

Contributor Information

First name: Naishadh

Family name: Gadani

Title/Position: Career Practitioner | Author

Email: naishadh.gadani@gmail.com / www.linkedin.com/in/NaishadhGadani

Institution: Monash University / Your Career Down Under (Self-employed)

Country: Australia

Proposal Type

Workshop of Practices (60 minutes)

Conference Theme

Best Practice – Tupuānuku: *Nurturing Best Practices from the Ground Up; Cultivating Excellence and Growth.*

Title of Workshop

Doodles, Metaphors, and Meaning: Visual Learning in Career Development Practice

Presentation Language

English

Keywords

visual learning; career metaphors; constructivist career counselling; facilitation tools; inclusive practice

Abstract (max 600 words)

Introduction

Career practitioners increasingly work with clients who struggle to articulate their values, aspirations, and concerns through verbal or written means alone. Assessment tools and structured frameworks, while valuable, can create distance between practitioners and the clients who most need their support - neurodiverse learners, multilingual clients, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. This workshop presents visual doodles as a practitioner-developed, evidence-informed approach to opening career conversations that text-based tools cannot always reach.

Objectives

This workshop aims to: (1) present the cognitive science and career-specific research underpinning the use of visual metaphors in career counselling; (2) demonstrate how illustrated visual resources, each paired with facilitation questions, can be used in individual sessions, group workshops, and school-based career education; and (3) equip participants with practical strategies for integrating visual tools into their existing practice frameworks.

Theoretical Basis and Key References

The workshop draws on three research pillars. First, cognitive science provides a robust foundation: Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory demonstrates that information encoded both verbally and visually is retained significantly better than verbal information alone. Mayer's (2009) multimedia learning research found an effect size of $d=1.67$ for words combined with pictures versus words alone — one of the largest effect sizes in educational research. Studies show that after three days, individuals retain 10–20% of verbal information but close to 65% of visual information (Burmark, 2002).

Second, career-specific metaphor research directly validates the approach. Inkson and Amundson (2002), writing in the *Journal of Employment Counseling*, argue that the development and use of multiple metaphors may liberate career development by facilitating perception of new possibilities. Barner (2011), in the *Journal of Career Development*, demonstrated through peer-reviewed case studies that visual metaphors help clients construct meaning from career transitions and reduce social-desirability effects - clients reveal truer perspectives through images than through direct

questioning. Additional research confirms that students perceive visual metaphor as a stimulating exploration of personal goals that enhances engagement in reflective processes (Metaphoric Drawing Study, cited in career counselling literature).

Third, an inclusivity dimension grounds the approach in equity practice. A Swiss National Science Foundation-funded project on photography and visual stimulation in vocational counselling found that visual stimulation supports at-risk and lower-achieving learners where language-based approaches fall short (Zurich University of Teacher Education). Visual strategies have also been identified as particularly effective for neurodiverse learners, including those with autism, ADHD, and dyslexia.

Methodology and Workshop Content

The workshop is interactive and experiential. Participants will engage directly with a selection of illustrated career doodles drawn from the presenter's collection of 87 visuals, currently in use in schools and universities across Australia. Two doodles are used as anchor examples: the Remote Control metaphor (things you can and cannot control in a career) and the Career Toolkit metaphor (construction tools mapped to career skills and mindsets). Participants will experience the facilitation questions paired with each doodle, engage in small-group reflection, and discuss how the approach connects to their existing frameworks - narrative, strengths-based, and dialogic practice.

Results and Evidence from Practice

The 140+ doodles have been developed and refined over five years. It has been often used in Australian and UK schools, universities, employment services, and with CALD communities. The collection is published in *The Big Book of Career Doodles* (Naishadh Gadani, 2023), featuring contributions from 50 career practitioners across the globe. Practitioner feedback consistently identifies the doodles / visuals as accessible, engagement-generating tools that create entry points for clients of all ages and genders. The presenter's work was recognised with the 2024 CDAA Award for Excellence by the Career Development Association of Australia.

Conclusions

Visual metaphors are not a replacement for structured career assessment - they are a complementary entry point that widens access and deepens reflection. As career guidance globally

grapples with increasingly diverse, non-linear, and complex client needs, visual tools offer a practitioner-accessible, evidence-grounded, and inclusive methodology. Participants will leave this workshop with practical resources and a framework for integrating visual facilitation into their own practice immediately.

Bibliographical References

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