of goal setting in schools. He/she should ensure to guide his/her team to select the number of goals that are feasible and attainable to address the key areas of school needs. Goals should not be too numerous or complex as to confuse members of the school community.

Challenging and Realistic: - When goals are easily attainable, it may lead to lack of seriousness on the part of those concerned. Therefore, goals should be challenging but realistic enough to be attained within the time frame.

Linked to Rewards: - Goal attainment should be linked to rewards. Rewards when linked to goals show the worth or importance attached to the goals. Rewards encourage individuals to put in their best. As staff and students are rewarded for attaining to the goals, they are energized and motivated to continue the positive behaviour and to do more. To improve goal attainment in schools, principals must ensure that goals are known to all members. Members need to understand how realizing school goals add up to attain overall national educational objectives and how failures at the school levels will eventually impact the direction of the Educational development of a country.

The Process of Goal-Setting
There are many variations of goal setting but the cyclical process appears to be the most popular. This according to Bryson (1994), consist of a cycle of four steps involving: setting goals, developing action plans, monitoring performance evaluating results.

Goal Setting: This is the first step in a goal setting process. at this step goals that align to school visions and missions are selected, agreed upon and written down. Examples could include: to increase the percentage of students who have five credits and above in Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE), to lower the number of school drop outs by 10%, to improve students' writing skills, to end examination malpractice in the school, etc.

Developing Action Plans: The second step is to develop action plans once the goals have been selected. Action plans identify how each of the ends will be achieved. This involves:
- Identifying the activities necessary to accomplish the goals,
- Establishing how these activities are related to each other,
- Assigning responsibilities for each activity,
- Estimating the time required to carry out each activity
- Determining the resources required to complete each activity.

Monitoring Performance: This is the third step in the cycle of activities. The performance of the group must be monitored. How far they had gone in the achievement of the goals set. Individuals concerned with each of the activities must meet regularly to review the progress of each of the activities. Periodic reviews give opportunities for feedback to be given about the performance of the group.

Evaluating Results: Both formative and summative evaluation are advised in the goal setting process. There should be regular formative evaluation meetings to assess the effort of the group as they progress towards the goals. At such meetings the data generated should be discussed, areas of difficulties should be examined, solutions presented where possible and

remedies/new courses of actions should be taken where feasible within the prevailing circumstances. At the end of a complete goal setting cycle (which could be one academic year) summative evaluation meetings should be held to evaluate the ultimate degree of goal attainment. At this point the goals the group met and those which were not met should be discussed by the principals and a representative group of staff. The positive gains should be rewarded to the principals and other members of the group whose performance were outstanding to encourage and motivate them further. Future corrective action plans should be drawn from lessons learnt during the just concluded goal setting cycle. Such a corrective action plan should not be to witch-hunt but should be constructive and directed towards improving the future performance of the group. Thus the end of one cycle is the beginning of the next cycle of goal setting. The goals for the corrective action plan is part of the first step in the goal setting phase of the next cycle of goal setting process.

Developing Plans to Attain School Goals
Following the establishment of school goals, the next logical step is to develop plans to meet the goals. In developing goals and action steps some of the questions to consider are:
- Why does this need to be done?
- Who will be affected, who will participate?
- What needs to be done?
- When will this take place?
- When will we know we are done?
- When can the progress be measured?
- How will it be measured?
- How will it be known that it is successful?

