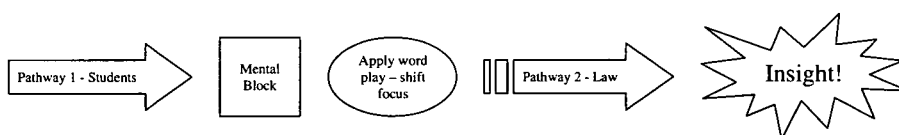
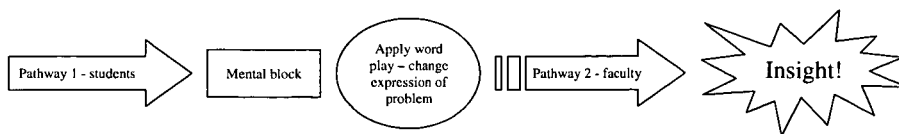


### A. Wordplay

Changing the emphasis or focus of the issue helps to alter the lens through which we view a problem. One can do this by choosing a different focal point for the problem.<sup>59</sup> For example, if we are concerned about how to better help our students become creative problem solvers, instead of viewing the problem as our law students' lack of *creativity*, we might view it as our *law* students' lack of creativity. In other words, perhaps there is something in the discipline of learning about the law that is lacking in creative thought. Or, perhaps it is *our* law students' lack of creativity; is there something about our individual institution that lacks creativity? In terms of brain processes, this shift in focus causes us to move from one pathway to another. Continuing to move down the same pathway, i.e. how can we get our students to become more *creative*, might lead us nowhere and be frustrating. Shifting to another pathway might provide insight that would not have been possible by staying on the first pathway. This process would look as follows:



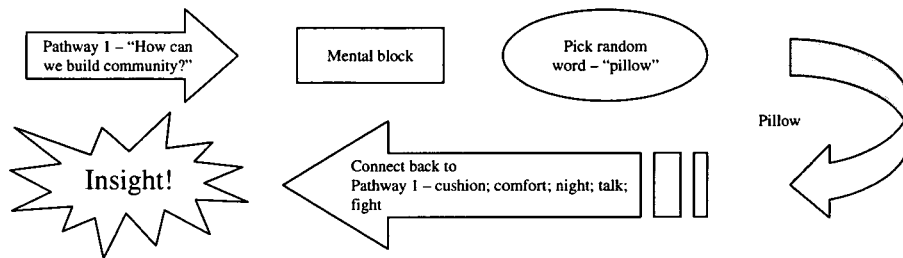
Another technique to inspire creative thinking is to change how we express the problem. For example, if we change "students" to "faculty" in the above problem description, the problem takes on a different focus. Perhaps we should first train ourselves as creative thinkers before we think about training our students. Or, if we take out the word "law", we see the problem more broadly. Perhaps our system of Western education is patterned too greatly on convergent thinking. Or perhaps other disciplines do more to encourage creativity than we do in legal education. In the context of brain functioning, this achieves the same result as shifting focus – it takes us to another pathway. This technique is graphically expressed as:



Or, we might add new words, not generally associated with the

<sup>59</sup> PLSEK, *supra* note 33, at 59, discusses this technique as simply "redefining the problem"; see also EIFFERT, *supra* note 6, at 42-45, 70-74, 160-165.

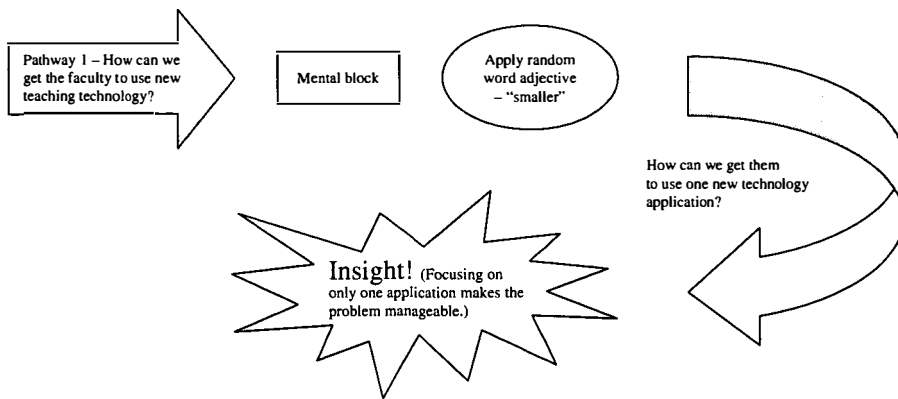
problem through a technique called “random word association.”<sup>60</sup> For example, in dealing with the problem of creating community at school after admitting an unexpectedly large first-year class, we might randomly choose the word “pillow” and associate it with the problem as follows: Pillow – cushion (enhance the student lounge area); pillow – comfort/relaxation (make students more comfortable by making efforts to be welcoming and not threatening); pillow – talk (create more intimate seating areas at the school); pillow – night (extend classes into the evening so there are not so many students on campus at one time); pillow – fight (provide opportunities for games that create community spirit). Graphically, this is represented in brain functioning as follows:



Another random word method is to associate the problem with certain adjectives, which also aids in context-shifting.<sup>61</sup> For example, the problem solvers could analyze the problem by making it **SMALLER**. If the problem is that the faculty is resistant to using new teaching technology, the problem can be made smaller by focusing on one particular application of new technology. Whereas the first articulation of the problem might seem overwhelming, it is much easier to develop a strategy to indoctrinate the faculty in one new application. The graphic representation of this technique is:

<sup>60</sup> PLSEK, *supra* note 33, at 42, 247-267.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.* at 54.



These techniques force the mind to “jump across” its usual pathways (mental ruts), or to make new connections between old pathways in order to create a new idea out of two seemingly disparate ideas. These techniques are described by de Bono as prompts for lateral thinking.<sup>62</sup>

from **Stuck in a Rut: The Role of Creative Thinking in Problem Solving and Legal Education**

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<sup>62</sup> See generally DE BONO, *SERIOUS CREATIVITY*, *supra* note 6.