Key Elements of Effective School Improvement Plans
School improvement plan consist of series of steps put together to move from one point of development to another in the school. There are some key elements that are expected to be present in an effective school improvement plan which includes to:
1. Start with a Vision: Questions like "what are we looking to achieve? And how will we define success?" are to be asked and answered.
2. Conduct a Needs Assessment: To get from point A to B, one needs to know not only where we are going but where we are starting from. Needs analysis helps to know where we are coming from. To be effectiveness, there should be an honest assessment of current practices and results. The school organization should scale its strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement.
3. Identify Goals and Objectives: Once there is a clear sense of where the school is, then they can begin to map out the strategy for progressing to where they want to be. Goals must be concise, measurable and achievable to be successful. Needs analysis can reveal a number of facts about school factors such as students; how well they are doing, their entry levels, difficulties, frustrations, strengths, etc., about teachers; their qualifications, motivational levels, experiences, skills, etc. and the state of school facilities. All such information is needed to provide facts because sound decision making must be based on having a clear picture of the facts. It is important to choose few goals. Principals must not attempt to address everything at once because in doing so nothing gets the attention it really deserves. They should focus on areas of improvement that are attainable and each goal included in the plan must have a corresponding strategy for attainment.
4. Outline Specific Action Steps: This can be done by making plans actionable and outlining what each person needs to do to achieve the goals. Without specific action

steps to guide progress, the plans will falter. Strategies have to be mapped out for every staff (teaching and non-teaching); with each person made to understand their specific roles in fulfilling the plan.

5. Involve all Stakeholders in the Process: Strategies developed collaboratively are widely supported and adopted. Having a process that involves stakeholders, soliciting feedback through the same process and listening to what stakeholders have to say are strategies that have been found useful by researchers.

Conclusion

The paper discussed planning at the school level. It explains that when educational goals have been identified and plans put in place at the national level, these eventually should translate to individual school plans for effective attainment. It discussed the need to make plans that embrace creativity to ensure that the teaming youths of this century are adequately prepared to tackle the challenges of the times. This is due to the fact that when educational planning is done with the needs of citizens and society in mind, efforts are directed to choosing educational processes that develop citizens to their fullest capacity and also produce the required human capital that will meet the needs of the society. Thus, all educational planning processes at all levels are intertwined and should be given the seriousness they deserve in every step. There is also the need for there to be consistency of purpose in addition to the synergy of all the levels to promote overall focus and effective attainment of the goals.

Suggestions

To this end the writer made the following suggestions:

1. That teaching and learning activities that encourage creativity, originality and problem solving among learners should be preferred above those that promote learning by rote.
2. That teachers and school administrators should ensure that students' tasks are challenging and engaging enough to discourage passive and routine tasks but promote active participation, creativity, originality and problem-solving skills.
3. That teachers and school administrators should be offered opportunities by appropriate authorities to participate in professional development programmes that build capacity for creativity, originality and problem-solving so they too can promote these skills among the learners.

References

Bailey, G. D., & Littrell, J. H. (1981). A blueprint for curriculum development: Establishing a systemic design. NASSP B*ulletin*, 65,22-28.

Bryson, J. (1994). Strategic planning and action planning for non-profit organizations. In R. Herman (Ed.) handbook of non-profit leadership and Management, p154-183. Jossey-Bass.

Kampens, M. (2019). School mission statements: The 2020 guide (+ 6 writing tips). https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/school-mission-statements

Lunenburg, F. C. & Irby, B. J. (2006). *The principalship: vision to action*. Thomson Wadsworth

Meredith, L. (2014). Empowering teachers as the experts in education. https://theeducatorsroom.com/7-goals-education/

Murray, M. M. (1991). *Goal performance system: A complete guide to achieving strategic goals* 2nd edition. Centre for Human Work Flow Dynamics, Inc.

National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education NACCE, (1999). All our futures: creativity, culture and education. http://sirkenrobinson.com/pdf/allourfutures.pdf

Roe, B., (2012). Why is creativity important in everyday life? https://tscpl.org/art/why-is-creativity-important-in-everyday-life

Schmoker, M. J. (1996). *Results: the key to continuous school improvement*. Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Sternberg, R. J. (2001). Why schools should teach for wisdom: The balance theory of wisdom in educational settings. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(4), 227-245.

Torronez, A. (2018). How creativity leads to a more successful life. https://addicted2success.com/success-advice/how-creativity-leads-to-a-more-successful-life/